

Gaggle

The Safe LMS

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INTRODUCTION TO GAGGLE

Distance education is one of the fastest growing forms of education today (Rivero, 2011). As our culture moves faster, we must learn how to keep pace. There are various modes in which distance education can be driven; learning management systems (LMS), course management systems, and virtual learning environments. The goal of each system is to emphasize communication and collaboration between the teacher and the student (McIntosh, 2012). A relatively new LMS is Gaggle. This article will focus on the history of Gaggle, the exclusive

safety components that Gaggle possesses, and student' opinion of Gaggle.

WHAT IS GAGGLE?

Gaggle was founded by Jeff Patterson, an entrepreneur in the field of education and technology (Gaggle About Us, n.d.). Patterson believed that e-mail was a great tool for communicating with his colleagues. He also believed that students could benefit. As a result, Gaggle was launched in 1999 and its main focus was student e-mail communication; since then Gaggle has grown to offer so much more (Gaggle Students/Parents, n.d.). Gaggle's main focus is offering safety within the K-12 market. Today, Gaggle is headquartered in Bloomington, Illinois, and provides various student communication tools to more than 15,000 schools in over 57 countries (Gaggle Students/Parents, n.d.). The Gaggle LMS includes several useful tools—from e-mail and shared calendars to drop boxes and online editing documents (Gaggle Students/Parents, n.d.). "Gaggle" is the name for a group of geese. According to Patterson, "Our goal was to give teachers an easy way to watch over their gaggle of students, hence the name Gaggle" (Gaggle About Us, n.d.).

GAGGLE AND SAFETY

The many benefits of the Internet are well known; however, the Internet can pose dangers as well. There are three major areas where young Internet users can be exposed to danger: exposure to illegal or



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harmful material, receiving unsolicited messages, and being lured into a physical encounter (O'Reilly & O'Neill, 2008). Gaggle provides measures that protect its users from all of these dangers. Gaggle recognizes that the 21st century student will need to use the Internet and that limiting Internet use and functions can be detrimental to student learning (Gaggle Safety, n.d.). All the student activities in Gaggle pass through several Internet security measures as described in Table 1.

GAGGLE'S HUMAN MONITORING SERVICE

Since July 1, 2012, Gaggle has enhanced its online communication and productivity tools through the Human Monitoring Service (HMS) (Heykamp, 2011). HMS is an

invaluable tool that helps to monitor all communication between students. A teacher who has to monitor a class of 25 students understands the difficulty of monitoring the communication between all of the students in the class. It is much more cumbersome to monitor the communication between 6 classes of 25 students. It is important that the monitoring of student accounts is done on a consistent and frequent basis (Gaggle Safety, n.d.). Gaggle's HMS allows this type of monitoring to be done. The HMS assigns a Gaggle employee to a set of student accounts. This employee is responsible for the monitoring of the assigned student accounts, relieving the teacher of both the pressure and responsibility. The school district is also informed of any possible violations that students may do by sending questionable messages. In

Table 1. Student Filtering

Internet Danger	Internet Security Measure	Function
- Exposure to illegal or harmful material - Receiving unsolicited messages - Being lured into a physical encounter	Blocked words	Gaggle filters e-mail messages and attachments, as well as postings to blogs, message boards, chat rooms, and other activities for inappropriate language, including profanity, drug references, sexual references, and potential threats to student safety. Lists are frequently updated to stay current on the constantly evolving slang and text-speak being used by youth today.
- Exposure to illegal or harmful material - Being lured into a physical encounter	Anti-Pornography Scanner (APS)	Content of images are analyzed and appropriate images are can distinguish between inappropriate images. The antipornography scanner has been engineered with total safety in mind. It decompresses and analyzes zip files, inspects embedded images, and even scans linked pictures and URL addresses in e-mail messages, attachments, blog entries, and other Gaggle activities.
Receiving unsolicited messages	Blocked domains and addresses	Teachers and administrators can control with whom students can communicate. Student accounts can be restricted to e-mail within their class, school, or district as a group or individually, or set to allow or restrict e-mail to and from specific e-mail addresses or domains.
- Exposure to illegal or harmful material - Receiving unsolicited messages	Blocked attachments	Attachments are filtered through the blocked words list and the antipornography scanner, as well as scanned for viruses.

cases of student safety concerns, like suicide threats or violence, Gaggle immediately contacts the designated school or district contact (Gaggle Safety, n.d.). The HMS became active on July 1, 2012 (Gaggle, n.d.).

GAGGLE AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

The Hillsborough County (Florida) school district is now piloting this system at Robinson High School. The digital design class at Robinson High School has 24 students. One of the major problems encountered by the instructor, Ms. Nelson, was having her students save updates to their digital files. The main issue was that students had a documents folder with only 250 MB of storage space. Because they needed more space, Nelson inquired about storage. The school district recommended Gaggle. To receive a student perspective concerning the use of Gaggle, five students from Nelson's class were asked the following five questions:

1. What is Gaggle to you?
2. Is Gaggle User friendly?
3. How would you compare Gaggle to other LMS?
4. Do you like Gaggle?
5. How do your parents view Gaggle?

In response to question one, all the students said "Gaggle is a file storage system." None of the students mentioned the robust options of the Gaggle suite, such as e-mail communication and texting. It is possible that these operations are being achieved through other programs. In response to question two, all students agreed that Gaggle is user-friendly and has a very familiar interface. Concerning question three, most students did not have experience with any other LMS, so they could not make a comparison. In response to question four, the students agreed that they generally like Gaggle. Concerning the

parental impression of Gaggle, only one student's parent was familiar with Gaggle and actually used it to view and monitor the child's assignments.

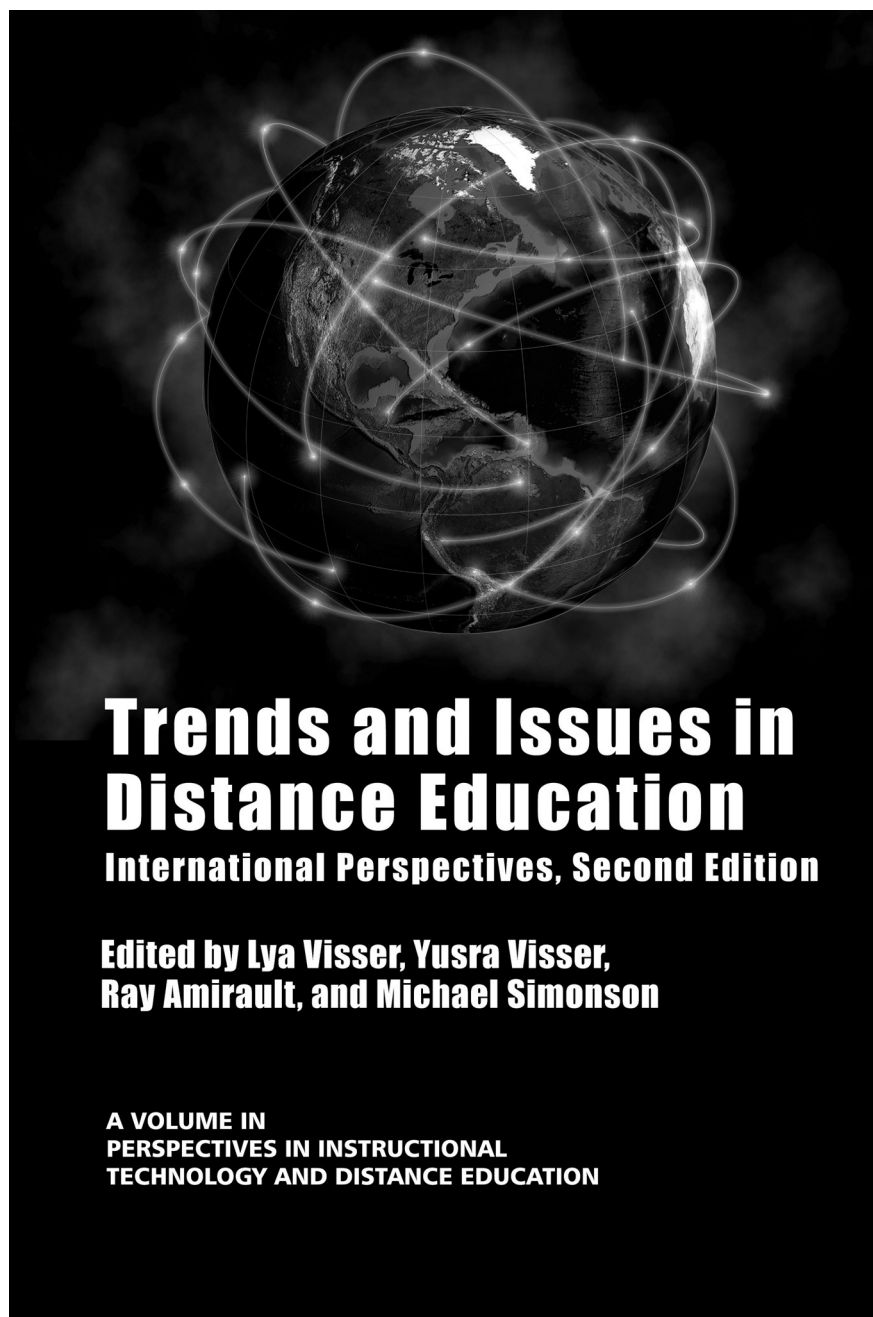
GAGGLE FOR THE FUTURE

Gaggle recently announced its new instant messaging tool. This tool will allow users to instantly chat with each other and incorporate Gaggle's state of the art safety features. The instant messaging tool is compatible with third-party systems such as Google Talk. Gaggle plans to expand the instant messaging tool to support other programs such as Facebook and Yahoo (Heykamp, 2011). Gaggle has also recently partnered with Microsoft Office to add security to their existing Live@edu and Office 365 services (Heykamp, 2012). Patterson, Gaggle's founder, said, "Gaggle is on the frontline protecting students against cyberbullying, offensive content and many other harmful situations. The safety we provide goes far beyond the Internet and in fact increases real world student health and well-being. It's only natural that we would want to extend our safety umbrella" (Heykamp, 2012).

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