

Digital Citizens of the World Unite with opening remarks by Professor Tanya Byron

Moderator: Stephen Balkam, FOSI

Panelists:

Jane Tallim, Media Awareness Network

Tanya Byron, Clinical Psychologist

Anne Collier, ConnectSafely

Linda Burch, Common Sense Media

Mike Galvin, BT

This popular session opened with remarks from Professor Tanya Byron, saying that we should no longer be talking about 'digital citizenship' rather now it should just be referred to as 'citizenship' because there is no divide between the world and the online reality, the spaces are now as one. She reminded the audience that it is kids that are on the right side of the digital divide and it is the adults that need to catch up. She made reference to her report prepared for the British Prime Minister and called upon those attending the conference and those working in the field to stop the conversation and to take action.

As a result of her work Byron brought developmental issues to the attention of the knowledgeable audience. Notably she said that in protecting kids we need to remember that it is vital for them to have a private life, they need to feel trusted and protected but at the same time they must be given their independence. According to Prof. Byron children are now being raised in captivity and consequently they are growing up in a risk adverse culture and that is not healthy. Their only method of communication and play nowadays is through the Internet, we are effectively saying to them that it is not safe outdoors but online is fine, even where parents don't understand it. This is not how we treat road safety and according to Byron it should not be how we treat online safety.

Byron called for a sensible without prejudice dialogue between all parties especially the big firms and said that it is going to take a multi-organizational approach to help kids learn how to stay safe online.

Professor Byron called upon law enforcement to stop developing policies and action plans based upon the conduct and responses of one vulnerable child affected by the issue. Such behavior stifles a child's development and the creation of this negative world prevents the building of vital resilience in children. These actions designed to protect are, in fact, detrimental to children, and Byron thinks that we need children to become competent, confident digital citizens.

Education was the next topic and Professor Byron was very critical of the fact that children are prevented from using these new technologies in the classroom. She made the point that children spend the majority of their time in schools; therefore in the interests of digital literacy it is vital that the

schools' education objectives are widened. She called for a new approach and for the school curriculum to move towards producing competent citizens comfortable with the digital world. Byron, expanded and said that education efforts should be based upon clinical studies as to the part of the brain that is engaged developmentally at the time.

To conclude her remarks Professor Byron called upon the children present in the hall to take their cell phones, their laptop and their iPods into school and the demand to be taught on them or in a way compatible with them. In the words of Elvis she called for "A little less conversation and a little more action."

The session then progressed to a panel format moderated by Stephen Balkam.

In response to the first question about education Anne Collier stated that adults are holding hostage children's education in not allowing new media in the classroom. It is so serious that it has reached a crisis point and we stand to lose relevancy with the youth. Collier believes that we need to teach them to function on and offline and guide them using the new relevant media and it is a project on which everyone needs to work together. Tallim pinpointed the issue as being that of demonizing technology. She said that as adults we fear the phases of development in children's lives and consequently blame new media for causing the changes. According to Tallim any discussions must have 'youth' at the table and in studies that she cited the number one thing that they say that they want to learn is how to know whether content is true and to be trusted. Children wanted to know about calculated risk taking.

According to Linda Burch, a balanced approach is needed. Burch believes that the risk should not be minimized rather it should be acknowledged that young people are creating and doing amazing things on the Internet and they are sharing this with the world. This is something that should be celebrated.

Mike Galvin from BT said that the broadband revolution had changed everything; instead of looking backwards we should be looking forwards. He called upon those involved to lose the arrogance that they know what the threats are, and they should be talking to kids and most importantly listening to what they say and above all not underestimating their resilience. According to Galvin, the situation requires that we humbly go where no parent has gone before.

Byron said that the term 'digital citizenship' was outdated it is too exclusive and tends to be a middle-class educated way to talk about the issue. According to Byron this is not what it should be and more and more there was no distinction required as the worlds blend together for kids.

As for education efforts, Collier said that the use of media in the classroom must be treated with respect and it must take a disease prevention approach, that is to say a tiered approach designed to reach different types of youth. She called for media literate and competent teachers to educate the new generation. And Galvin reminded us that young people feel empowered when they can do what they want on the Internet, they should not be stopped from doing this rather they should be given the information and training before they begin. Burch maintained that it is a policy question and at the moment there is a great opportunity in the US for a public education program to communicate the messages of online literacy and safety.

Byron went further still alleging that it is discriminatory practice that we do not allow children to use new technology in the classrooms. She called for the introduction of social networks into schools to provide children with the space and resources to learn and communicate with each other. She said that in not allowing it we are guilty of narrow minded thinking, and are essentially saying because we did not have it then they should not either. Moreover she claimed that it is each child's human right to use the tools that they find most comfortable to learn with and through. She likened it to the suffragette movement and to the bra burnings in the 60's, a revolution is needed in the classrooms and it is the role of the children to bring in the cell phones and laptops and to declare that they are going to use them. Children are empowering themselves according Byron and they are leaving us behind.

Balkam concluded by asking, "what is it going to take?" Collier said it would require 'collaboration', Tallim stated that it was 'action', Burch wanted more positive stories; and Galvin wanted people to move outside their comfort zone. Whilst Byron stated that the resolution would be attained solely by a classroom revolution.