
Our Space: Being a Responsible Citizen of the Digital World

A collaboration of The GoodPlay Project
and Project New Media Literacies



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2011 The GoodPlay Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education
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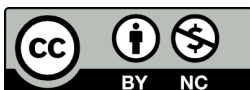
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“How We Got Here” by Howard Gardner and Henry Jenkins

Introduction to Our Space

For most young people today, engagement with new digital media is a routine aspect of life. Through computers, mobile phones, and other handheld devices, many youth use social networks (e.g., Facebook), play games (e.g., RuneScape, World of Warcraft) and use online information sources (e.g., Wikipedia). Some youth also use Twitter, keep blogs (e.g., LiveJournal), and share videos, stories, and art they've created (e.g., YouTube, Fiction Alley).

Important skills and knowledge can be gained from these activities, but there are also risks. However, young people may only rarely consider the learning opportunities, risks, and the related question of what it means to be an ethical, socially responsible “citizen” on the Internet. The materials in this casebook are designed to encourage youth to reflect on these important issues. Through role-playing activities and reflective exercises, students are asked to consider the ethical responsibilities of other people, and whether and how they behave ethically themselves.

Our Space was co-developed by The GoodPlay Project (Harvard Graduate School of Education) and Project New Media Literacies (Established at MIT and now housed at University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism). The GoodPlay Project is a study of how young people think about ethical issues in online spaces. Project New Media Literacies is an educational initiative focused on promoting the social skills and cultural competencies required to meaningfully engage with participatory culture. The *Our Space* collaboration grew out of a shared interest in fostering ethical thinking, and conduct, among young people when they exercise their new media skills. For more background about the collaboration that resulted in this casebook, see “How We Got Here,” by Howard Gardner and Henry Jenkins (See Appendix).

In this Introduction, we first describe the Ethical Thinking and New Media Literacies emphasized throughout *Our Space*. We then describe the Core Themes explored in the units.

Ethical Thinking in New Media Environments

Our Space is inspired by the belief that young people need to think habitually about online life in ethical terms.

In this casebook, we define *ethical thinking* as the capacity to think about one's roles and responsibilities in the communities in which one participates, offline and online. Such thinking requires the capacity to think abstractly about one's roles; to do so in a nonpartisan, disinterested way; and to consider the impact of one's actions *beyond the self* and on a larger collective—such as one's school, community, state, nation, and world. Research conducted by the GoodPlay Project suggests that young people rarely think in ethical ways about their online activities.

***Our Space* is aimed at cultivating the following *ethical thinking skills*:**

- **Perspective-taking**, or striving to understand the motives and goals of multiple stakeholders in online communities. Stakeholders might include one's friends, peers, parents, and teachers; other individuals with whom one interacts online; and the creators, owners, or subjects of content downloaded or accessed online.
- Reflecting on one's **roles and responsibilities** when online—for example, when presenting oneself in an online community; when sharing information about the self and others; when taking action in an online, multiplayer game; when deciding how to respond to something troubling, such as hate speech; and when deciding whether and how to make use of information, music, video, and text accessed online.
- Considering the **potential benefits and harms to communities** of various choices online—including those related to conduct and speech, self-presentations, privacy, establishing one's credibility, assessing the credibility of others, and using online content.

If youth engage these skills, we believe they will be more likely to behave as, and conceive of themselves as, responsible *citizens*—as opposed to simply bystanders or (at worst) abusers—of online communities.

Ethical thinking is especially important in new media environments because of the great powers they afford young people—to shape their own and others' identities, credibility, and privacy; to create and share their own content, and remix or mash-up others' creations; and to join and participate in a new set of communities, the size and scope of which may be unknowable.

Full participants of online communities exercise critical new media literacies, including:

- **Performance**—the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery.

- **Simulation**—the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real world processes.
- **Judgment**—the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources (including friends and peers).
- **Negotiation**—the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.
- **Networking**—the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information; in other words, networking creates opportunities to share with others.
- **Collective intelligence**—when participants pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.
- **Appropriation**—the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content.

The materials in this casebook highlight these skills that are often exercised by youth—consciously or not—in their various activities online. Our hope is that youth will come to acknowledge that exercising these skills, or powers, carries a civic responsibility—an obligation to think, and ideally act, in ethical ways.

Core Themes

The casebook is divided into five units, each of which focuses on a core theme—namely, participation, identity, privacy, authorship and ownership, and credibility. This quintet of themes was derived from research conducted by the GoodPlay Project. The research suggested that each theme is “high stakes” online and thus carries both promises and risks, particularly for young people. Importantly, the choices young people make online with respect to privacy and the other themes have implications not just for themselves, but for others. To us, this means that these themes have *ethical* dimensions. Here, we briefly describe each unit’s core theme and the ethical dimensions addressed in the unit lessons.

- **Participation**—We define participation broadly, as the ways in which people conduct themselves online. Participation online can include signing an online petition, commenting on a friend’s status update on Facebook, uploading an original video to YouTube, contributing to an ongoing blog, etc. Online spaces provide young people with positive opportunities to assume new roles, learn new skills, and collaborate with others to address urgent social problems. At the same time, opportunities to participate in harmful or counterproductive ways abound, such as through hate speech, grieving, trolling, cyberbullying, and other forms of misconduct that can harm both individuals and whole communities. The Participation unit raises the following key questions: *In online contexts, where communities can rapidly form, and just as rapidly*

disintegrate, how should norms of behavior be established, maintained, and respected? What are your roles and responsibilities in the online communities in which you participate? How can a person's conduct in an online community affect other participants and the community as a whole?

- **Identity**—The Internet provides new contexts for young people to express, explore, and develop their identities. They can use photos, interests and “favorites” lists, and other content to play up—or hide—different aspects of their identities. Online self-expressions and forms of “identity play” can also affect others in various ways. Youth who celebrate gay, lesbian, or other kinds of identities through blogs and/or profiles may uplift others who feel marginalized and unable to express themselves. On the other hand, some forms of online identity exploration can be deceptive and can undermine relationships. Key questions raised in the Identity unit include: *How do different forms of self-expression online affect others? What are the potential benefits and harms to others? When does “identity play” cross the line and become identity deception?*
- **Privacy**—Traditional notions of privacy are being challenged by new media that offer rich opportunities to network, communicate, and share information with vast audiences. By creating social network profiles and sharing at least some personal information online, young people can reach out to others, share their ideas and experiences, and form support networks around various struggles. At the same time, disclosing too much online can be harmful, given that information can persist indefinitely and can be shared with unintended audiences. Deception intended to protect one's privacy can also have unintended negative effects on relationships with others. Key questions addressed in the Privacy unit include: *What are the boundaries of sharing information about yourself and others online? What are the potential benefits of being able to share information online? What are the potential harms—to yourself and to others? In what circumstances can concealment of personal information—and anonymity—be beneficial vs. harmful?*
- **Credibility**—Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of people—especially their credentials, skills, and motivations—and of information. The volume of information available online creates both opportunities and risks—for learning, for making informed choices, and for connecting with other people. On the opportunities side, anyone can contribute information to knowledge communities like Wikipedia. On the risks side, it is relatively easy to post misinformation or to misrepresent one's credentials and expertise in online forums, and risk doing harm to people

who turn to such forums for advice. Certain properties of the Internet make it difficult to assess whether information can be trusted—including the potential for anonymity in many online spaces; the asynchronous nature of communication; and the absence of cues (such as tone and facial expression) that help us assess what people say offline. The Credibility unit addresses the following key questions: *What are the benefits and risks associated with the volume of information available online? How do you know when you can trust online information sources? How do you present a credible self online? What are your responsibilities when posting information about yourself, about other people, or information in different online spaces? How can you assess the credibility of other people based on their online profiles, blogs, and other content about them? What are your ethical responsibilities when you are an information seeker?*

- **Authorship and Ownership**—Traditional notions of authorship and ownership are being rethought in response to collective authorship on sites like Wikipedia, by the capacity to distribute amateur and professional videos to mass audiences through sites like YouTube, and by the technologies that allow remixing of content. Both promises and risks are apparent. New media afford unprecedented access to information, which may inspire new forms of learning; they also afford budding authors and other creators new avenues to participate in creative life. On the other hand, the Internet offers opportunities to abuse the free flow of information and content through illegal downloading, plagiarism, and failure to cite sources properly or consider the intentions of original creators and owners of online content. The Authorship and Ownership unit addresses the following questions: *How has the act of creation been altered by new media? What does it mean to be an author or a creator today? What is the difference between being “inspired by” someone else’s work and plagiarism? How can you remix, or otherwise “appropriate” the work of others in a responsible, ethical way? How do legal aspects of ownership, such as copyright, public domain, fair use, and creative commons limit or enable some forms of appropriation?*

While each unit in *Our Space* addresses one theme as a primary focal point, it is important to note that the five themes are not independent of one another. For example, choices about presenting one’s identity online frequently overlap with, and beg consideration of, privacy and credibility issues. Moreover, any use of the Internet involves participation in a community, whether or not participants realize it. Accordingly, many of the lessons raise several themes, at least implicitly. In the Orientation

activity designed for teachers, we explicitly address all five themes. We encourage students and teachers to reflect on new, unanticipated themes and questions raised by the materials as well.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Who is *Our Space* for?**

The target audience for *Our Space* is students of high school age, although some lessons have been successfully used with upper middle school (grades 7 and 8) students. Accordingly, each lesson indicates suggested grade levels.

2. **Where can *Our Space* be used?**

Although the casebook was designed with a classroom environment in mind, many of the materials could be easily used in other contexts, including after-school clubs, youth organizations, libraries, museums, faith-based groups, or even at home with parents and their children. Within schools, the materials can be used in homeroom or advisory periods; wellness programs; and subject-matter classes, such as social studies, history, or English language arts.

3. **How is *Our Space* intended to be used?**

Our Space is a set of resources for educators and other adults to facilitate conversations with young people about digital ethics. The casebook is not a curriculum to be followed from beginning to end; rather, we envision it as a “toolkit” of activities from which educators can pick and choose the most relevant and appropriate lessons. Moreover, the lessons themselves can be used in different ways; some facilitators may use them “as-is,” while others may “appropriate” and “remix” them for their particular purposes, contexts, and participants.

4. **What does a typical *Our Space* lesson involve?**

Our Space is designed to encourage young people to engage actively with ethical issues raised in online environments. Most lessons involve reflective exercises, role playing activities, and/or small-group discussions, guided by an adult facilitator. These types of activities create fertile conditions for youth to work through, and ultimately demonstrate their understandings of, the ethical dimensions of online life.

The lessons also involve working through realistic scenarios and dilemmas raised in online spaces. Many of the examples are drawn from our observations and our research with digitally active youth. Our intention is to raise scenarios familiar to students—ones that recall and resonate with their experiences, questions, and challenges faced online. Our hope is that the units push thinking about such familiar scenarios in more reflective, critical, and ultimately ethical directions.

5. Why are the lessons “low-tech” (i.e., paper-and-pen)?

We acknowledge that there is much to be gained from encouraging youth to think ethically in an interactive, online environment that simulates their online activities. However, we designed the lessons that make up *Our Space* so that they could be used in *any* classroom—“wired” or not. That said, some activities contain “high-tech” options—interactive supplemental material that some facilitators and students may find useful.

6. Do I need to be a frequent user of sites like YouTube, Facebook, and Wikipedia in order to facilitate these lessons?

No. The most important goal of *Our Space* is to cultivate ethical thinking skills in young people; we believe that adults have an important role to play in achieving this goal, regardless of whether they are familiar with the particulars of different online environments in which youth participate. Ideally, the exercises in this casebook will inspire youth to share their knowledge about these spaces with adults who are less familiar with the sites or with the ways in which youth use them. Together, adults and youth can develop a deeper understanding of the ethical dilemmas that surface in new media environments.

7. How do the core themes (participation, identity, privacy, etc.) arise on the sites my students use?

Some facilitators may be unsure about how themes such as credibility or ownership are relevant in particular online spaces. Included in the front matter of this casebook is an Orientation Activity through which we seek to address such questions. This activity provides a vivid example of how these issues arise in one type of online space frequented by youth: social networks such as MySpace and Facebook. In the lessons for students, discussion questions also highlight how the themes relate to particular online spaces.

8. Does *Our Space* address sexting, cyberbullying, and online safety issues?

Our Space does not contain lessons dedicated to issues such as sexting and online safety. However, some *Our Space* lessons contain scenarios and dilemmas that broach topics such as cyberbullying

(see the “I Thought You Should Know” lesson in the Participation unit). Where such issues come up, they are situated in the broader frame of exploring the impact of one’s actions on others, and the potential harms that could result. The five broad themes addressed in this casebook—identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation—can serve as entry points for discussing topics such as sexting as well. If appropriate, we encourage users of *Our Space* lessons to adapt them to engage youth in reflective conversations about these and other important safety issues.

9. Does the Ownership & Authorship unit cover legal issues, such as copyright infringement?

The Ownership and Authorship unit does *not* instruct students on the finer points of intellectual-property law or copyright infringement. Rather, the lessons will give a basic overview of copyright and ask students to think critically about legal and social norms surrounding copyright and the appropriation of copyrighted materials (see Axis of Media Ethics and Ad Men). In sum, our approach to ownership focuses on building a basic understanding of the legal principles while engaging students in ethical consideration of the meaning of ownership for creators. For more in-depth information and curricula on copyright law, please see:

- The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University and eIFL.net’s Copyright for Librarians Curriculum:
http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/copyrightforlibrarians/Main_Page
- The Media Education Lab at Temple University’s Copyright and Fair Use Curriculum:
<http://mediaeducationlab.com/teaching-about-copyright-and-fair-use>

10. Has *Our Space* been quality tested?

Many of the lessons in this book have undergone limited pilot testing in schools and after-school programs. Selected lessons have also been shared with educators in professional workshops, including Harvard Project Zero’s annual educator institutes. The entire casebook has been reviewed by experts in education, media literacy, and digital citizenship. Based on these pilot tests and reviews, refinements have been made to the framing, substance, and format of *Our Space*.

11. How do I assess what my students have learned from *Our Space*?

Each lesson lists a set of Learning Objectives that tell teachers what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. These Learning Objectives are laid out at the start of the lesson and reprised in the concluding Assessment section.

To determine whether your students have met the Learning Objectives, you can evaluate them based on one or both of the following:

- Their contributions to class activities and discussions.
- Their answers to the optional assessment questions found at the end of each lesson.

Although most assessment is individually oriented in the US, we have learned from our work abroad that group learning is important, too. Indeed, in the increasingly interconnected world, the capacity to work with others, and to arrive at collective solutions, increases all the time. To that end, you may choose to evaluate students either individually (e.g. using written answers to assessment questions) or collectively (e.g. observing how small groups work together to arrive at a collective solution).

As an example, consider the third lesson in the Privacy unit, titled “Trillion-Dollar Footprint.” In this lesson, students work in small groups to choose the final contestant for a reality TV show by evaluating the fictionalized Google search results for two candidates. Next, each group explains to the rest of the class which candidate they chose and why. Finally, in a whole class discussion, the teacher encourages students to reflect on the privacy issues raised by this activity.

Four Learning Objectives describe what students should be able to do by the end of the lesson:

- Define “digital footprint.”
- Consider the types of information that make up one’s digital footprint, the audiences who may see it, and the people beyond oneself who may help shape it.
- Articulate how and why to take care of their own digital footprints and the digital footprints of others.
- Recognize that digital footprints can change quite easily in one respect, and yet prove quite difficult to change in other respects.

To assess whether students have met these Learning Objectives, teachers could evaluate student responses in any one (or all) of the following:

- Small-group discussions
- Small-group presentations
- Whole-class discussion
- Assessment questions

Students who have met the first Learning Objective will be able to explain that their digital footprints constitute the record or “trail” of everything they do, say, or have said about them online. These digital footprints may persist for a long time and be accessible to a variety of audiences, some of them unanticipated.

Students who have met the second Learning Objective will be able to list specific types of information that make up their digital footprints, such as posting a photo, writing on a friend’s Facebook wall, and sending text messages via mobile phone. In addition, others may also contribute to one’s digital footprint, such as when one is tagged by someone else in a photo on Facebook. A variety of audiences may potentially have access to some or all of their digital footprint, including parents and other family members, current and future teachers, and potential future employers.

Students who have met the third Learning Objective will be able to explain that it is important to take care of their own and others’ digital footprints in order to protect their own privacy and reputations and respect the privacy and reputations of others. In addition, they will be able to describe ways they can take care of their own and others’ digital footprints, such as choosing to tell friends sensitive information in person rather than through a text message, or asking friends if they mind being tagged in a photo before tagging them.

Students who have met the fourth Learning Objective will be able to explain why it may be easy to change their digital footprints in some respects, but quite difficult to change them in other respects. For instance, they may decide to remove a photo album from Facebook that contains pictures from their early childhood. If these pictures haven’t been downloaded by other people, it may be easy enough to remove them from Facebook, never to be seen by others again. However, if one or more people have already downloaded the photos and either forwarded them to others or posted them to their own Facebook profile or another website, these childhood photos may become an enduring part of one’s digital footprint.

We welcome your reactions to *Our Space*. Please share your thoughts and experiences with us by email at: carrie_james@pz.harvard.edu or ereilly@usc.edu.