

Minors and Internet Interactivity: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

The Internet offers new opportunities both for accessing information created by others and for creating and sharing new information. Minors' right to retrieve, interact with, and create information posted on the Internet in schools and libraries is an extension of their First Amendment rights. (See also other Interpretations to the *Library Bill of Rights*, including "Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks," "Free Access to Libraries for Minors," and "Access for Children and Young Adults to Nonprint Materials.")

With these interactive opportunities, however, come new challenges to intellectual freedom and privacy for children and young adults. Filters, for example, restrict access by children and young adults to interactive social networking tools on the Internet.

Interactive Academic Content

The evolution of Web technology allows young people to interact in their academic pursuits by creating documents and sharing them online; uploading pictures, videos, and graphic material; revising public documents; and adding tags to online content to classify and organize information. The educational benefits of shared learning are well documented. Concern that these sites may be used inappropriately has led to censorship of such academic tools. Schools and libraries should create an instructional environment in which interactive Web tools can be used by all students safely and constructively in their academic pursuits.

Interactive Personal Content

Social networking Web sites may also be used for sharing personal interactions through the creation of online communities that feature an open exchange of information in various forms, such as images, videos, journal entries, and discussions about common interests. They are also a venue for assisting children and young adults to learn about and organize social, civic, and extra-curricular activities. Many of these sites invite users to establish online identities, share personal information, and join social networks. It is the responsibility of parents to monitor their children's use of social networking Web sites. Some have expressed strong concerns that young people are endangering themselves and others by injudicious posting of private and personally identifiable information on the Internet through blogs, chats, discussion forums, and social networks leading to decisions to restrict access to them. Banning children and young adults from using these sites does not teach safe behaviors and leaves them unprepared for interacting in an unsafe environment. They should be taught what personally identifiable information is safe to share and how to avoid risky interactions.

Intellectual Freedom Issues

Concern about the inappropriate use of social tools, for both academic and personal content, has led to decisions to restrict access to social networking websites. Restricting access to Web sites because the sites provide tools for sharing content publicly, social networking, blogging, or creating personal Web space violates the tenets of the *Library Bill of Rights*. To hinder the usage of these networking sites in a school or library is to prevent minors from accessing and creating resources that fulfill their interests and needs for information, social connections, and participation in a community of learners. It is the responsibility of librarians and educators to monitor threats to the intellectual freedom of minors and to advocate for extending access to interactive applications on the Internet.

Conclusion

As defenders of intellectual freedom and the First Amendment, schools and libraries have a responsibility to offer unrestricted access in accordance with local, state, and federal laws related to the Internet and computer network use. Librarians and teachers also have a responsibility to educate minors to use these social technology tools responsibly, ethically, and safely.