

Sharing good practice

5/01/08

In this first issue of Sharing Good Practice for 2008 Robert Hart tells us the story of Emily Sanderson - one little girl in 120, 000. The story shows how online connectivity is changing children's lives.

Connectivity

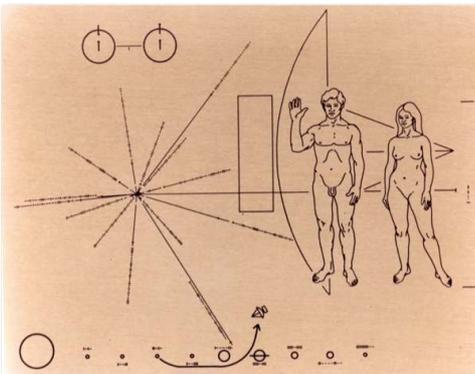
The focus of each edition of SGP will be an article or articles contributed by readers. If you feel that you could make a contribution please contact me, Heather Govier, at contact@ictopus.org.uk (we pay a small £50 thank-you fee for each piece published).

Emily - The Connected Ape

Robert Hart



The human species is evolving rapidly. Our children are growing up in a very different environment from their parents. They have access to huge amounts of information at the click of a mouse. They can connect with people all over the world from their desktops, their laptops, and now increasingly from their mobile phones and mobile internet devices.



Let's wind the clock back 25 years to 1972, when Carl Sagan was asked to design a plaque to go into deep space with the NASA Pioneer 10 and 11 spacecraft. It was naively designed to invite ET round for tea, or to eat us for tea! It showed how to find us and what we looked like. Here's how we chose to represent the human species back then.

Notice the humans standing side by side, but disconnected. If Sagan had known about Emily Sanderson and her online friends, the picture might have been different. We are now seeing the emergence of *Homo sapiens continuus* – the Connected Ape. With humans intimately connected to each other online around the world.

This is the story of one little girl in a community of 120,000; it gives some clues to how online connectivity is changing our children's lives.

The research



Emily Sanderson is a real child (*although that's not her real name and this is not her photograph*). She is 10 years old, lives in the Midlands and is a representative of over 120,000 children in the SuperClubsPLUS & GoldStarCafe social learning networks.

Working with DCSF and Becta, Intuitive Media conducted extensive research into how children behave and learn in protected online social learning networks. The research included observation and analysis of the online behaviour of over

120,000 children, direct online consultation with over 12,000 children who took part in a series of research surveys and the detailed profiling of 8 representative children. Here we distil what we learned through the profile of a single 10 year old girl.

This profile describes Emily alongside other children in her online community – her online experience and activity, her productivity, how she engages her peers, her contribution, her capabilities and achievements, her sociability one to one and in groups, her circle of friends local and countrywide, her socialization, her personal and social learning at school, at home and on the move.

Statements about Emily are given in relation to the statistical analysis of the whole community. For example: “Emily owns a Nintendo DS (24%)” indicates that statement is true for 24% of the community.

Research: How is Emily equipped and connected?



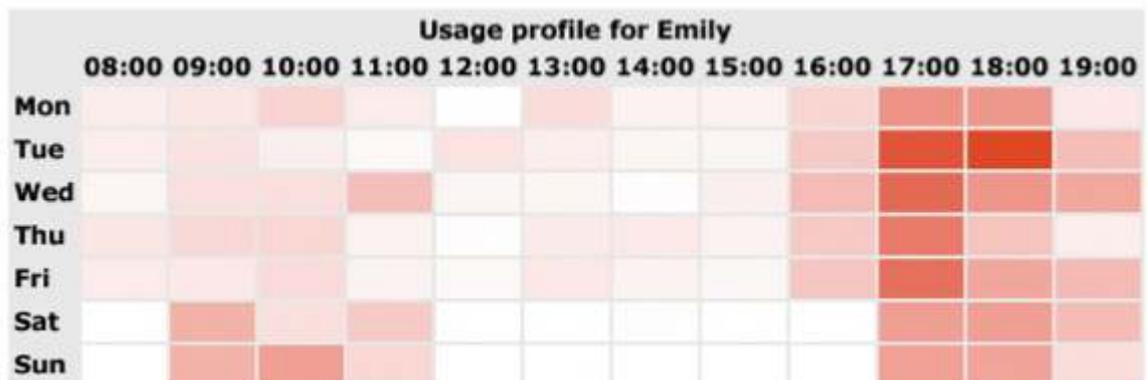
Like 61% of the SuperClubsPLUS and GoldStarCafe communities, Emily has a home PC (15% have Macs). She owns a mobile phone (like 76%), a Nintendo DS (24%) and a Sony PSP (16%). She uses the Internet on her mobile phone (36%). Like 42% of mobile connected members she uses her mobile to access SuperClubsPLUS – mostly to email her friends, join in forums and hot seats, keep up with her favourite *Get Active* sports club and edit her home pages.

Research: How is Emily's life different online?

Emily says (like only 5% of her online community) she prefers to do easier work and at a slower pace than other kids in class. But she turns into Hurricane Emily online! In her online community Emily is exceptionally productive and communicative. She joined SuperClubsPLUS in June 2006 and has by October 2007 been active in the community for 15 months. She makes 90 visits a month – that's 3 visits a day.

Research: When and where does Emily connect?

Like over 50% of the children we surveyed, Emily gets just 30 minutes a week on the school computers. So her community activity is light during the school day, apart from Wednesday mornings when her class gets a lesson in the school computer suite.



Most of Emily's online communications activity is at home. She quickly checks her SuperClubsPLUS emails before she leaves for school and she logs in again as soon as she gets home. She's active in the evenings from 4-8 pm and very active at the weekends.

She spends over 300 hours a year in the SuperClubsPLUS community.



Research: How productive and effective is Emily online?



Emily is a dedicated personal website developer. To populate her 4 home pages in SuperClubsPLUS, she has sourced, prepared and published 32 images and 15 icons. She's edited her home pages 4,180 times, with 279 updates per month or 9 per day. She also contributes her content to her school's site in SuperClubsPLUS.

Emily has created her own online club – a Web Ring called "BIRMINGHAM CITY ARE THE BEST!!"

Emily's pages are very popular with other children. She's had an exceptional 6,268 visits to her main home page.

Her digital guest-book has been signed by 544 visitors who left positive comments.

Research: How does Emily engage others in her interests?

"England had a ok World Cup. They got to the quarter finals while playing Portugal. 0-0 Game so a bad penalty shoot out which never gives us wins. Hargreeves had a brilliant World Cup while Cristiano Ronaldo scored his penalty to put England out of the World Cup"

Emily's home pages and webrings, are dedicated to her favourite football teams. She announces upcoming games, writes reviews and publishes results.

Emily's email conversations focus on football, getting ideas on how to improve her home pages and engaging other children in making their own clubs.

Emily has a strong online relationship with Jennifer from Scotland and Erin from Belfast. They mostly talk about football.



"Me and Charley Have Made A Club Called B.L.C-Big Live Chat Club. I'm Doing The Members And Charleys Doing Home P's. Would You Like To Do The Compo's And Games ?"

Emily is very appreciative of other children's efforts, as she shows in these encouraging messages to Caitlin and Catherine (Cat):

"awwwah Caitlin your site is brill for only yr.3, luv emily x"

"So Your Keeping Your Project Page! I Think Its The Best Ever Cat"

Research: Does Emily enjoy publishing?

At home, Emily likes to create her own images, photos and animations (e.g. icons) and send interesting site links to friends. In SuperClubsPLUS she says she likes to make and share content...

"on my Project Pages, on my Home Pages. I post Ideas and Stuff in Forums. I Email Ideas to friends"

Emily likes sharing her ideas and content with others, but wants to retain her creative individuality.



*"I Want Everyone To Have Fun And Have Really Cool Homepages."
 "I Would Like Other People To Give Me Ideas But I Want My Home page
 Different To Other Peoples."*

Research: How communicative is Emily?

Emily is very sociable and communicative one-to-one. In 15 months she sent 8,419 emails to 580 different members. She sends 140 emails a week and receives 146. She prefers to email on her Nintendo DS Lite, which she can use anywhere in the house.

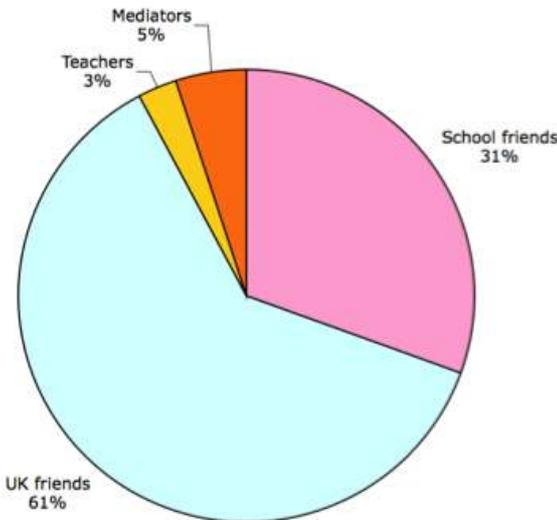
She's a prolific communicator in groups. She made 5,721 contributions to 13 different SuperClubsPLUS forums (mostly from her Nintendo DS) including: Get Active (sports), Media Dome (film & TV), One World (global issues) and her School Forum.

She is also a prolific contributor to community 'hot-seat' forums, with invited authors, designers or people from overseas. She made 72 posts in 12 weeks.

Research: How has being connected affected Emily's circle of friends?

Emily has a productive online relationship with her teacher (133 emails sent, 84 received). She talks more with the community mediators (259 emails sent 212 received).

Emily Communications Sent



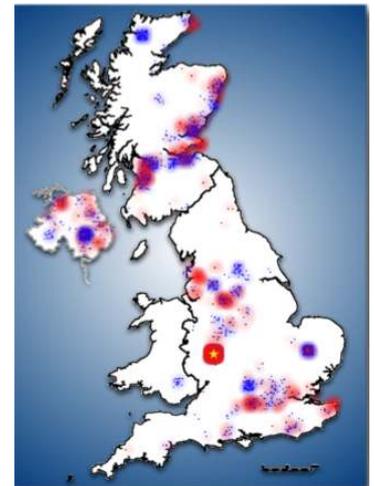
Her circle of young friends has expanded enormously. With 31% of emails going to school friends, but 61% to friends outside school and well beyond her neighbourhood.

Emily's friendships span the UK.

Emily's online friends live on average 217 km away with the furthest 761 km away in NE Scotland.

She writes mostly to girls at school, but almost equally to boys (53%, blue dots on the map) & girls (47%, red dots) around the UK.

Communication is the common ingredient of Emily's favourite activities in SuperClubsPLUS. She says she likes to:



"See Who's On, Email People, Talk To Friends, show Music and Pictures, See Other Kids Pages, do Polls, Quizzes, Survys, win Compos do Star Awards."

Research: How popular is Emily?

Popularity is a good measure of effectiveness in communications and Emily is one of the most popular members of the SuperClubsPLUS community. She receives emails from 503 different community members. One hundred children list her as a close buddy (they can only chose 10 buddies each, so this is an indication of high regard).

Only 2 children have spam-blocked her emails because they found her annoying.

Emily is no angel online and her enthusiastic affiliation activity has attracted some mediator interventions for attempted...

- ◆ giving external email details
- ◆ contact details on home page
- ◆ insulting language in forums.

Research: What has Emily Learned?

Apart from her huge learning in effective communication, Emily has gained specific ICT competences celebrated on the awards bar on her home page.



Emily's site visitors will see:

- ◆ **Teacher's gold crown** award "for getting all your stars!"
- ◆ **Surveys** badge for participating in community research for DCSF and others,
- ◆ **Test-Zone** badge for testing online learning resources for the BBC.

She's also won 6 Star Awards, celebrating her ICT skills: She has these basic skills:

- ◆ **Rules Star** - understands community rules
- ◆ **White Star** - appreciates the need for internet safety, & applies community rules
- ◆ **Red Star** - creates web pages with appropriate tools & resources, with graphics, text, sound - plans tasks, finds & uses information.
- ◆ **Green Star** - safely communicates with email, attachments, spam filter and posts to forums.

Emily has developed advanced skills:

- ◆ **Blue Star** - uses multimedia on home pages - finds resources in the Media Library - creates, resizes, names, describes and uploads new images.
- ◆ **Yellow Star** - uses advanced markup coding (similar to HTML) to create, format and animate text in home pages, emails and forum posts; to enhance home page functionality and add links to other community pages.

Research: How does Emily's learning vary between home and school?

Emily uses a school computer once a week (like 37% of the sample) for 30 minutes each session (like 54%), so school access is around 20 hrs/year. She wants to...

"go on it more regular. Also i would like to spend maybe a day or afternoon on it. I would like to have a computer each so we dont have to swap."

At school Emily wishes she had more choice in what she learns. She wants to...

"choose my own work" and "do my own projects."

She wants to choose her pace of work:

"do easier things than other kids, work slower than other kids."

Emily would like to work with her teacher from home in SuperClubsPLUS (like 83%). She wants to email (like 58%) and do forums (25%) with her teacher, show the teacher her work (42%) ask for ideas (41%) and for help (40%).

Emily thinks she learns better at school (like 77%), but says she also learns well in the evenings (24%) and weekends (17%), with her parents (53%) and siblings (22%).

Like 75% of the children in the community, Emily thinks she learns better with her own home computer than she does on the school system. In contrast to her limited access to ICT at school, she spends over 300 hours a year communicating, collaborating, creating and learning in SuperClubsPLUS. She also plays computer games (like 94%) but only occasionally (29%), mostly with friends (41%) for 1 hour or less each time (45%).

She thinks that by playing games she learns: typing (like 47%), thinking (42%), using the computer (40%) and strategies (36%). She says:

"Computers Tell you Things. It gives you Clues. You can go on Education/ Websites and do Games and Work at the Same Time"

Who listens to what Emily says?

Emily took part in 6 online research surveys which invited her to advise government on her needs for personal and social learning online at home and at school.

DCSF and Becta listened and her contribution helped shape the personalized learning strategy that now underpins the Harnessing Technology programme. She took part in the *Me and my Mobile* survey and helped Intuitive Media develop the *Community in my Pocket* service.

Conclusion

Emily might be "slow" at school, but she's like a hurricane online. Her mobile connected lifestyle has changed her educational and social experience.

The combination of a mobile phone or games console PLUS a safe online learning community EQUALS a new social learning dimension.

Things have changed. Emily takes her learning home. She communicates and collaborates with a vast peer group across the UK. She has become a productive, effective and engaging publisher and communicator, sociable & popular with a very wide circle of online friends – adults and children.

Emily Sanderson has become *Emily Connected*, a member of the species *H. sapiens continuus* – **The Connected Ape!**

Our thanks to DCSF, Becta, Emily and her friends in SuperClubsPLUS and GoldStarCafe.

© Copyright 2007 Robert Hart

Author Notes

Robert Hart is Director of Research for Intuitive Media, the organisation that runs SuperClubsPLUS and GoldStarCafe.

robert.hart@intuitivemedia.com
www.intuitivemedia.com
www.superclubsplus.com
www.goldstarcafe.net

If you have enjoyed reading this issue of Sharing Good Practice sign up to receive a free weekly copy at www.ictopus.org.uk

