

# Case 03

## Whose Fault is it Anyway?



### Background Information

With technological communication growing rapidly, it will be imperative that all students, teachers, and administrators implement some type of proactive approach to grasping cyber ethics. Cyber ethics is an umbrella term that covers a variety of topics including privacy and security, copyright and intellectual property rights, and appropriate uses of technology. It is based on ethical theory and a materialist theory that explains the generality of what information comprises (Frohmann, 2000). In an article by Martha Rader (2002) and Linda Star (2003), a plan is presented for dealing with the ethical challenges of today's schools. The first step is the establishment of an acceptable use policy for all involved parties. Ethical codes should be communicated through all available media including handouts, school newspapers, and websites. It is then up to the teachers and administrators to model ethical behaviors and include classroom discussion on a variety of ethical issues. In a study done by Calluzzo & Cante (2004), on ethics in information technology and software use, it was concluded that the area of greatest need in ethics development was staff members, professors, and teachers setting examples for their students. Reinforcing ethical conduct is also very important. This can come in a number of ways, including assignments given in class that center around ethical topics. As always, student behavior must be monitored closely. In such settings as elementary and middle schools, Internet surfing should be only under direct supervision of a teacher. Finally, an overall reinforcement of all policies on technology in a school should be followed and strict punishment given for violation of any of these policies.

It must be communicated that improper use of technology has far reaching effects. It was estimated that in 2002 over 100,000 jobs and over five billion in wages were lost because of software piracy. This comes from a variety of sources including making "bootleg" copies of compact discs, software, and downloading illegal material. This has the potential to not only hurt the companies and people that originally created the material, but also the user through viruses, worms, and other harmful programs that can cause damage to the computer (Kruger, 2003).

### Preview

In a society where advanced technology is becoming commonplace and means of communication and expression are on the frontier of a seemingly endless horizon, we must remember that with this freedom also comes responsibility. In a world dominated by the capabilities of the Internet, cyberethics, a term referring to the social behavior of people on the Internet, becomes very important. The educational setting has unfortunately become the breeding ground for a large amount of unethical cyber behavior, from plagiarism to misuse of

intellectual property. Billions of dollars and numerous jobs are lost each year due to dishonest uses of material transmitted over the Internet. So whose fault is it? Who is the cause of this mass job loss and wasted money?

Many companies and organizations are now leading educational efforts in issues related to cyberethics. Some of them include iSafe, Cyber Citizen, and Education World. With an increased focus now being placed on cyberethics, hopefully we will begin to see positive efforts toward making sure everyone is educated in this area.

## Focus Questions

As you study the following case, keep these questions in mind: (1) How should cyberethics be taught to students, teachers, and administrators? (2) Are school and system-wide Acceptable Use Policies (formal sets of rules that govern use of a network) meant to teach cyberethics? (3) Who is affected most by a lack of cyberethics education?

## The Case

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On January 25, 2006, a letter was delivered to Andrew Fuller, superintendent of Melbourne City Schools. When he opened the letter and began reading the expression on his face was a compilation of anger, shock, and frustration. The letter stated that the Melbourne City School system was being sued for 2.3 million dollars for infringement of copyright and intellectual property rights, overt plagiarism, and illegal downloading and use of software. He thought to himself, “How could this be when we have one of the best written and comprehensive acceptable use policies in the state?” The answer, however, was immediately evident. Although they did have an excellent AUP and required all personnel to sign saying they read, understood, and would follow it, he knew that most just dismissed the AUP as another form to sign in the myriad of paperwork.

Various things brought this lawsuit onto the Melbourne City School system but the issue was basically one thing--the website. The school system had recently received a grant that funded the development of the system's website and training for all system personnel on basic web design. This grant benefited all the teachers, administrators, and even gave high school students the opportunity to create websites that would be housed on the system server and linked from the system-wide website. In theory, this was a wonderful idea but lack of education in the area of cyberethics had gotten the system in more trouble than it could afford. The lawsuit cited instances where one professional photographer's work had been copied and pasted on several middle school's teacher websites. An elementary school had scanned and made available whole books on the library's media page. The high school students' websites contained volumes of illegally downloaded music that could easily be shared with anyone. To top it all off, the websites were all created from software downloaded on the system server and made available to all teachers, students, and administrators in the system with just a single user license. Ever since the letter arrived, when you type in the web address for the Melbourne City School System you are directed to a page that reads, “under construction.”

As you can imagine, the matters addressed in the letter did not sit well with Mr. Fuller. He quickly called a meeting of the head administrators of the school system to first question

The University of Alabama Computers and Applied Technology Program (2009). Technology Education: A series of Case Studies. Available at <http://www.ua.edu/edtechcases>.

how information regarding cyberethics was being handled in the various schools. No one could give a direct answer. This prompted Mr. Fuller to develop a mandatory cyberethics orientation for students, teachers, and administration. The teachers and administration would complete the hour-long seminar the week before school started and the students would be required to take it during the first week of school. He hoped that this would help to rectify the lack of knowledge about the acceptable use policy and general cyberethics. What do you think?

## Questions for Discussion

1. Are there other people or entities not mentioned in the case that have a role in cyberethics education? How?
2. Who do you think (if anyone) should be held accountable for the incident in the Melbourne City School system?
3. Do you think Mr. Fuller did enough to rectify the situation? Why or why not?
4. What essential components should comprise a quality cyberethics education initiative?
5. What is the role of an Acceptable Use Policy in a school? (student, the teacher, the administrator, parent?)

## Links

I-Safe-The leader in Internet safety education. [www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org)

An overview of cyberethics and other online ethical issues.

<http://www.unc.edu/~jsugar/ethics.html>

Resources for cyberethics. <http://www.cteresource.org/publications/featured/cyberethics/>

## Resources

Calluzzo, V., & Cante, C. (2004). Ethics in information technology and software use. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51, 301-312.

Frohmann, B. (2000). Cyber ethics: bodies or bytes?. *International Information & Library Review*, 32, 423-435.

Kruger, R. (2003). Discussing cyberethics with students is critical. *Social Studies*, 94(4), 188-189.

Rader, M. (2002). Strategies for teaching Internet ethics. *Delta Pi Epsilon*, 44(2), 73-79.

Starr, L. (2003). Tools for teaching cyberethics. Retrieved Feb. 12, 2006, from [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_tech/tech/tech055.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/tech/tech055.shtml).

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