

Digital Citizenship: Think before you ACT

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Digital Citizenship is defined as “the norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use” (Ribble, 2015, p. 38) and Heick defines it as “the quality of habits, actions, and consumption patterns that impact the ecology of digital content and communities” (2018). It’s important as an educator to help our students become good citizens in the world and on the internet especially since technology is a part of everyday life. Teachers should teach digital citizenship along-side and within the curriculum and not just in a reactive situation but as a proactive activity before problems arise when incorporating technology into the classroom.

Nine Elements of Digital Citizenship

Ribble (2015) looked at Digital Citizenship and divided it into nine elements to make it easier to understand how expansive it is. These elements are digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security. He further categorizes them by how they impact the classroom; student learning and academic performance, school environment and student behavior, and student life outside the school environment. Within the categories they are classified by three principles; respect yourself and others, educate yourself and others, and protect yourself and others.

The school environment and student behavior category contain digital etiquette, digital security, and digital rights and responsibilities. Digital etiquette is essentially treating others as you would like to be treated in the electronic world and part of the respecting yourself and others principle. Digital security is the process of keeping your information safe when navigating the internet and part of the protecting yourself and others principle along with digital rights and responsibility. Digital rights and responsibilities are defined as “the requirements and freedom

extended to everyone in a digital world” (Ribble, 2015, p. 46). These elements are also important for students while using technology and should be covered before students begin to use the internet in a solo setting.

Student life outside the school environment covers digital commerce, digital law, and digital health and wellness. Respecting yourself and others includes digital law where students are aware of the legal ramifications of their actions. Educating yourself and others encompasses digital commerce where students learn how to shop online in a responsible way. Protecting yourself and others covers digital health and wellness which is using technology in an ergonomically way to avoid injuries along with knowing to limit the amount of time you spend on devices to avoid addictions. Since these are used in the classroom the least yet equally important, they must also be taught and modeled in the classroom

Elements for Elementary Schools

Together, the nine elements encompass digital citizenship and broken down into bite-sized pieces to make it easier to teach. Digital security, digital health and wellness, and digital etiquette are foundational components to begin educating elementary students in digital citizenship. Once these three elements have been established, educators can begin working on digital literacy, digital communication, and digital access as they work towards middle school.

Digital Security

Since elementary students are just beginning their online adventures, it is vital that they learn to protect themselves and their devices when navigating the internet. Teaching them how to protect their identity while online by not using their last name, phone number, or address is the first step. Next, students need to know to never share their passwords or login information with anyone other than their parent or teacher. From experience, students tend to forget to log out of

their websites and devices at the elementary level so this must be reinforced and practiced until it becomes second nature.

Digital Health and Wellness

Digital health and wellness covers using technology responsibly to avoid injuries such as carpal tunnel and other repetitive stress syndromes and avoiding addictions to technology.

Addiction to video games and electronic devices is a very real problem in China and on the rise in America ("Digital addiction: This is your brain online", n.d.). Students need to learn to balance their digital lives with their real lives. Many teenagers do not see a difference between their digital lives and their non-digital lives, which can make logging off a struggle. Teaching elementary students to limit their device use is the first step to healthy technology use.

Digital Etiquette

Digital etiquette goes beyond being kind to others, it includes using technology at appropriate times and not using it when it would be considered rude. Many adults use their phones when driving, at the movies, or even at funerals. Everyone needs to learn to respect people online and in real life to know how to behave online and how to avoid being rude to others by having loud phone conversations at inappropriate times.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 11). Willful means they meant to do it and it wasn’t an accident or unintentional. Repeated refers to a pattern that develops over time and harm can even include perceived hurt, which allows for emotional and social injury. All these portions are included in regular bullying, therefore the only difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying is the use of an electronic device for delivery.

Adolescent and preadolescent students are most likely to experience cyberbullying in their lives. Willard (as cited in Siegle, 2010) identified eight forms of cyberbullying as flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking. Flaming is online fights with vulgar language, denigration is spreading rumors to damage someone's reputation. Impersonation is when the bully takes on the persona of the one they want to bully and they post/send inappropriate things on their behalf. Outing someone is sharing their private thoughts in a public way. Trickery is how personal information is gained through pretending to be their friend or someone else. Exclusion is purposefully and maliciously not including someone, and cyberstalking is repeated harassment that can include threats meant to incite fear (p. 15).

Some of the consequences of cyberbullying are emotional, psychological, academic, and behavioral. Eating disorders, chronic illness, running away, feeling lonely and insecure, difficulty making friends, and poor relationships are some of the emotional and psychological consequences of bullying. In order to avoid the bullies in school, a student may avoid school and lash out through violence, shoplifting, drug use, and vandalism. Some signs of avoidance of cyberbullying are not using their devices or quickly turning it off when a parent comes in the room (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Students need to be taught the steps of reporting cyberbullying, keep evidence of each occurrence in a log and save screenshots, report the bullying online to the host site that the bullying occurred on, and tell a trusted adult. The trusted adult should never tell children to just stay off their devices, they should investigate the matter since bullying victims are two to nine times more likely to consider suicide (Dosomething.org, n.d.). Adults that work with children should be aware of the harsh reality that students do commit suicide because of cyberbullying.

Think Before You ACT

A mantra with an acronym can help students to learn to be a good digital citizen. Using one such as “Think before you ACT” where people ask themselves if their online behavior is Accurate, Compassionate, and Thoughtful. Accurate covers their words, the site they are using, and the proper use of the device. Compassionate encompasses how they interact with others and accessibility of technology use. Thoughtful use of a device in a healthy manner and not distracting others leads to good digital citizenship.

Conclusion

Learning to respect, educate, and protect yourself and others when online or using technology is the all main takeaway of digital citizenship that all people need to learn. Children learn best when adults model the behaviors they want children to emulate. With proper guidance, today’s youth can learn to be the best digital citizens they can and make a difference in the world.

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