

OECD seminar on encouraging an ethical digital generation

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) held a seminar in Paris yesterday which explored how policy makers can encourage an ethical digital generation. The seminar was moderated by Francesca Gottschalk, an OECD analyst at its Education and Skills Directorate. She noted that children are spending more time on-line, and at a younger age, than ever before. This had positive benefits as well as risks. When children have been at home more than ever, and not able to mix with their friends in the normal way, using digital tools to show their creativity had been a benefit.

Professor Sonia Livingstone of the London School of Economics and Political Science referred to research that showed that if schools just teach functional skills then outcomes are mixed. Outcomes are better if the whole range of skills are taught, including communications, critical and participatory skills.

Professor Livingstone also observed that we expect children to be ethically good and to be well-behaved. Yet adults on-line, and in the real world, are often not well behaved at all. Her fear was that while the digital world could enhance children's experience "we are not ready yet. It would just be exploited."

Tracey Burns, another OECD analyst, noted that it was very difficult for children to catch up if they lack digital skills or access when they are young. What COVID has shown is just how uneven access to IT equipment, connectivity and a good learning environment is. Children who can't access IT, or who come from a crowded household where there is not a learning space and where parents are less likely to have the IT skills to help their young children, are in practice excluded.

A fuller report on this will appear in the international section of the next issue of *Education Journal*.

2 September, 2021

[WN 0003]