

# The Research Files Episode 21: The impact of Snapchat in education...

*Jo Earp*

*Thank you for downloading this episode of The Research Files, brought to you by Teacher magazine – I'm Jo Earp. This month I'm talking to University of New England academics Dr Jennifer Charteris, Senior Lecturer in Pedagogy, and Dr Sue Gregory, Chair of Research at the School of Education. Their research – with UNE colleagues Dr Yvonne Masters, Associate Professor Amanda Kennedy and Associate Professor Myf Maple – looks at the impact of the messaging app Snapchat in education settings, and how schools are responding to issues such as cyber bullying and sexting.*

**Jo Earp: First of all Jennifer, can you explain a bit more about the research topic?**

Jennifer Charteris: Certainly, Snapchat as a software was launched in 2011 and there are seven billion snaps sent around the world each day, so it has enormous usage. In Australia, there are two million active monthly users. We were interested in the influence of [Snapchat] in school settings; in particular we were interested in how young people can be quite vulnerable and unaware of the issues and implications of inappropriate social media use.

**JE: So, Sue Gregory, what did this study actually involve then?**

Sue Gregory: We have sent surveys around to all schools within Australia. In October 2015 we sent surveys out to New South Wales schools and to date we've had 254 responses. Because of the results of our New South Wales schools we felt that we would like to capture a wider audience and find out what's happening in schools across Australia. We sent out the surveys yesterday to all other schools in Australia and so far they've been 114 responses since yesterday across all states and territories, which is pretty amazing. And we're also surveying school students, but this is not across Australia, this is actually restricted to just one school at this stage. We've also interviewed principals as a result of the surveys, ones that have put up their hand to be interviewed, and there's about 20 of them that we've interviewed. We've also surveyed our university students and staff within the School of Education at UNE. So, that's happened over the last 18 months.

**JE: Okay, so Jennifer back to you now, the study is due for completion as Sue said there at the end of June but there are some worrying themes already emerging, aren't there? Can you share a couple of those with the listeners and the practical implications I guess for teachers and leaders. And, also, what are schools doing to tackle these issues?**

JC: Well the school leaders we spoke with, particularly those in secondary schools, said they deal with issues associated with cyber sexting and cyber bullying on a regular basis. And so the disappearing nature of this particular media [Snapchat] can make it very difficult to track incidences of cyber bullying, because the evidence

disappears. And, in addition, because these young people send these images with a timer and it is supposed to disappear, people can trust that the person that they send it to is not going to have access to it on an ongoing basis. So, young people sometimes send sexually explicit material and with the advent of screen capturing software the image can be captured, retained and sent on to quite a large audience.

So, young people can experience shame and humiliation around ... incidences of cyber harassment and cyber bullying. Particularly young women, because there are double standards around girls' sexuality and so young women can experience quite a bit of shame and humiliation when these images get disseminated. We've also heard of incidences of coercion where young girls have pressure put on them to record and disseminate images that are sexually explicit. This can be very difficult for schools to cope with when the incidences spill into classrooms and into schools.

**JE: And so have you managed to gather information on how schools are actually tackling this, well, what is a relatively new issue isn't it?**

JC: Well, there are a number of things that schools have done to be very proactive. They target staffing – so, there are people employed who are very confident ICT users and understand how social media works, they also raise it in classroom programs. In fact, 91 per cent of educator respondents said that they raise issues around social media with students. And, also they invite school police liaison officers into the schools to talk about the implications of cyber sexting and cyber bullying.

**JE: So it's really just the education side of it as well. And this is just Snapchat isn't it? We've got to be clear, that's the only thing you've looked at in this particular study.**

JC: Our focus has specifically been on Snapchat as a disappearing media because there is research on Facebook out there and there is very little on Snapchat and that is why we actually particularly chose that media because it is emerging and it is ubiquitous.

**JE: On a more positive note, your research has highlighted, or the initial results have highlighted, the benefits of social media.**

JC: Certainly. We've noticed that children often send images to each other that express humour, that they can morph animal faces onto human faces and use a range of filters to send amusing pictures to each other. And in this way they can cement relationships, build community and it's a very positive generative form of media creation. So, they're actually authoring media, which is a very positive thing.

**JE: Sue Gregory, finally then, what are the next steps for this research?**

SG: We have an amazing amount of data that we already have and [are] still collecting and I think will be collecting beyond the end of the project. So, a project finishes because that's when the funding finishes but this project will continue because we think that it's a very important topic and it has a lot of interest from schools. We hope to get information out to schools by creating resources for the schools to use ...

... But we also would like to take the research further, beyond UNE researchers, to see [if] other researchers across Australia or maybe even the world would like to do

a bit of comparison of the use of disappearing media in schools Australia-wide, New Zealand, or beyond.

**JE: Well, we'll watch this space, if you like, with interest. Dr Sue Gregory and Dr Jennifer Charteris, thanks very much for sharing your work with The Research Files.**

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The UNE research team of Dr Sue Gregory, Dr Jennifer Charteris, Dr Yvonne Masters, Associate Professor Amanda Kennedy and Associate Professor Myfanwy Maple are a cross disciplinary group of academics from the Schools of Education, Law and Social Work.

Stay tuned: Next month in Teacher, Dr Sue Gregory and Dr Jennifer Charteris will be discussing how school leaders are managing issues of cyber bullying and sexting.

### **Further reading**

Charteris, J., Gregory, S., & Masters, Y. (2014). Snapchat 'selfies': The case of disappearing data. In Hegarty, B., McDonald, J., & Loke, S.K. (Eds.) *Rhetoric and Reality: Critical perspectives on educational technology*. Proceedings ASCILITE Dunedin 2014 (pp. 389-393). <http://www.ascilite.org/conferences/dunedin2014/proceedings/>

Charteris, J., & Gregory, S. (2016, May 30). *The two faces of Snapchat for schools and parents*. Retrieved from <https://blog.une.edu.au/news/2016/05/30/the-two-faces-of-snapchat-for-schools-and-parents/>

Charteris, J., Gregory, S., & Masters, Y. (2016). Snapchat, youth subjectivities and sexuality: disappearing media and the discourse of youth innocence. *Gender and Education*, 0(0), 117. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1188198>