

Safer Internet Forum 2011:

Minutes from the parallel session “Promoting Positive Online experiences for Children across Europe”

Session heading:

Promoting Positive Online experiences for Children across Europe

Who were present at the session (what kind of actors)?

Governmental organisations, associations, Sciences, Representatives from Safer Internet Centres, broadcasting companies, National and European winners of the Award for Best Children’s Online Content, Representatives of the European Commission

Christine Kormann	DG Information Society and Media, European Commission
Sonia Livingstone	Chair of the Jury of the European Award for Best Children's Online Content and EU Kids Online
Christel Franz	„Ein Netz für Kinder“ Funding program for websites for children
Jacqueline Harding	parentchannel.tv, advisor to CBeebies, the BBC children's TV
Geertrui Robbrecht	Representative children’s portal "www.ketnet.be"
Youth Category winners from Latvia, Czech Republic, Poland and Germany	National and European winners of the European Award for Best Children’s Online Content, Youth Category
Safer Internet Centres	Representatives of the Safer Internet Centres involved in the pilot competition
Lidia de Reese	Search engine for children "www.fragfinn.de"
Remco Pijpers	Foundation "Mijn Kind Online"
Dr. Ulrike Behrens	"www.jugendschutz.net", German Hotline, children’s portal " www.surfen-ohne-risiko.net" - My homepage
Rafn M. Jonsson	Safer Internet Centre Iceland

The issue(s): Overview of the issues that were discussed:

What is "positive online content for children"? What do children want?

During her presentation Sonia Livingstone (EU Kids Online) identified four important aspects for positive online content: (1) Learning, (2) Participation, (3) Creativity and (4) Identity. Positive online content for children has to meet children's needs. It must be age appropriate and must not be poor on any kind of security dimension. For children the attractiveness, reliability and usability of websites are central elements to benefit the audience. From the experience in the expert group and jury of the European Award, Sonia reported that firstly, positive content is hard to define, esp children might have another opinion of what positive content than adults; also, she reported about several challenges in classifying websites and choosing the winners – comparing websites with a lot of money behind them with others, benefit for 6year v. different from benefit for 12year olds, etc.

Jacqueline Harding pointed out that there is a strong demand for learning from children and that there can be no doubt that children are interested in teaching and learning content. As a matter of course such content has to be attractive for children which requires a child-friendly colouring and shaping, special fonts etc. Positive online content for children has to keep up with latest developments and opportunities on the internet, it must be produced with regard to the future of children and not the adults' past.

With "www.ketnet.be" Geertrui Robbrecht introduced the 3rd place winner of the "European Award for best children's online content". Ketnet.be is a website which already takes several of the mentioned aspects into consideration. It offers multimedia-based content (games, videos, photos etc.), is free of advertisement and is implementing a parental controlled profile (registration only with permission of the parents) for children at present.

Rafn M. Jonsson introduced "www.paxel123.com", a multilingual and interactive website which offers attractive teaching and learning content for children. The users may find games concerning rhymes, patterns or puzzles etc. on paxel123.com. At present the website-content is available in 7 different languages.

Of course one of the central aims is for children to stay safe on the internet. Remco Pijpers from "Mijn Kind Online" foundation introduced MyBEE, a special browser for children which allows children up to the age of about 10 to surf the web safely and easily, including a possibility for parents to evaluate and rate websites.

The projects presented by the youth category winners of the "European Award for Best Children's Online Content " underlined the discussed aspects of

attractive websites for children and youth. The introduced websites are dealing with contemporary issues (e.g. cyberbullying), using multimedia-based content and provide options for participation. The youth emphasised that it is crucial to provide information in the first language of young people. The examples shown from Latvia, Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic bring out the great motivation and competences of young persons to contribute to safer internet topics.

Who are the actors in this field?

Scientific research and practical experiences made by producers and funders of positive online content for children could increase the knowledge concerning this topic.

Challenges and opportunities:

To catch up with popular portals like YouTube and Facebook and to make children use positive online content is a challenging task – leading them to good websites, make them know them, etc. Actors of a wide range of sectors (e.g. politics, education, science) have to work together to achieve this aim. Advertising and commercial backgrounds can be a problem; they must be transparent and clear, but in many cases it is difficult to find valid criteria what is ok and what is not ok.

Examples of best practice and related evidence and success factors

The EU Kids Online Study revealed a lot of useful information concerning children's online-behaviour and children's needs.

Recommendations: Who should do what about which challenges and who can contribute to enhancing the opportunities?

One central task is to raise awareness on positive online content for children and to share experiences with regard to producing and promoting positive online environments for children. Christine Kormann highlighted that the European Commission is planning to start a new activity with the aim to encourage the exchange of expertise on positive content across Europe.

How to support positive online content for children?

The question how to support positive online content for children was of a fundamental relevance for the whole session. A lot of different approaches were presented and discussed. Competitions like the "European Award for Best Children's Online Content" are very useful to raise awareness on positive online content for children. Christine Kormann announced that the European Commission will start a new project to identify central technical issues concerning websites for children and to share the findings of this project, as well as a thematic network on positive content in the next programme.

Christel Franz from the German funding initiative "Ein Netz für Kinder" ("A net for children"), highlighted the importance and the opportunities of funding activities. During the first 3 years of the initiative 70 new websites or new functions within existing websites were realised. A state grant for positive online content is quite helpful, especially for small associations etc. which are not able to finance such projects independently.

With "www.fragfinn.de" Lidia de Reese presented a special search engine for children, which makes it easy to find interesting and appropriate content for children. Based on a whitelist of checked websites (more than 10.000 domains at present) young users can easily find their topics within a safe environment (walled garden). It is possible to use the fragFINN-whitelist for organisations dealing with internet security.

Dr. Ulrike Behrens introduced "www.surfen-ohne-risiko.net/meine-startseite" (my homepage), a web-page which provides individualized starting pages for children. Parents and/or children can easily choose between different settings for news, games, weather etc. which are appropriate for children. A wide range of settings is offered and by using widgets the user has the option to create his personal homepage. The software allows to merge and circulate content from different websites via RSS feed and may be easily adopted for other languages.

Who are the actors in this field?

European Commission (European Award for Best Children's Online Content), national funding initiatives (government, industry).

Challenges and opportunities:

To ensure long-term projects the funding of positive online content for children must be well-considered. Funded projects have to be viable even if the funding is ending. For this reason advertisement within children's websites is a big topic and there must be standards to deal with this topic.

Examples of best practice and related evidence and success factors

To support positive online content for children several different actors should be involved. The European Award for Best Children's Online Content was a very successful initiative which stimulated the production and the discussion with regard to positive online content.

Recommendations: Who should do what about which challenges and who can contribute to enhancing the opportunities?

To support positive online content for children a lot of different starting points were presented within the session. The situation across Europe is very different and there are a lot of best practise activities which could be transferred within the

EU. It is necessary to raise awareness on websites for children and to involve governmental and nongovernmental organisations as well as partners from the industry. Christine Kormann pointed out that the European Commission plans on continue with the European Award for Best Children's Online Content in 2012-2013.