A New Citizenship for a New World

A Reflective Essay

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Abstract

Citizens of the digital age have gained an abundance of technologies that provide them access to the Internet. Through this access citizens have the ability to obtain a virtually unlimited amount of information, to synthesize their original thoughts with that information, and to create new digital information and spread it via the Internet. This paper acknowledges the need for education of today's youth on responsible digital citizenship. This need will carried out by educators and parents and will determine the future use of the digital world.

A New Citizenship for a New World

The digital revolution guarantees human participation in two universes, each of which directly affect the other. In a survey of 40 diverse countries across the globe, 67% of people can admit that they connect to the internet regularly or own a smartphone (Poushter, 2016). This global community of digital citizens demands a set of guidelines to promote fair and equitable use of the digital world. Digital citizenship provides the framework for digital citizens to ensure that the positive aspects of technology are emphasized in an effort to provide an even playing field for all digital citizens to play and work on (Ribble, 2016). Educators will work alongside parents and guardians to inform our youths on how to create and maintain positive digital footprints and to provide opportunities for those youths to practice creating and maintaining positive digital footprints. The online experience has the potential to be an empowering and educating force, and it also has the potential to be a demeaning and undermining force. Promotion of the nine elements of digital citizenship secures our digital world's future as a positive community used for the betterment of humanity.

Whether it be connecting to the internet via a personal computer or a smartphone, 92% of teens admit that they are accessing the internet daily (Lenhart, 2015). These teens consciously or unconsciously are leaving a trail of digital footprints as they sprint through the digital world accessing a plethora of digital content. Digital citizens use various platforms of social media to create and consume digital content: 90% of ages 18-29, 77% of ages 30-49, 51% of ages 50-64, and 35% of ages 65+ use some type of social networking site (Perrin, 2015). The digital footprint that is left behind by every digital citizen regardless of age will be used to analyze and evaluate that citizen's digital character. Educators and students alike must understand that creation of a digital footprint is inevitable once access is gained and that the footprint developed has the

potential to be seen in a positive or negative light depending on the circumstances of who is viewing the footprint and content of the footprint.

Knowing how your digital footprint affects others becomes a vital understanding when posting original pictures on a social media site and when posting content that was found somewhere else in the digital community. Plagiarism and copyright infringement overlap each other on more than a few concepts; however, there are also some distinct differences that separate the two (Bailey, 2013). Educators and students that rearrange, borrow, and synthesize digital content are prone to becoming plagiarists and copyright infringers. The consequences of being labeled as either of these two negative surnames vary but all guarantee a black mark on your digital footprint. Knowledge and responsible use of resources such as Creative Commons and OER Commons offers an extensive amount of sharable material. However, proper practice demands that proper attribution be given when using digital content that is not originally developed. The practice of attribution and citation guarantees that information accessed through digital tools remains credible and valid. The nine elements of digital citizenship provide the structure that maintains a credible and valid digital community.

The past days of relying on professional journalism to convey professionally developed news afforded citizens the faith to trust the limited sources providing them information, but present days demand that information consumers determine whether information is valid on their own (Ribble, 2016). (Ribble) continues that digital citizens who consume and create digital content must learn and abide by the elements of digital citizenship to ensure content is identified and used correctly when developing and maintaining a digital footprint. He identifies nine elements of digital citizenship that define digital citizenship as the status quo for proper and responsible behavior when engaging within the digital community. Furthermore, (Ribble)

acknowledges that it is the responsibility of every digital citizen to provide every other digital

citizen the opportunity to engage in the digital community without suffering from "interference,

destruction, or obstruction" stemming from inappropriate use. (Ribble)'s nine 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. Due

technology's nature to constantly evolve and adapt, it becomes unfair to assume that all digital

citizens understand the guidelines for appropriate use; therefore, it is the responsibility of school

systems and the citizens employed by the school systems to instill appropriate use practices

within today's youths (Ribble, 2016).

Digital citizens that gain access and use access without knowledge of the nine elements

of digital citizenship become candidates that develop negative digital footprints through practices

such as plagiarism, copyright infringement, and cyberbullying. Educators must inform students

on the nine elements and provide opportunities to practice positive digital citizenship through the

nine elements to avoid a negative online culture within the school and the digital community.

Students that view educators displaying proper practices such as citing sources and attributing

content properly are more likely to use those responsible practices when engaging in the online

community. Students that have online discussions monitored through the use of a LMS

discussion board or learning ePortfolio are more likely to engage in responsible digital practices

and responsible digital communication. Modeled responsible behavior is becoming increasingly

more important due to statistics such as 47% of teenagers reporting digital abuse (Siegle, 2010).

Cyberbullying, while comparable to traditional bullying, provides teens a new battleground in

which ideas and self-expression are constantly challenged.

Cyberbullying is defined as the use of the Internet and various digital technologies to engage in cruel and harmful social aggression towards others (Siegle, 2010). (Siegle) lists the eight types of cyberbullying as flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking. While (Siegle) outlines a variety of practices for educators to prevent cyberbullying, the most vital four practices are establishing that the rules that govern acceptable behavior in the real world also apply to the online world, educating the youth on proper and appropriate online behavior, modeling proper and appropriate online behavior, and monitoring students' online behavior. As responsible digital citizens, parents and educators alike must comprehend the potential positive and negative uses of technologies that students will engage in and then assist those students to properly and responsibly implement those technologies in their lives (Siegle, 2010). Alongside cyberbullying, the practice of sexting has become apparent within teen culture, 24% of 14-17-year-olds admitting to be involved in a various type of "sexting," and when certain digital tools are used sexting may take the form of child pornography (Siegle, 2010).

According to *Prevalence and Characteristics of Youth Sexting: A National Study*, there are three dimensions of "sexting:" youths that appear in or create images versus youths that receive images, youths that receive images whether or not the youth appears in the image, and the sexual explicitness of the image (Mitchell, 2012). While (Mitchell) concludes that collected data determines that sending and receiving sexually explicit material is not the status quo for teenagers, occurrence of sexting within the youth culture demands that educators and parents inform the youth on the legal consequences of sexting and how to responsibly act if a sexual image is received. (Mitchell) also notes that knowledge of the practice of sexting is imperative for educators and parents alike; however, that knowledge must come from credible and valid

sources. Indicators of youth sexual behavior are down, despite what certain media outlets say about the "hypersexualization" of today's youth (Mitchell, 2010). Therefore, the responsibility of parents and educators remains in properly informing and monitoring youth behavior in the real world and the online world (Mitchell, 2010).

The digital community will continue to grow as technologies advance and evolve. Increases in citizenship demand a more efficient education of responsible digital citizenship. The digital community that desires to use its tools and capabilities to spread information to better humanity must promote and abide by the nine elements of digital citizenship. Positive digital citizenship guarantees a positive digital footprint, and when each citizen aims to replicate positive digital footprints, the online community will achieve the goal of creating an equitable and fair platform for every citizen to develop and spread ideas throughout the entire community. Educators and parents that acknowledge the obligation to instill positive digital citizenship within the youth culture become the primary drivers of the digital community's achievements.

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