Digital Citizenship Reflection Essay

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Nicholas Negroponte states “Computing is not about computers anymore. It is about living.” (Negroponte, 2014). He explained that computers were initially for mathematical computations and not for regular use by people. Technology has become a way of life. We use it for education, entertainment, and to make our lives easier. Embracing this technology would mean that we can spend more time experiencing life. As educators our students have been allowed access to technology daily in addition to their personal devices. As long as they are our students we must educate them hone how to safely use them and how to conduct themselves in a digital community. The privilege of access to technology and use in the classroom means that they must be educated about being a citizen in this digital community. My mantra for what I have learned about digital citizenship is: With technology comes responsibility to educate yourself. My definition of Digital citizenship is: An education in the appropriate use and responsibilities of technology in digital communities.

To educate students on digital citizenship, I focused on showing teachers in a presentation about the 9 elements, what they are, examples of each, how recommendations on how to remedy issues. Also, I chose to break down the elements into 3 categories: Respect, Educate, and Protect Yourself and Others. In introduced the presentation with the Nicholas Negroponte quote and what it means to educate ourselves and students about the challenges with technology. I introduced my mantra and definition and then discussed how technology and education to show the importance of digital citizenship.

**The 9 Elements: Techology and Education**

**Introduction.** Our students are using technology in our classes and with this comes issues we as educators must be aware of. Digital citizenship is the field in which we handle responsibilities while using technology. According to Ribble (2015), citizens of a country, like ours, have a responsibility along with rights. Like citizenship, people in a digital community- especially in education- have the responsibility to not abuse digital tools by violating copyright laws, bullying others, and sharing inappropriate information (Ribble, 2015, p.7). Both are concepts that are designed to protect the communities belonging to them. The presentation is broken down into 3 categories and each describes different element of digital citizenship: Respect Yourself and others (Etiquette, Access, and Law), Educate Yourself and others (Rights and Responsibilities, Security, Health and Wellness), and Respect Yourself and Others (Etiquette, Access, and Law). While using technology, respect has to do with how our students are conducting themselves while being mindful of the law when using the devices that they have access to. Our students have gained access to rented devices. They will have these devices until the end of the year and will be able to use them at any time they please.

R**espect Yourself and others**

**Digital etiquette.** When using technology, students must be aware of others. For example, in the classroom using technology to check text messages or conduct research outside of their assignments, then this is considered poor etiquette. Teaching students how to be courteous and effectively use their tools in their studies, will make the environment conducive to learning. We must ask “Are students being considerate of others and are they conducting themselves appropriately while using technology?” Solution to this problem include conducting a discussion of what is considered good etiquette and display them in the room. Also, creating visible cues for when phones are allowed or not (Ribble, p.39).

**Digital access.** This element is referring to whether students can participate at any level if they choose to. Not every student has access to technology, even though devices were offered. During virtual learning not all students had a device. Most of them were working off their phones. We must consider that our students our sharing a device with others. It is unfair to make students accountable for using technology they may not have. Some recommendations to gain better access are through surveys, access for students with disabilities, and ensuring distribution are effective (Ribble, p.24). For example, providing a survey that asks if students have devices, internet, electricity and be mindful of the demographics will help the teacher assess the conditions and create an action plan. To make sure all students have a device, it helps to encourage students to obtain their devices from the district. Students with disabilities are often overlooked. Providing equitable access for students with disabilities means helping those students understand the functions on the programs or devices that will accommodate their needs. An example of ideal access is when students who did not have access to technology were given paper packets by mail until they were able to acquire full use of their devices. Teachers take time to ensure student log in information works, as well as getting their Google drives running.

**Digital law.** This element involves topics such as sexting and copyright. It questions whether students are following laws and are they aware the rules and laws that protect their community while using technology. When students have rights to use technology, there will be laws to protect them. It is easy to share files or use information from sources on the internet, but students do not always understand if it is allowed or if they need to give credit to creator.

Sexting is when students share explicit media to others. Explicit materials shared of students under the age of 16 is considered child pornography and anyone in possession of it can be arrested. A recommendation to help avoid this behavior is to show a video of students whose lives were affected by sexting and create a discussion on how this could be prevented. Encourage students to report when others are sharing explicit media. Have students research the laws and consequences for breaking them.

Copyrighted laws protect the author. Examples of copyright law violations are when students download music or other media that should be purchased through file sharing. According to Baily (2013), copyright infringement is to break with the terms of the law that protects the actual owner of the copyright, who is the creator. Plagiarism is when a person takes someone else's work and presents it as their own (Bailey, 2013). Attribution is like giving credit for copyrighted work. Not giving attribution to a person's content, can be both plagiarism and copyright infringement. To determine if plagiarism or copyright infringement has taken place, the owner of the content must be determined.

Recommendations to avoid violations of copyright laws, teach students how to determine if the use of the work is fair use one must consider the purpose, the nature, the around, and the effect on the market (McCord, 2014). Students should be taught to site their sources and to be aware of what content is copyrighted and what is not. Create a lesson where students list the ways students have shared or downloaded copyrighted material. Have the students research the law and consequences for violating this. Inform students that these materials should be purchased.

The benefits of abiding by copyright laws forces us protect the author's work and forces us to think critically, enhancing learning in the process. For example, if students are asked to apply what they learned from 2 sources to provide an explanation for how photosynthesis is taking place in a plant they planted in an experiment, then they will decide how to use it and decide how to cite it.

**Educate Yourself and Others**

The elements involved are Digital Literacy, Communication, and Commerce. Our students may not be completely computer literate. Computer literacy includes being able to understand all the computer's functions (I.e. firewalls, privacy settings, and updates). Education in technology requires knowledge about the device and software, knowing what appropriate communication looks like, and how to safely make online purchases.

**Digital literacy.** This element questions whether our students learning how to use technology. Sometimes devices and apps are introduced to our students with the assumption that they know how to use them. We must dedicate enough time to become familiar with our tools to utilize them effectively, as well as showing students how to evaluate online resources. At times, resources and websites are not secure. Recommendations to help increase literacy is to provide lessons that allow students to determine the accuracy of the resources and providing safe online examples and teaching students about search engines and the dangers of phishing (Ribble, p.35).

**Digital communication.** Digital communication is about students exchanging information through cell phones, email, and social media in a safe and responsible manner. Our students always have technology in their possession. If they are not using their computers, they have cell phones. They are communicating and sharing information through social media, blogs, chat groups, messengers, etc. We must make them aware of how much information they may be releasing to the public, as well as how not to behave when communicating with others. Our job as educators is to make our expectations clear about when and how communication is allowed during class time. Recommendations to helping educate on issues of digital age communication is to research lessons and the technology before-hand and troubleshoot the capabilities students have. For example, if using Zoom, explore the settings before having a session. Disable private chatting to avoid inappropriate communication. Make norms clear and state what is appropriate and inappropriate use of digital communication. An example of a situation of when technology is allowed is when students are using devices to research, collaborate, and create projects. An example of how students are not allowed to use devices and technology would be when students use technology to not only make fun of others in private digital conversations and are not on task by browsing for personal entertainment.

Communicating regularly though social media, may involve sharing information or pictures. They were not considering that their future employers may one day see their posts. This sharing of information while communicating leaves a trail of evidence on the internet called a digital footprint/tattoo Digital footprints/tattoos can be positive or negative and/or intentional or unintentional (Still, 2020). Students may share photos of themselves at a party or acting silly but may cost them employment opportunities. They can be deleted, but no one will never know if it has been saved or shared. The difference between an intentional and an unintentional digital footprint/ tattoo is that intentional digital footprints are made by posting information you want others to see while unintentional digital footprints are made in the process of innocently using the internet. Often unintentional digital footprints are made when people log in to active accounts, make purchases, or do not select private settings. According to the Family Online Safety Institute (2020), we should check in with our students about their use and participation in social media.

[The Digital Reputation Checklist](https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/digital-reputation-checklist/) suggests that we do the following:

* Type your name in different kinds of search engines and look through videos, images, etc.
* Remove posts and tags that are not suitable.
* Look over your friends list and see who follows you. Block or unfollow people you no longer speak to.
* Change your privacy settings to private.
* Take time before you post and question the impact it may have on your life in the future.
* Keep your posts and social interactions positive and not so personal (FOSI, 2020).

**Digital commerce.** Are your students purchasing and selling goods? Are they aware of how to protect themselves? In class, students are not necessarily making purchases or selling items, but they do need to be *educated* on protecting their information from being stolen. Students are more likely to make in-app purchases for entertainment. Purchases should not be permitted in class. Instead, they should be made under the supervision of their parents. Since the 2000s shopping online began to boom. All you needed was a credit card to make online purchases. Youth ages 8-24 spend $400 billion online. To prevent online theft, educate we must our students to carefully research reputable sources or venders and determine if they are safe and secure. Students can protect themselves by checking out the webpage security, watch out for email scams, use a VPN, using a strong password, and watching out for email scams (Ribble, p.28-29).

**Protect Yourself and Others**

The category involves Rights and Responsibilities, Health and Wellness, and Security to demonstrate that students have rights and with that come responsibilities, as said in my mantra.

**Digital rights and responsibilities.** This element is about students being aware of their rights while using technology and protecting them. Students must be aware of what they can do and what responsibilities they have when using technology. We must teach our students to understand rules with using technology (Ribble, p.46).

Cyberbullying is running rampant in schools. An example of a case that resulted in tragedy was the case of Ryan Halligan. He was a student who suffered from three types of cyberbullying that led to his suicide. It was preventable and shows the need for an education on cyberbullying. The types of cyberbullying in this case study are rumor spreading, information spreading, and impersonation. This was preventable event. There are 49 states that have anti-laws now that require school districts to have anti-bullying policies that can criminalize students for bullying. It is now required that districts create internet safety, ethics, and etiquette training and curriculum (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 132). Because of this tragedy, his father helped pass a law mandating suicide prevention education (Halligan, 2020). Also, there is more awareness about how empathy negates attacks like this.

There are different forms of cyberbullying and the nature in which they occur. They include rumor spreading, flaming, posting pictures and videos, commenting and messaging, impersonations, tagging and untagging others, and cyberstalking. According to *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying by* Hinduja & Patchin, bullying, in general, is defined as when someone says or does something intentionally hurtful and they continue to do so after being told to stop. They don't stop even though the person is visibly upset (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 8). Similarly cyberbullying includes the willful, repeated, harm against a person using computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. Everyone and anyone can be affected by cyberbullying. If there is a medium and malicious intent, it can happen to anyone.

The college freshmen and high school juniors examined cyberbullying and redefined citizenship in the 21st century in the iCitizens Project. They concluded that teaching empathy was the most effective way to prevent bullying. A participant from the project stated “An iCitizen sees every person as a human first...be a person who has dignity for themselves and the world” (Curan, 2015, pg. 10). Standing up to bullies and reject disrespect daily will build a culture that reflects the beliefs of a digital citizen. Bullies will no longer have power over the communities of iCitizens. Curran’s (2012) iCitizens Project participants defined an iCitizen as a person who is “aware, empathetic, and socially responsible; they believe in social justice and model socially responsibility both face-to-face and virtually”. He added that this citizen should be involved and connected to the world (Curran, 2015, p. 16). The iCitizenship project provided the basis for the implication that “Empathy must be modeled and taught early and often” (Curran, 2015, p. 16). Empathy is difficult to teach in the classroom setting but can be done.

Recommendations for preventing cyberbullying is infusing information into the student mindset about cyberbullying and creating awareness can be done directly through educators and parents. The issues should be embedded in curriculum. Some schools have practiced digital citizenship, but only the for one day at the beginning of the year and never again. It is the responsibility of the district to allow educators to build awareness in the student population, especially if the students are provided with a district device. To build awareness daily, a newsletter can be made for students with articles and stories, student can be expose to issues in homeroom classes with discussions and activities as embedded curriculum. I believe that our students can easily become bullies if there is no accountability or social connection with each other. Brewer and Kerslake concluded that a people who had low self-esteem were more likely to commit cyberbullying. Therefore, embedding cyberbullying issues into curriculum can involve helping build self-esteem (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). Through the involvement of educators and parents through constant infusion of the issues, cyberbullying will not show it's face in schools. It helps to students feel comfortable to come forth with information about cyberbullies if teachers post hotlines and help in the classroom.

**Digital security.** Are student safely protecting their information and protecting other people's data? Putting locks on our personal items and properties should also be considered for our information online (Ribble, p.52). Students must be knowledgeable of computer viruses, phishing, or compromising cloud drives. Solutions to this problem would be showing students how to enable firewalls, recognizing phishing scams and encrypting their personal information.

**Digital health and wellness.** This element is is about students using technology in healthy ways, physically and psychologically? Are they aware of the risks? Students can be affected by technology. Whether it is by spending too much time on their devices and being addicted or by being physiologically affected by the posture the student is holding while using the device (Ribble, p.49). During virtual or distance learning, one can feel the effects of sitting at a computer and staring into the blank screen. Students should be taught how to manage time on the device or state healthy span of time for utilizing technology.

* Some recommendations for safe and healthy practices are:
* Post suggestions for ideal amounts of time spend on the computer.
* Discuss and suggest ways to keep a good posture and how to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome.
* Have mental check-ins.
* Set clear expectations of not allowing students to inappropriate material.
* Set restrictions, if possible, with software or programs that allow monitoring.

**Reflection on Culminating Project**

Upon creating my presentation, I came across a few challenges or obstacles. My obstacles were the organization of the presentation, the specific topics I was going to include, and determining who my audience was. I struggled with the overall organization of my presentation because I wasn’t sure how to answer all the components on the rubric and include with fluidity. I knew there were 9 elements to address and the rubric was asking for specific parts of the 9 elements. I decided to group them by the categories Respect, Educate, and Protect. I would include copyright, cyberbullying, and cybersecurity into the categories to ensure I was following the rubric. These categories seemed very cohesive. Not only did I want to include these important topics, but I wanted to include some recommendations. Determining the audience to whom I am creating this for is always a struggle. It seems unnatural to write it for teachers without providing a description of my audience. For example, will it be understood that I am creating this for teachers as if I am in charge of a digital citizenship program for the district or school and that I am just giving an initial overview of what digital citizenship?

The things that went wrong in this project was creating links, uploading the presentation as an html, and collecting all the information that we had compiled throughout the course. It was an investigation upon investigations. My links were not working, and my slide deck was not entirely visible. I had to adjust the size through the html several times.

What I would do differently would be to have organized my coursework so that it was easier to look though. With so many links, sources, assignments, journals, and discussions, this was a tedious task. I would also have considered narrating my presentation and turning it into a video because it would be easier to grade. It could also be something informational to place on my ePortfolio.

This was a reflective process because I was required to put all the elements together and look at all the lessons and materials from the course. I was able to see that my ideas, mantra, and definition of digital citizenship had changed at one point or another. I could also see that that the lessons were carefully scaffolded to help build my knowledge base to create a culminating project. I think as an educator, I will use this experience to help me build courses and scaffold in a similar fashion.

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