

Combat cyberbullying by teaching a culture of digital civility

By [Angela Schaerer](#)

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Like the humble spreadsheet before it, the internet is one of the most transformative technologies in history. However, like any piece of technology, the internet can be used for bad as well as good, with some of the online dangers being hackers, online predators, and internet bullies.



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In fact, South Africa is one of the worst countries when it comes to the level of civility across various online interactions. Microsoft recently conducted research among adults and teenagers in 14 countries and South Africa ranked in 14th place in the Digital Civility Index, making it the country with the highest online risk exposure and lowest degree of Digital Civility out of all the nations surveyed including Australia, Germany, India, France, the UK and US.

Microsoft is challenging people around the world to embrace “digital civility” through the Digital Civility pledge, which formed part of the recent Safer Internet Day (7 February). Through this pledge, the company hopes to inspire and encourage people to treat each other with respect and dignity online. Amongst other avenues being used in support of this pledge are educational approaches that focus on social and emotional learning and help develop empathy, as well as prepare youth for success in the 21st century.

Teaching civility along with calculus

Furthermore, because we live in a digital culture, citizenship skills that encompass a child’s full life must be a priority. This will be achieved through lessons about life online that are integrated into traditional scholastic curricula including social studies, health and language arts classes.

In addition, the effectiveness of this program can be boosted by way of investment in after-school programmes, so all family members can learn and model safe, healthy skills and competencies and become responsible, respectful and informed citizens of the world.

In South Africa, the non-profit organisation [Bridge2Africa](#), is one of the companies aiming to do this locally. The organisation runs intervention programs that address issues like cyberbullying by tapping into the power of the latest technologies, in order to reach out to diverse demographics within vulnerable communities.

Building a bridge to better civility

[Bridge2Africa](#) runs a mobile communication and intervention toolkit called the Cyber Project, which is an ICT-based model to promote the safe learning space. As part of this initiative, Bridge2Africa manages a high profile coalition of academia, corporate and basic education members within Tshwane South and North, Gauteng North as well as Johannesburg East Districts. The intervention curriculum addresses cyber safety, security, ethics, digital citizenship and cyber bullying.

The three dimensional programme also focuses on learners (Grade 1 to 12), educators and parents or guardians through cyber workshops for educators, learners in schools as well as Bridge2Africa Cyber Camps and Cyber Leadership Conferences.

Additionally, there is also a programme called the Smart Kids Initiative which is aimed at gap year students and Bridge2Africa's intervention model also caters for University students with much emphasis on Cyber safety and Security and tackles the cyber challenges faced by millennials.

Currently, Bridge2Africa has reached more than 300 schools and the company is moving into the direction of the digitalisation of its intervention model. This move will assist the company by enabling it to live stream its presentations, facilitate video conferencing and online programmes, which will provide Bridge2Africa with more leverage to reach about 26,000 schools in an hour.

Through partnerships such as these, civil society and the business community will be able to educate the next generation and enable them to become more civil while online or offline, and ultimately help make the larger South African society a more civil one.

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