



# Teach Your Children Well

For the click-to-learn generation, the ethics of hacking, plagiarism and copyrights need to be in the lesson plan. BY LISA SHUCHMAN BLOOMFIELD, CONN.

**A** SEVENTH GRADE CLASS AT Carmen Arace Middle School recently got into a discussion about whether it's OK to cut and paste information directly from the Internet into student research papers.

"You shouldn't do it because that would be plagiarism, and that's illegal," says Leroy Moton, 12, who wants to be a basketball player and a lawyer.

"But besides that, your conscience should stop you," chimes in Stephen Lake, an earnest 13-year-old with curly hair and glasses.

"Well, I'd do it if it were legal," con-

fessed Brian Melanson, 12. "It would make things a lot easier."

Internet ethics is not a subject typically taught in American schools. But Leroy, Stephen and Brian don't attend your average middle school. Their suburban Bloomfield, Conn., school issues every student a wireless laptop; and topics ranging from copyright infringement and plagiarism to hate e-mail and hacking are an integral part of the curriculum.

As more and more schools get wired, teachers are finding those issues need to be taught along with

the three Rs. Students are becoming sophisticated computer users, capable of creating viruses and hacking into networks. They can copy music files for free and lift someone else's work verbatim off the Net, passing it off as their own. And without compunction, they are increasingly doing all of the above, educators and law enforcement officials say.

"Kids today have the technical skills of adults but the ethical skills of very small children," says Cherie Geide, an adjunct professor at Marymount University in Arlington, Va., who special-

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izes in ethics and technology.

A case in point: Last September, a Florida federal judge handed down a six-month sentence to a 16-year-old boy who admitted he hacked into a Department of Defense computer network as well as downloaded \$1.7 million worth of NASA software.

Hoping to curb this teen temptation to commit online crimes, the Department of Justice and the Information Technology Association of America, a tech-industry trade group, have created the Cybercitizen Partnership. The alliance, funded with \$500,000 in grants from the Justice Department and the ITAA Foundation, is developing a curriculum designed to teach children the ethical use of technology. The Cybercitizen Partnership will begin rolling out age-appropriate lesson plans next year.

Although kids aren't responsible for most online crime, teens are increasingly capable of committing them, government and industry officials say. One sign of future trouble: Nearly half of more than 47,000 elementary and middle school students recently surveyed by Scholastic said they do not consider hacking a crime.

"We are truly in a new world," says Jeffrey Hunker, who oversees online security for the National Security Council at the White House. Hunker says that many hacking incidents are relatively harmless pranks by kids he calls "ankle biters." But even pranks are cause for concern. "When computer incidents occur, we don't know initially where they're coming from and we have to spend time and resources sorting them out," he says. Notes an official from the Justice Department computer crime section, who asked not to be identified: "Often [teen hackers'] actions can be dangerous, present public safety concerns and have serious consequences."

Hacking is only part of the problem, according to Gail Chmura, who teaches math and computer science at

Oakton High School in northern Virginia. She says many of her students see nothing wrong with copying someone else's software or plagiarizing articles found on the Web.

Chmura, who is working with the Cybercitizen Partnership, assigns ethics projects to her students. The kids, who range in age from 15 to 18, are required to read several online articles about the moral and ethical use of computers, turn in copies of the articles and cite them in a written report. To Chmura's dismay, the students sometimes plagiarize the online articles – even in papers about ethics.

"When we talk about hacking, plagiarism and copyright infringement and I ask them if they'd walk into someone's house when the door is open, look around and maybe steal something, they without exception say they wouldn't do that," Chmura says. "But when I compare that to breaking into someone's computer, downloading a program or copying someone else's work from the Web, without exception, they say it's not the same thing."

The anonymity that the Internet affords potential perpetrators fosters such attitudes, believe some teachers. "If kids knew the results of their actions and could see a victim, they'd be more inclined to do the right thing," Geide says.

That message apparently got through to Jermaine Williams, a fifth grader at Carmen Arace, where kids traipse through the halls with their heavy, magnesium-cased laptops and book bags strapped to luggage carts.

"Sending a threatening e-mail is the same thing as threatening someone to their face," Jermaine said recently as his classmates did a lesson on their laptops. "That's easy to understand."

Harder to do is keeping track of all the rules that govern students' Internet use. Jermaine's own laptop had been confiscated for three weeks after a teacher caught him visiting an off-limits game site. The school filters Web access and forbids downloading games and sending "inappropriate" e-mail. Teachers monitor students' Net activities from their own computers.

"Ultimately, you try to teach the kids to be responsible citizens," says Carmen Arace Principal Dolores Bolton. "But first you have to start with external controls."

One such check is an online plagiarism detection site called Turnitin.com. The fee-based service compares student papers to millions of pages on the Internet and notifies teachers if a student has lifted other people's work.

Some teachers believe the best deterrent to online crime is the fear of

being caught. Others, however, hope to instill a sense of right and wrong in younger children before they get really Net savvy – kids like seventh-grader Angelique Pryor.

Angelique was amazed when she heard about a couple of teenagers who managed to hack into a computer system and shut down Internet access. "I was surprised," she says. "But I was not impressed." ■

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