

From the mouths of young people into policy; how can we implement qualitative research in policy?

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Introduction

This paper summarises an ongoing research project undertaken by Reset.Tech Australia, supported by the Antigua & Barbuda Ministry for Education, into young people's perceptions of data privacy in the twin island state. The research uncovered many policy relevant findings, and engaged ICT teachers and staff at the Ministry for Education as well. This paper documents the next steps in this research process, drawing from a recent presentation at the Ministry of Education's 4th Annual Research symposium, exploring how to translate this research into real policy change. The aim is to provide a case study for implementing meaningful research, informed by young people, in the future.

Background: The Research Findings

Across 2022 and 2023, Reset.Tech Australia, supported by the Antigua & Barbuda Ministry for Education, undertook a series of workshops and conferences with young people and teachers in Antigua and Barbuda to gather their thoughts about privacy in the digital world. This research project—called *Young people and privacy in Antigua & Barbuda*—documented the fascinating perspectives and lived experiences.¹ It noted that young people in Antigua & Barbuda hold nuanced and detailed understandings about privacy in the digital world. They defined privacy in the digital world as having four key characteristics:

1. Being able to conceal personal information
2. Protects from 'others' who may want to interfere
3. Creates a comforting feeling of safety
4. Is connected to safety and security

Or in short, that young people felt that

Privacy is the use of your private information in protected and safe ways. Privacy protects and conceals information from those you don't want to see it. It sets boundaries and makes your personal life more private & comfortable.

Young people also highlighted nine broad principles for data protection that they wanted to see enhanced in their online experiences:

1. Strong data security. Young people made calls like; '*make security stronger for young people's data*' to '*keep accounts private*'.
2. More rights and control over data. Suggestions included '*give young people more choices*' to; '*right to delete data*'.
3. More transparency around data use. Suggestions included '*tell young people what you will be using their personal information for*' and '*be honest with how you use our data*'

¹Farthing, R., Smith-Nunes, G. & Camacho, K. 2023. *The Digital Future of Antigua & Barbuda: Young people's rights in the digital age*. <https://trustech4kids.github.io/files/ABReportFinal202303.pdf>

4. Data minimisation to reduce data footprints . Suggestions included *'data shouldn't be taken so often'* to *'the internet shouldn't ask about your location so often.'*
5. Preventing excessive data sharing and selling. Young people stated *'don't share my data with other apps'* or *'don't sell our data to others'.*
6. Preventing excessive or unexpected uses of data. Calls included *'do not use data for other things'* and *'data collected for ads shouldn't be collected if the data wasn't asked for'.*
7. Reasonable data retention. Suggestions included *'make a time limit for data'* and *'delete young people's data when it's not needed'.*
8. More use of young people's data for good. Asks included do *'use my data to do things that would benefit me, and let me know'* and *'protect our data for better uses'.*
9. Provide timely help and support. Suggestions included that platforms should *'respond quickly to reports and violations of guidelines'* and *'take full responsibility for something wrong and help fix it'.*

Young people described how they wanted these principles realised and listed a range of desired individualised and systemic responses. These included critical digital literacy skills (*'Primary schools need to teach the younger students about protecting themselves'*, *'Set up posters'* or *'Have talks in schools'*) and systemic change (*'Set up a campaign'* *'Talk to Government'* or *'Antigua needs more laws'*).

These findings, clearly, lay down a gauntlet for policy makers in Antigua and Barbuda, with young people wanting to see stronger protections for their data. This did not go unnoticed. The Antiguan & Barbudan Ministry of Education penned a response to the young people's workshops.² They expressed commitment to improving privacy and youthful participation in the process:

"Our youth have a place at the table of decision making as it pertains to protecting their digital footprints. Who knows and understands the consequences of their plight greater than them? Their voice must not be snubbed. ... We make an ironclad commitment to ensure that the recommendations from this conversation are realized—a data privacy climate must be built, strengthened and sustained for a safer Antigua & Barbuda, Caribbean and World."

Next Steps: Thinking through how to turn research findings into policy change

Research findings, no matter how policy relevant, don't just turn into policy change by magic. The research authors have been quietly working with the Ministry to identify where policy changes might be possible in identified changes that could be made to their *ICT in Education 2013* policy that would reinforce what the young people (and teachers) told us.

So we know the policy levers we may be able to pull, and we know the direction of the policy change we'd like to see, but how do we make it happen? Previous research into generating meaningful policy change suggests two key tools are useful for researchers in planning this process:

1. Stakeholder mapping

There are many tools and processes that can be useful for stakeholder mapping (see for example Mehrizi *et al*).³ At their core, they all boil down to the same process; identifying all the stakeholders (be they organisations, groups or individuals) who may be needed to pave the way to policy change. In this research, we have identified the following stakeholders:

- a. The Ministry of Education. The key stakeholder in this change making process is the Ministry itself. The Ministry is in charge of the *ICT in Education 2013* policy, and the subcommittees that are needed to both review proposed changes, and accept them.
- b. Teachers and schools. Even if the *ICT in Education* policy is reformed, meaningfully implementing any changes requires the support of the educators whose work will be affected.

²Farthing, R., Smith-Nunes, G. & Camacho, K. 2023. *The Digital Future of Antigua & Barbuda: Young people's rights in the digital age*. <https://trustech4kids.github.io/files/ABReportFinal202303.pdf>

³Mehrizi, M. H. R., Chasemzadeh, F., & Molas-Gallart, J. 2009. 'Stakeholder Mapping as an Assessment Framework for Policy Implementation' *Evaluation*, 15(4), 427-444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389009341731>

This is building on Lipsky's theory of 'street level bureaucracy'⁴ which notes that those on the frontline of service delivery, especially when resources are tight, often dictate much of how policy is realised.

- c. Parents and students. Policy reform takes time and effort. Policy inertia or simple resource constraints that make policy reform feel impossible. Policies only pass when there is widespread support from those who will be directly affected by it, in short, there needs to be a demand for a change to make it 'worth it'.

Implementing this small scale policy change is going to take work with these three key stakeholder groups to get any changes across the line.

2. SWOT analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis are common tools used in the business community, but are frequently used in policy development processes too.⁵ For the purposes of presentation at an online research symposium, we simplified this 'four quadrant' analysis into two, identifying barriers to policy reform and opportunities for policy reform.

Barriers identified include:

- Policy making inertia. The *ICT in Education* policy was passed in 2013. Why change it now?
- Drafting issues. Who has the time, resources or expertise to review any proposed changes?
- Implementation issues. Do schools and teachers have the support they need to implement these changes?

Opportunities identified include:

- The ability to 'engineer' moments to challenge inertia: Such as connecting with existing tech events or days like safer internet days. This speaks to a need to hold or support tech related events that can energise the call.
- The ability to connect with students, parents and teachers to promote a call for reform. This speaks to a need to work with the media (such as radio, or the Broadcasting Unit) to raise the profile of these discussions.

Next Steps: Planning to make policy change

Based on these conversations, the researchers are planning to work with the Ministry of Education on the next steps. At this stage, plans include:

- Holding a small student technology symposium towards the end of the school year, to act as a moment to both reconnect with students as well as provide some additional tech training and 'excitement' around the capacity of technology to enhance learning. This is designed to become a moment to tackle policy inertia, as well as document demand for change.
- Meeting with teachers and schools. One meeting with ICT teachers has already been held to explain the issues and build consensus about the needs for reforms. We will hold another alongside the student symposium.
- Work with the Ministry of Education. We will continue to work with the Ministry to provide advice and as much expertise as we can to advise on the policy reforms, to tackle some of the barriers to change making that exist.

⁴Lipsky, M. 2010 *Street-Level Bureaucracy, 30th Anniversary Edition: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service* Russel & Sage publishing, London

⁵See for examples: Benzaghta, M. A., Elwalda, A., Mousa, M. M., Erkan, I., & Rahman, M. 2021 'SWOT analysis applications: An integrative literature review' *Journal of Global Business Insights*, 6(1), 55-73. <https://www.doi.org/10.5038/2640-6489.6.1.1148>, and Namugenyi, C. and; Nimmagadda, S.L. & Reiners, T. 2019 'Design of a SWOT Analysis Model and its Evaluation in Diverse Digital Business Ecosystem Contexts' *Procedia Computer Science*. 159. 1145-1154. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2019.09.283>

Ultimately, any decisions about policy changes—or not—rightly rests with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, as a representative democracy. The value of this research is hopefully in identifying an issue of importance to young people and their advocates (from teachers to parents) and identifying pathways for potential policy reform. In this sense, this research could advance children’s rights to participation by supporting improvements to their privacy. As the *General Comment No. 25 (2021) on Children’s Rights in Relation to the Digital Environment* makes clear, “when developing legislation, policies, programmes, services and training on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment, States parties should involve all children, listen to their needs and give due weight to their views.”⁶ Implementing research can be one way to help achieve this.

Conclusion

There is a strong drive for policy reform to improve the data privacy of students in Antigua and Barbuda. This desire comes from students themselves, but has also been echoed by teachers and the Ministry for Education. Making the change however, requires a concerted effort involving many stakeholders to overcome existing barriers and capitalise on or create opportunities. The possibilities exist, but it takes effort to drive them across the line.

But it is worth doing. No one can tell us this more powerfully than a young person themselves. As a young person, Ajanté, wrote in a yet to be published book chapter that draws on this research to build comparative examples, put it:⁷

“Being a young person in Antigua and Barbuda in the digital age is a journey filled with excitement, resilience, and the quest for meaningful involvement. ... Digital privacy and security remain major concerns, making us vigilant about protecting our online presence. ... We dream of a future where our participation in shaping the digital landscape is not just a token gesture, but a genuine collaborative effort between generations. By fostering understanding and embracing our shared responsibility, we can create a more inclusive and secure digital future for everyone”.

⁶UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021 *General comment No. 25 (2021) on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment*.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-25-2021-childrens-rights-relation>

⁷Kasimakis, M., Meira, M., Camacho, K, Fraser, A. & Farthing, R. (forthcoming) ‘Young people’s digital experiences across Ibero-America’ in Brossi, L et al. (eds) *Handbook of Communication, Media and Digital Technologies in Iberoamerica* De Gruyter publishing house, Brasilia