

Running Head: Internet Filtering Today in the Schools

Internet Filtering Today in the Schools: The Debate Continues

Barry D. Thibault

University Of West Georgia

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Introduction

The Internet filtering debate in my MEDT 7477 class brought up many valuable arguments for both sides on the issues of using filters in the classroom. As a teacher, I can understand and sympathize with both sides of the debate. However, I must admit that I still lean in the direction of the fact that filtering is a source of protection for the students we teach everyday! It is true that the internet, including web 2.0 tools, has become more interactive as the technology progresses and it can certainly engage the learner compared to classroom instruction of the past. Nevertheless, it is also far more threatening to the younger students than it has ever been and this is the primary reason why we must continue to filter.

I must clarify my latest thoughts after the research on this filtering debate:

“I believe that it is necessary to protect students; I also believe in the fact that it is an obligation to our students for us to teach the proper behavior for using the latest technological tools!”

Reviewing the research

As I have been researching this topic on the filtering debate, I often read about training the students to handle the proper behavior, respect and maturity for the integration of the internet and the use of technology. As an educator I firmly believe that it is most important to train these students on this technology etiquette at a very early age and not ban them completely from the

use. As Parry (2011, p. 16) suggests, “We are called on as teachers to teach them [students] how to use these technologies effectively, to ensure that they end up on the right side of the digital divide: the side that knows how to use social media to band together.” Parry believes that web literacy is as important as basic literacy and a necessary skill for future employment.

Filtering in the Future

One particular technology report that I am often referred to, discusses some very positive data of the integration of technology into the future classroom. The recent *2011 Horizon Report* projects mobile learning’s time to adoption as one year or less with two convincing statements: “By 2015, 80% of people accessing the Internet will be doing so from mobile devices” and “Internet-capable mobile devices will outnumber computers within the next year” (Johnson, Smith, 2011, p. 12). In keeping this in mind, we must not assume that all students will be accessing the same data through filtered software found in the school networked computers. This is enough reason to train them and teach them the appropriate measures to surfing and using internet technology. This training will prepare them to make better decisions in the case that there is no filtered content as suggested with the use of future mobile devices.

As the future of online learning changes, perhaps we may soon find that the Children’s Internet Protection Act (2000) that once protected our children in schools and libraries may no longer exist. In fact, all federal funds provided for filtering internet access and internet safety policies may also soon be discontinued if the technology continues to change the shape of education in the future.

Filters Limit Educational Information

In terms of the filtering debate, the principal grounds for being against the filter in the schools were because of the fact that filters usually filter out any websites that have anything to do with blocked key words. These key words are important in education as students learn and develop the skills needed for success in the academics. These key words can be related to drugs, sex, violence, gangs, abortion, pregnancy, homophobia, gay, racism, gambling, tobacco, alcohol and much more key words that affect students today. This can certainly cause problems as these words are all filtered from the schools and students are not able to research these topics. Many educators against the use of filters can argue that students are not being properly educated by filtering these specific words.

The use of Proxies

Lastly, students will use creative ways of “getting around” school and library internet policy. These proxies that are often used are considered more dangerous as nobody is watching and this is where the internet predators hang out! Often times, there are always ways of getting around filters and children are capable of figuring out how to do so. Filters are also not 100 percent guaranteed to catch certain websites, and your children may still stumble across them by accident.

In conclusion, I still believe that with the latest technology devices being so mobile we must teach the students how to use them properly rather than filter everything from them. As the technology advances and the Internet becomes even more part of the school culture, educators

must accept the responsibility to protect students from inappropriate internet content by teaching these important internet rules and procedures of “netiquette”.

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Appendix A

The following 10 arguments were found on the website “ehow” and provided an excellent resource for my group during the debate:

http://www.ehow.com/list_6027406_internet-filtering-pros-cons.html

WHY FILTERS CAN'T WORK IN SCHOOLS!

1. *Underblocking*

No filtering software is clever enough to block even 10% of the pornography on the Internet unless it effectively blocks most or all of the materials on the Internet. This is because of the inherent complexity of human language and thought, not a matter of simply improving filtering technology.

2. *Overblocking*

Filtering software always blocks more material than the small proportion of pornography it is able to block, thus significantly damaging the most basic and practical uses of the Internet, not to mention the free speech rights and civil liberties of every person accessing, publishing, or broadcasting on the Internet. Most of the material on the Internet is informative and useful and should not inadvertently or intentionally get blocked.

3. *"Expert" Control*

Even the simplest filtering software is difficult to operate in a way that permits *local control* over the specific type and scope of materials blocked, so people who have to use filtering software depend on "experts" in filtering software companies who decide what

they should and should not see, then keep this information secret even from those using the filtering software. (Only one filtering software company makes the list of blocked sites available to customers or the general public.)

4. *Subjective*

Criteria used to block materials are vaguely defined and subjectively applied to everyone who accesses the Internet, rather than designed and customized to meet the needs of particular communities.

5. *Error-Prone*

Filtering software companies make lots of mistakes in assigning sites to block lists and almost always rely on automated systems for making content decisions. The process is fraught with error and there is usually no effective means to check whether a site is blocked inappropriately, to correct the problem, to override the blocking, or to appeal the multitude of incorrect decisions made by filtering software companies.

6. *Censorship*

When the U.S. government mandates filtering in public schools and libraries, the government mandates censorship in direct conflict with the U.S. Constitutional guarantees to free expression and freedom of association. Laws prohibiting the production and distribution of child pornography and obscenity *already* apply to the Internet.

7. *Discrimination*

Filtering software blocks "controversial" materials related to certain issues or communities disproportionately more than other materials, thus unfairly discrimination

against whole communities of people accessing, publishing, or broadcasting on the Internet.

8. *Vulnerable*

Filtering software blocking can be relatively easily bypassed even by children.

9. *Problematic*

Use of filtering software causes problems with computers during installation, maintenance, upgrades, and removal that negatively impacts the use and performance of the computers, including computer crashes, access time delays, web display errors, and other problems impacting negatively the ability to access the Internet effectively.

10. *Wrong Focus*

Internet filtering software is an unsuccessful panacea to an important problem that requires a more thoughtful solution. Parents, teachers, librarians, administrators, and local communities must work together to come up with Constitutionally acceptable solutions that encourage learning in a safe environment on the Internet, rather than relying on an unworkable technological fix. The focus should be on determining local standards and on education for all parties about how to use the Internet effectively.