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*The value of risk: cycling cyber-highways with stabilizers*

As new genres of social media are introduced the industry adapts to ensure, as much as can be possible, the safety of children online. In the UK internet service providers are largely self-regulated, however they are encouraged to follow guidelines produced by the Home Office Task Force for Internet Safety. New guidelines are released every two years or so to reflect the development of new kinds of online social environments for children, for example, social networks or mobile phone use. The child safety lobby has been vociferous and effective; the UK is considered to be a centre of excellence in child safety online and the UK model is closely observed abroad.

There are many ways of keeping children safe online; the education of children has been particularly foregrounded. Parents and teachers have also been encouraged to learn about life online and to experience online gaming or virtual worlds, with varying levels of success. Alongside education there is the provision of sensible moderation practices and the hosting (management) of social media. Finally, technology is becoming smarter and more able to filter and process content.

This paper argues that children should be gradually introduced to more sociable online environments to prepare them for a networked adulthood. This gradual exposure to risk could be accompanied by education and underpinned by the support of parents or carers. The topic is considered through the case study of 'Adventure Rock', the BBC's virtual world for children which was launched in April, 2008. Findings from a two-year study are presented which show that children enjoy being given social challenges online, however there were observable differences between the behaviour of children aged 7-9 and those aged 10-12.

In order to begin encouraging parents to take a more active role in the care and education of children online many providers are beginning to create 'parental dashboards' which offer the setting of levels of participation for children. The provision of parental dashboards offers an opportunity for parents to both educate their children and to take control of their children's social lives online to some degree. The advantages for internet service providers are obvious; it moves the ISP from being *in loco parentis* to placing the responsibility with the parent of the child concerned. The disadvantage of parental dashboards is the civil liberty implication for an older child citizen. The success of the strategy relies on parents being knowledgeable about participatory media, and knowing what level of engagement is suitable for their child. At best, parental dashboards could offer an opportunity for parent and child partnerships, at worst it could inhibit a child's growing understanding of virtual life.