Handouts for

Classrooms and Libraries for the Net Generation

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Bibliography and Attributes -> Implications chart p. 2
Libraries for the "Net Generation" text p. 3
The Importance of Bricks p. 7
Policies 2.0: Rules for the Social Web p. 9

Classrooms and Libraries for the Net Generation

Schools and libraries will be more effective if educators acknowledge the unique attributes and preferences of the Net Generation and adapt educational environments to suit students instead of trying to change their basic natures. This session looks at the unique attributes of today's students and proposes a Net Gen learning environment.

List 5 characteristics of today's "Net Gen" students…

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Attributes	Implications for schools
As a distinct demographic 1. Born 1982-2000 - AKA Millenials 2. 36% of population/31% minority 3. Racially and ethnically diverse (20% have one immigrant parent) 4. Eventually larger group than Baby Boomers 5. Valued (Play dates, NCLB, SAT prep) and Sheltered (Helmets, Metal Detectors, V-Chips and NetNanny)	
Relationship with Technology 1. Fascinated by new technologies 2. Grown up with tech - immersed 3. 96% have gone online 4. Spend more time with digital media than TV (3.1 hours vs 3.5 hours) 5. Access primarily through home and amount varies by race and economic level	
Relationship with Information 1. Ubiquitous - mobile 2. 94% have use the web for school research 3. Taggers/folksonomy users 4. Satisfice - snip-its 5. Information = conversation = authority?	
Learning Styles 1. Teachers are vital - computers can't replace humans 2. Building social skills is a part of school 3. Social learners / informal learners 4. Re-mixers - Share - 57% content creators 5. Minds shaped by technology and media Hypertext minds Read visual images Inductive discovery (games?) Learn by doing Shift attention Expect fast responses Text literacy less well developed Tech understanding shallow	
Values and Views 1. Achievement oriented - Want rules, schedules and agendas - Believe it is cool to be smart - Focused on grades 2. Work on "things that matter" 3. Identify with parents' values 4. Busy with extra curricular activities 5. Unaware of consequences of their tech use	

As a Net Genner, here's my proposed change for your library…

Libraries for the "Net Generation"

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My son Brady is different – and I mean that in only the nicest way. Born in 1986, he has never lived in a home without a computer, began creating hyperstacks that sang and danced when he was five, and had access to the Internet starting in elementary school. The computer to him is about as remarkable as indoor plumbing is to me. He is constantly "connected" via iPod, cell phone, keyboard, digital videocamera, or game controller to the very technologies I too often find intrusive and puzzling.

Educators Diana and James Oblinger report similar observations about their own school-age children in the first chapter of the online book *Educating the Net Generation*, EDUCAUSE, 2005 (a free download from <www.educause.edu>). Just what is it with these always connected, multi-tasking, digitally oriented kids, born between 1982 and 1991, now being commonly called the "Net Generation?" they ask.

The second chapter of the Oblingers' book sets out to answer that question by summarizing the findings of thirty-some studies about the characteristics of this demographic – especially in terms of how they learn and how they relate to technology. It's an interesting and important read for all educators, but especially library media specialists.

Some of the findings are not terribly surprising. 96% of Net Genners have gone online and 94% have used the web for research. They see technology as "embedded in society," a primary means of connection with friends, and helpful in solving both personal and academic problems. They spend more time using digital media than watching television. They seem more comfortable and adept with the newest technologies than the adults who surround them. These kids expect fast communication responses, tune out when things aren't interesting, and may be more visually than verbally literate. For them, technology is a tool for learning on any topic they choose. (Are you reading anything you don't already know from the media or from personal observation?)

But what caught my eye was that the studies also showed another side of this group, one far less publicly acknowledged. Our current crop of students believes that "teachers are vital," that "computers can't replace humans," and that motivation is critical in learning. They like group activities, believing building social skills is a part of schooling; they identify with their parents' values; and they are achievement oriented, feeling it is "cool to be smart." And while fascinated with new technologies, their knowledge of them is often "shallow." (Who actually *maintains* the computers in your home or school?)

And finally the studies point to how this generation learns – or likes to learn. Our current crop of students with their hypertext minds like inductive discovery rather than being told what they should know. In other words they want to learn by doing rather than simply listening or reading. They enjoy working in teams, on "things that matter," often informally, and not just during school hours. And given their quick response requirements, they need to be encouraged to reflect.

Now it is my firm belief that schools will be more productive if educators acknowledge the unique attributes and preferences of the Net Generation and adapt educational environments to suit students instead of trying to change their basic natures. So what are some implications for NG (Net Generation) library media centers?

To a large degree, media centers may be the most NG-oriented places in schools. Our information resources and access to it continue to move from print to digital and the Net Generation is responding. *L&L*'s first "Media Matters" column "What Should Be on a School Library Web Page?" (Baumbach, Brewer, and Renfroe,

September 2004) dealt with this shift in detail. General categories of information resources that should be on the "virtual" media center's website included:

- online catalogs for not only your school LMC but also other libraries your students might use
- reference resources and assistance
- curriculum connections
- literacy connections
- general information about your LMC

It's a given that Net Genners are drawn to digital resources and we need to provide them, but there are two other areas that deserve attention if we are to meet all the needs of today's kids.

NG Physical Facilities

Although many students today are connected virtually using cell phones, IM, and e-mail, they still congregate at local coffee shops, malls and movie theaters. Online presence has not replaced physical presence in these kids' lives. Does this mean the media center as a "room" in the school is still important to the Net Genners, and just what will keep it relevant to them?

Given their preference to work in groups, the Net Generation media center (NGMC) provides spaces for collaboration on school projects and socialization. It contains the tools necessary for the production of information, not just its consumption – computers with the processing power and software to edit digital movies and photographs, scanners, and high quality printers and projection devices - and of course, assistance in the use of these tools. Networking hardware and those employees who maintain it also need a home and the NGMC provides it since most have a central location in the building and secure spaces. It's hub of the school, not just philosophically, but physically.

And taking a lesson from today's bookstores, the NGMC provides spaces where kids and teachers *want* to be. The NCMC has comfy chairs, a friendly atmosphere, low-stress, safe, and forgiving – and yes, in high schools, an in-house coffee shop. Spaces for story times, puppetry, plays, and games along with computer stations with age appropriate software and easily found elementary websites are just as important in elementary schools. If the "room" is not a wonderful place to be, students *and* teachers will stay on the Internet or in the classroom. Period. (And given the rise in online schools, is there a lesson here for classrooms as well?)

In creating what is commonly being referred to as the "hybrid library," we can't ignore either the electronic *or* physical resources we offer students.

Net Generation Media Specialists (NGMS)

Both the addition of new technology resources and the continuous changes in existing ones makes locating and using information increasingly challenging. The media specialist's role as "information expert" for students is more important than ever. Helping Net Genners select the right search tool, build effective search strategies, and determine the relevance of found information is a primary job of the NG media specialist. Helping students take the time to analyze the quality of the information despite their desire for rapid responses and reluctance to reflect is even more important.

In the second "Media Matters" column, "Substantive Searching: Thinking and Behaving Info-Fluently" (*L&L*, November 2004), Joyce Valenza explores the complexities both the attitudes and behaviors of effective searchers including:

- Knowing what he or she is looking for
- Realizing he or she has search choices

- Knowing basic strategies for evaluating sources
- Knowing that advanced search screens exist and offer greater searching power
- Knowing when quality matters
- Having a plan
- Having mind tools for organizing materials he or she gathers as well as tools for designing the product
- Recognizing when he or she might benefit from consulting an information professional

Our Net Genners may be adept at pushing buttons, but the NGMS teaches them to be purposeful and effective while doing so.

Unfortunately, I've known media specialists whose primary goal is to *reduce* the number of students using their media center. The availability of online resources makes accomplishing such a goal quite achievable. But unused media programs don't require staffing. The NGMS who truly serves today's students works on interpersonal skills as well as technical skills and designs programs that recognize and honor their NG learning preferences. The findings of the Oblingers' book suggest ways to increase our value to students:

1. An inductive style of learning
The NGMS's work with students on problem-based research assignments is a natural fit for this preferred style of learning. Helping kids learn how to learn by finding information, and putting it to use is the antithesis of the "rote, restraint, regurgitation" methodology that is the mainstay of too many classrooms. An increased emphasis on primary sources – original surveys, interviews, experiments and source documents – gives students a chance to use even more of their inductive skills. And using technology to both find and present information is very much an active, hands-on, applied experience.

2. Information presented visually rather than textually
The acquisition and promotion of both picture books for younger students and graphic novels for older ones is a given in NG media centers. And while the current generation of educators may learn best verbally and do (rightfully) value print resources, the NGMS provides information in a wide variety of formats including both analog and digital video, pictorial and aural resources, and the technologies through which such resources can be viewed or heard. The NGMS also recognizes that this generation of Ken Burns-wannabees enjoys communicating visually as well. NGMS helps teach students how to take and edit digital photographs, create digital movies, create multimedia presentations, and serves as the visual literacy experts in our schools, teaching students how to critically examine visual information.

3. Meaningful learning experiences
For many students, research of primarily academic interest (literary criticism, historical research, non-applied science investigation) is seen as irrelevant and unimportant. But it is not just academically oriented kids who need good information and problem-solving skills – all learners need these skills to meet both vocational and personal needs. The media program and its resources have long been a resource for students seeking information for personal, day-to-day needs. The same student reluctant to research an aspect of the Civil War willingly practices information problem-solving skills to figure out the best video game to buy. The NGMS finds ways to combine academic assignments and personal interests to reach all students. A student who is interested in hunting may get excited about comparing the firearms used by the North and South in the Civil War *if* guided by a skillful NGMS, hopefully in collaboration with the classroom teacher.

4. Work in groups
The NGMS fosters student collaboration both online and in the media center. The days of the shushing librarian are over. While the NGMS still works to maintain a physical environment that is conducive to learning, s/he

recognizes that conversations are the stuff of genuine involvement and provides the tables, conference rooms and labs where those conversations can take place. The NGMS helps make available and teaches students to use collaborative tools such as wikis, discussion groups, and blogs.

5. Need for rapid results
By working both in the virtual and physical world, the NGMS helps meet today's students' "any-time learning" needs. Net Genners tend to be impatient and want to be able to learn outside of school. The NGMS is, of course, available during schools hours and can help students with questions then, but s/he can do "virtual" reference as well by providing her/his e-mail addresses and responding to questions electronically (perhaps with a disclaimer about an approximate turn around time). The NGMS facilitates timely interlibrary loan of information contained only in physical formats (and teaches the skills needed to access the library collections that contain them).

6. A welcoming and safe environment
Not all students are comfortable in our classrooms and hallways. Bored in classes, intimidated in common areas, these kids need a place where they are welcome, safe and valued. The NGMS above all else creates a program that serves students who are diverse – economically, culturally, and academically.

A frightful quote was given in a Pew study by a middle school student: "The Internet is like a librarian without the bad attitude or breath." ("The Digital Disconnect: The widening gap between Internet-savvy students and their schools," 2002. <www.pewinternet.org/report_display.asp?r=67>) But if the NGMS provides resources, facilities and learning opportunities that are uniquely suited to the Net Generation and has a genuine appreciation for their unique attributes and talents, s/he will be valued in return by this "next greatest" generation. And this in turn is a good thing for the profession as these students become parents, teachers, school board members, and legislators themselves,

The Importance of Bricks

> *Our district is in the process of planning a new high school. The architects are here and are saying that "many new schools are being built without libraries," and that "students will each have their own individual gizmo and be able to access everything they need on-line." (sigh)* from an LM_Net posting, April 2, 2006.

A bit of storm was raised last spring when a Texas LMS sent the message that included the quote above. That Texas – always the educational trendsetter!

As schools look for ways to economize and as students increasingly have access to and a preference for online information sources, the old "Why do we need a library when we have the Internet?" question will be asked more often and more loudly.

While many out front librarians have responded to this digital threat by offering an increasing amount of digital content and digital services, might I suggest that we must refocus our attention, if libraries (and the field of librarianship) are to survive, on our bricks and mortar facilities and face to face services rather than on our virtual resources. As counterintuitive as it may sound, the very ubiquity of information requires this. What can our physical libraries do, that the Internet cannot?

1. Libraries must be the technology place.
The library should house the infrastructure technologies needed to insure that students, teachers and their electronic tools can connect to each other and the rest of the world, where data and video servers, patch panels, and routers are placed in a secure area. It is the logical place to house the technical staff, where one of the professional librarian's jobs will be to help them prioritize their tasks and possibly supervise. The production lab containing computers with massive processing power used to do high-end image and video processing and number crunching will be a part of tomorrow's library. Also needed will be spaces and resources for individual tutoring and group teaching of information and technology skills.

2. Libraries must be the collaborative space.
Collaborative learning and the need for social interaction will require our libraries to be places of active learning. Studies of Net Genners tell us that even this wired group wants and needs places for face-to-face interaction – a role a library space can fill in ways the classroom cannot. And while most of a child's education will be increasingly individualized to meet specific learning goals and styles, interpersonal and collaborative skills will become ever more important. This means conference rooms, small lounge spaces, and tables where talking is not just allowed, but expected.

3. Libraries must be the performance/demonstration location.
I personally hope that storytelling, puppetry, live debates and demonstrations will be part of every child's education. The library needs to be the space where all steps of the information process are practiced – including communication. Every library needs a presentation/storytelling area with multimedia equipment and seating for groups larger than a class.

4. Libraries must be the relaxation/meditation/caffeination station.
The library will remain a physical learning space if we begin creating facilities and environments where kids and teachers want to be. The library must have comfortable chairs, a pleasant ambiance, and a friendly, low-stress, safe, and forgiving atmosphere. It must contain flexible spaces that can be used by individuals, small groups, and whole classes. Think about why one goes to Barnes & Nobles rather than simply shops on Amazon.

And yes, libraries should have coffee shops or their age-appropriate equivalent. < See "A Jolt of Java in Your Library" <http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blue-skunk-blog/2005/10/13/a-jolt-of-java-your-library.html>

5. Libraries must be the go-to the place for face-to-face.
As librarians, we will need to compete for patrons and promote our space since we are no longer the only game in town for information. It will be our skills, especially our interpersonal skills, to which patrons will be drawn. The librarian needs to be a good reason to go to the library, rather than to avoid the library, if we are to survive.

We forget sometimes that society has given our K-12 schools three major charges:

- Teach young people academic and technical skills.
- Socialize future citizens.
- Contain and protect children while Mom and Pop are busy.

Each of these societal charges is increasing, not lessening – hence all-day kindergarten, latchkey programs, longer school days, and longer school years.

Schools themselves will be made of bricks and mortar for as long as they are expected to provide not just educational, but socialization and custodial services by the public. And a space called a "library" must be integral to future schools.

Policies 2.0: Rules for the Social Web

Threshold Magazine, Summer 2007

Subhead:
In the fast-changing online world of social networking, where an embarrassing photo can travel the globe in seconds, online predators are the topic of nightly news programs, and young adults travel as avatars to virtual worlds where anything can happen, what policies do schools need to set and how do they set them?

In the spring of 2006, the television news program *Dateline* aired a story about how pedophiles use information gleaned from the social networking site MySpace <www.myspace.com> to locate and abduct children. The story set off a storm of reactions in schools and communities around the nation so strong that even federal legislation was proposed to address this perceived threat to children. Parents learned almost overnight that their children were leading two lives – the one they knew about and one they didn't – online. And if the television news was to be believed, it was a certainty that their children's online activities put them at risk in the physical world.

As a result, schools are still struggling to determine just how to deal with the problems and possibilities of MySpace and other social networking sites.

What is "the social web?"
MySpace is only one incarnation of what is popularly being called Web 2.0, the social web or the read/write web. The simplest explanation of this phenomenon is that the World Wide Web is changing from a "read only" resource to one which user input is not just allowed, but encouraged. The development of online tools that allow content to be entered, uploaded, edited, displayed and made public has made this Web 2.0 possible.

These are some of the more popular manifestations of the social web as of spring 2007. But be warned: new online applications for sharing personal information seem to surface on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

- **MySpace and Facebook** are among the most popular sites where users can easily post information about themselves, create lists of friends, and share comments about interests. According to the Pew Internet & American Life project <www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_SNS_Data_Memo_Jan_2007.pdf> 55% of all online American youths ages 12-17 use online social networking sites.
- **Blogs** (web logs) started as personal journals, often with highly political overtones. A blog in its most generic sense is a website that is updated on a regular basis, displays the content in reverse chronological order (newest entries first), and allows, even invites, reader response. Technocrati <technorati.com> estimates there are about 55 million blogs as of early 2007.
- **Wikis** are online tools that allow group editing. The most popular wiki is Wikipedia <www.wikipedia.org>, a user-edited encyclopedia that rivals traditional encyclopedias for student use.
- **Social bookmarking** sites such as del.icio.us <del.icio.us> allow users to share their Internet bookmarks and create descriptive "tags" to help organize these resources. **Flickr** <www.flickr.com> does the same for photographs, and **YouTube** <www.youtube.com> allows video tagging and sharing.
- **3-D virtual environments** like Second Life <secondlife.com> and Teen Second Life <teen.secondlife.com> allow users to create avatars, pictorial representations of themselves, and explore these worlds, converse with other avatars, participate in their economies, create habitats, and attend events, some educational.

A comprehensive list of sites for social networking and user created information appears in *The Horizon Report- 2007* published by The Media Consortium and EDUCAUSE <www.nmc.org/pdf/2007_Horizon_Report.pdf>.

How do Web 2.0 safe and ethical use issues differ from those of Web 1.0?
Educators have been concerned about the safe and appropriate use of the Internet for as long as it has been available as a resource in schools. Our district's board-adopted acceptable use policy (AUP) <www.isd77.k12.mn.us/district/isd77policies/524.pdf> reflects the requirements of the Childhood Internet Protection Act (CIPA) of 2001. This law requires schools make efforts to ensure that students cannot access materials that can be classified as "child pornography, obscenity and harmful to minors" and requires that a content filtering system be put in place. When such devices are properly installed and updated, access to content that meets CIPA's definitions can deterred – at least from school networks.

The social web, however, is creating a new set of concerns about safe and ethical behaviors of the Internet by students – ones less easily controlled by mechanical solutions such as filters. These include:

- **Protecting children from predators.** Pedophiles using the information gleaned from sites like FaceBook and MySpace is arguably the area of greatest concern to parents and educators. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children <www.missingkids.com>, "Approximately one in seven youths (10 to 17 years) experience a sexual solicitation or approach while online."

- **Protecting children from each other (cyberbullying).** Nationally recognized Internet safety expert Nancy Willard <www.cyberbully.org> defines cyberbullying as "sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices," and she documents instances when such activities have resulted severe psychological damage to the victim.

- **Protecting children from themselves (making inappropriate and personal information public)**. Larry Magid and Anne Collier in their book *MySpace Unraveled: What it is and how to use it safely.* (Peachpit, 2006) argue that the greatest likelihood of children and young adults doing harm to themselves on the social web is by posting pictures and messages that portray them in a negative light and that can be viewed by teachers, coaches, relatives, college admission officers, and potential employers. Few students (and adults) understand that material once placed on the Internet and made public has the potential of always being accessible. Projects like The Internet Archive <www.archive.org> store snapshots of the Internet and make them available as historical documents long after websites have changed.

In other words, the danger to kids in Web 2.0 comes not from what they may find online, but from what they themselves put online for others to access.

Our current acceptable use policy (cited above) does include the following language:

> *Users will not use the school district system to post private information about another person, personal contact information about themselves or other persons, or other personally identifiable information, including but not limited to, home addresses, telephone numbers, identification numbers, account numbers, access codes or passwords, labeled photographs or other information that would make the individual's identity easily traceable….*

As educators, we must respond proactively to these real dangers children face in using social networking and read/write web resources. But unfortunately the knee-jerk reaction has been to block *all* social networking resources – blogs, wikis, YouTube, Flickr, and virtual worlds. The well-named, but misguided, Federal 2006 Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) proposed last May would have required all schools and libraries

receiving E-Rate to filter out all interactive websites since they might lead to students' contact with online predators.
American Library Association president Leslie Berger issued a statement highly critical of the nearly unanimous vote (96%) that passed the bill in the House:

> *This unnecessary and overly broad legislation will hinder students' ability to engage in distance learning and block library computer users from accessing a wide array of essential Internet applications including instant messaging, email, wikis and blogs.*

The attempt to pass similar (and worse) legislation continues. Andy Carvin on his learning.now blog for PBS teachers reports on what he calls "DOPA Jr."
<www.pbs.org/teachers/learning.now/2007/01/lifting_the_hood_on_dopa_jr.html>

What is problematic about DOPA and school districts' decisions to block blogs, wikis and chatrooms is that these policies block formats, not contents. In other words, since a student might place personal information on MySpace, all blogs are blocked. This would be like a school banning all magazines because *Penthouse* is published in magazine format. Formats are content-neutral, but many adults seem to be having a difficult time understanding this.

Safety comes from education, not blocking.
Even if social networking sites are effectively blocked in schools, most students will still get access to them. The Pew study cited earlier in this article found:

> *Teens often use the Internet in several locales, especially home and school. This survey shows that teenagers' use of social network sites relates to the place where he or she uses the internet most often. Teens who go online most often from home are more likely to report using social network sites than are teens who go online most often from school (42%). Home users are more likely to have profiles posted online (59% compared with 38%) and are more likely to visit social networks once a day or more frequently than are those who go online mostly from school.*

Proxies and mobile networking devices also help the ambitious student avoid district filtering efforts. Do you know about SchoolBoredom.com <www.schoolboredom.com/>? Trust me, your kids do. Highly portable, personal networking devices that use cell phone signals to access the Internet are gaining in popularity among students – who, of course, bring them to school.

To think simple Internet filters will eliminate or even minimize the real risks associated with social networking, is a dangerous misconception. ***It will take educating students about the appropriate use of the Web 2.0 to genuinely protect them.***

Responsible adults are using online curricula from organizations like iLearn <ilearn.isafe.org/>. (See below for a list of resources for parents and teachers.) One site, NetSmartz, has created eye-opening videos such as "Tracking Theresa" and "Julie's Journey" <www.netsmartz.org/resources/reallife.htm>. Teachers find these ready-made curricula simple to integrate into their classrooms when teaching safety units.

Our school district, like others, has been actively working to educate communities and parents on issues surrounding Internet safety. We have developed a resource list of websites for parents about safe Internet use <www.isd77.k12.mn.us/parents>, have worked with our parent-teacher organizations and community education department to arrange programs about the topic, and have sent home reminders about good computer use in building newsletters home.

The need for the social web in schools – and children's lives
Pioneering educators are finding exciting ways to make good use of Web 2.0 resources. Schools and libraries are replacing their newsletters with blogs that can be rapidly updated and allow readers to respond. Teachers are using wikis to facilitate peer-reviewed and collaborative writing projects – including student created textbooks. Social book marking sites are proving to be an efficient means of creating bibliographies and reading lists. Creative teachers are asking students to create Facebook-like profiles for literary characters. (Who *would* be on Juliet Capulet's friends or music favorites list?) Virtual literary worlds are allowing students to walk through Orwell's world of *1984* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* Chicago setting.

But the issues are larger than these resources simply being used to facilitate traditional learning experiences. Henry Jenkins Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at the MIT and author of the McArthur report, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture* <www.digitallearning.macfound.org> writes: "We are using participation as a term that cuts across educational practices, creative processes, community life, and democratic citizenship. Our goals should be to encourage youth to develop the skills, knowledge, ethical frameworks, and self-confidence needed to be full participants in contemporary culture," he asserts, and adds, "What a person can accomplish with an outdated machine in a public library with mandatory filtering software and no opportunity for storage or transmission pales in comparison to what person can accomplish with a home computer with unfettered Internet access, high bandwidth, and continuous connectivity… The school system's inability to close this participation gap has negative consequences for everyone involved."

Obviously, districts must create a balance between opportunity for student engagement and new teaching methods and the need to protect children. But it is not a simple determination to make.

How are good decisions made about filtering and policy?
Look at the language of CIPA – "obscene, child pornographic and harmful to minors." These terms are open to a broad range of interpretations. Our own district's board set AUP includes phrases like:

- The school district system has a limited educational purpose, which includes use of the system for classroom activities, professional or career development, and limited high-quality, self-discovery activities.
- Users will not use the school district system to access, review, upload, download, store, print, post, or distribute materials that use language or images that are inappropriate to the educational setting
- An individual investigation or search will be conducted if school authorities have a reasonable suspicion that the search will uncover a violation of law or school district policy.

"High-quality," "inapropriate," "reasonable." Lovely, but ambiguous terms. Again, all open to interpretation.

Which leads to questions like this that I hear regularly from teachers and students – "Is there any definitive answer to what should or should not be filtered to meet CIPA requirements? Our technology director has been checking more little boxes on our filter." Or, "Our district has blocked access to all blogs. How can we get this policy changed?"

Who in a school *should* ultimately decide what is blocked and what is accessible to students and staff?

Ultimately, school boards rule on specific instances of resource selection. But in our district, these daily procedural, rather than policy decisions, are made by our district Technology Advisory Committee, the same folks who make lots of technology planning and budget decisions. This committee is comprised primarily of educators - teachers, media specialists, and administrators - but also includes parents, students, businesspersons,

college faculty members, and public librarians. And of course the committee includes our technical staff for their important input on security, compatibility and implementation issues. And we DO listen to everyone. Most of our building technology committees work in the same way. (You can find some tips on forming and running an advisory group at <www.doug-johnson.com/dougwri/ advice.html>.)

This has worked well for us. On the difficult filtering issue for example, the committee decided that as a result of CIPA, we would install a filter, but it would be set at its *least* restrictive setting. Any teacher or librarian can have a site unblocked by simply requesting it – no questions asked. Adults are required to continue to monitor student access to the Internet as if no filter were present. The technicians know that it is the responsibility of the teaching staff to see that students do not access inappropriate materials, not theirs. This is a good policy decision that could not have been reached without a variety of voices heard during its making. And has held up well even as Web 2.0 resources have become available.

It is also a decision that I believe honors the spirit of intellectual freedom – that a resource is innocent until proven guilty. If anyone requests that a site or resource is blocked, the same due process accorded to print or audio visual materials is followed unless it is immediately apparent that the resource violates the "obscene, child pornography or harmful to minors" dictate of CIPA. Without a formal process for the blocking of Internet-based materials, censorship becomes a real possibility. When a teacher complains to me when I refuse to block a game site, I explain that if I blocked every individual request, I would have to honor the request of the next parent who asks that a political or religious site is blocked. And I add that a formal reconsideration request can be made using the same form used to remove print instructional materials from the school.

Vicki Davis on her Cool Cat Blog <coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/2007/02/including-classmate-with-leukemia.html> reflects:

> *...it is not the tools that are inherently good or evil but rather the use of the tools.*
> *A hammer can kill someone but it can also build a house.*
> *A nail can be driven through a hand but it can also hold the roof over your head.*
> *A fist can hit but a fist can also be clasped in your hand in love.*
>
> *We do not outlaw hammers, nails, or fists -- we teach people to use them properly.*
>
> *So should we do with blogs, wikis, podcasts, Skype, and any other tool that becomes available for use in the human experience!*

Well said.

Recommended websites about Internet safety for parents

Blogsafety.com <blogsafety.com>
Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use <csriu.org>
Children's Partnership <www.childrenspartnership.org>
CyberBullying information <www.cyberbully.org>
CyberSmart <cybersmart.org>
Family Guide Book <www.familyguidebook.com>
Get Net Wise <www.getnetwise.org>
iKeepSafe.org <ikeepsafe.org/PRC/>
McGruff Online Safety for Kids <www.mcgruff.org/advice/online_safety.php>
MediaWise <www.mediafamily.org/resources.shtml>
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children <www.ncmec.org>
NetLingo: Top 20 Internet Acroynms Every Parent Needs to Know < www.netlingo.com/top20teens.cfm>
NetSmartz <www.netsmartz.org/netparents.htm>
Play It Cyber Safe <www.playitcybersafe.com>
SafeKids.com <www.safekids.com>
SafeTeens.com <www.safeteens.com>
Safety Ed International <www.safetyed.org>
Wired Safety Website <www.wiredsafety.org/parent.html>