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Moving Beyond One Size Fits All With Digital Citizenship

Essay by Matt Levinson, Deb Socia, June 11, 2010

(About this Essay)

I. Introduction

Parents, teachers, and policy makers have not yet come to consensus regarding the tools, rules, and/or expectations in the implementation of on-line safety curricula. Those of us committed to implementing fully integrated 21st century classrooms are left in a bit of a quandary regarding what to teach, when to teach it, and whose responsibility it is to ensure it is taught. This lack of cohesion regarding the potential message and sender hinders schools that are pro-actively trying to improve the appropriate and successful use of technology as a powerful learning tool.

Schools have significantly different needs and ideas regarding on-line safety, much of it dependent upon their experience and comfort on the spectrum of users of digital media to promote student success. It is necessary for schools and communities to work together to demystify the potential uses and abuses of digital media within and outside the school setting. Understanding the potential for cyberbullying, sexting, or other inappropriate consumption and planning for responsible reactions to such is a priority for the community that wishes to harness the potential of the tools while also keeping children safe.

It was once true that after the school day ended at 3:30, schools rarely, if ever, had any response to behaviors that occurred. However, now, everyone – policy makers, educators, and parents – needs to understand that education is 24/7 and any approach taken to mitigate and/or ultimately improve digital learning with students needs to start from that basic understanding of time and space. Efforts to empower must be community, parent and school-based. Because there is not currently a clear policy regarding on-line safety curricula, schools must proactively work with all constituents.

With the shift away from the monolithic standardization of No Child Left Behind, there is now an opportunity to think about more customized approaches for communities regarding digital learning. The recently released National Educational Technology Plan, “Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology,” signals the changes afoot in policy circles. The report, according to Education Week, “emphasizes the importance of leveraging technology to customize learning for each student, citing tactics such as mobile computing and online coursetaking.”

In this climate of need for policy and the lack of availability of such policy, schools are left to be the initiators and implementers of internally developed policy. This creates a wide range in the types of interventions, in the infractions addressed, and in the responses to behaviors that are deemed inappropriate. As one might expect, the resulting district and school level policies are inconsistently written and implemented within and across communities. Any attempt to develop standardized approaches for schools, regarding digital citizenship curriculum and online safety, needs to account for the sea of change in outlook among policy makers and the needs and interests of individual schools and communities. One size does not fit all.

There exist at least 5 stages of development for schools regarding digital learning, and any

programmatic approach to teaching digital citizenship needs to account for the varying levels at which school communities stand.

II. School Stages

Stage 1 School

This is the school that wants to keep technology outside of the doors of the school. These schools want to keep school as it is and has been for the last 100 years. Interestingly, law schools are embroiled in a culture clash with students over appropriate use of laptops during class time. The distraction of laptops proved to be too much for students to handle, in Georgetown University Professor David Cole's mind, so he chose to banish the instrument. This is one approach to take, but it does nothing more than put a band-aid on a much larger, deeply ingrained problem with learning environments: the teacher. With laptops, the teacher cannot stand in front of the classroom and use the sage on the stage model. It is like teaching to a roomful of students with their backs turned to the teacher. Screens are up, and students sink too easily into the abyss of the Internet, checking email, Facebook, or playing a social game. Teaching needs to change. Old pedagogical methods run counter to the potential interactive learning environment that can be built with mobile devices, from phones to laptops. It does take courage to change; it does not take courage to ban.

Siva Vaidhyanathan, an associate professor of media studies and law at U-Va., comments in The Washington Post: "The question 'Laptop or not?' isn't as big a question as the question of a screen or not," he said. "And, sitting in front of 200 students, I can't really enforce a ban on anything." Daniel de Vise, a staff writer for the Washington Post writes in the same article: “In an era of iPhones and BlackBerrys, Internet-ready cellphones have become just as prevalent in classrooms as laptops, and equally capable of distraction. If professors had hoped to hermetically seal their teaching space by banning laptops, they might be about three years too late.”

CNN reported that Principal Anthony Orsini sent an e-mail to the Benjamin Franklin Middle School community in Ridgewood, New Jersey, calling for parents to pull the plug on Facebook and online profiles. Mr. Orsini wrote:

"There is absolutely no reason for any middle school student to be a part of a social networking site! Let me repeat that - there is absolutely, positively no reason for any middle school student to be a part of a social networking site! It is time for every single member of the [school] Community to take a stand! They are simply not psychologically ready for the damage that one mean person online can cause.”

Clearly, Mr. Orsini is frustrated with online transgressions and how these mis-steps play out in school hallways. It is disruptive to the learning environment to have Facebook comments slip into school days. He is not wrong in his assessment of the developmental stage of middle schoolers, but absent a comprehensive community based program to educate students, teachers, and parents, it makes sense for him to take the stand that he chose to take. What he does not quite grasp yet is that Facebook is not going away; if anything, it is aging down, to as young as 5th and 6th graders using the social networking site. With the FCC unable and unwilling to establish any age verification software, the last bastion of identification lies with parents. For parents to enter into this minefield, they need to know they are not alone and they need to be armed with relevant, developmentally appropriate strategies to intervene. The game of “keep it out” may have a short-term effect on students at Benjamin Franklin Middle School, but it is unlikely to hold sway over time.

In Roswell, Georgia, a high school has opened the doors of learning to iPods and MP3 players. Their principal, Edward Spurka, states in Education Week: “Five years ago iPods were banned,

but we got overwhelmed with trying to discipline kids and fight the technology. Our philosophy here now is let them have it, ... so we've allowed all those resources out in the world to be on their person." Becky Chambers, who manages the AP program for the Georgia Department of Education, captures the positive change in outlook so needed in schools trying to come to terms with digital learning. In the same Education Week article, she explains: "Oftentimes, kids have technology but they don't use it for substantive work, only social media or for pleasure such as listening to music. They don't recognize the power of these devices to improve knowledge and skills." The shift is not an easy one and circles back to the need for pedagogy to grow more line with digital tools. Elizabeth Webb, the Georgia director of innovative academic programs shares: "We've been struggling to move teacher instruction away from some of the more traditional approaches to formats that are more engaging for students."

Schools that keep trying to ban laptops and digital tools are running up against a giant glacier that is impossible to scale. Stage 1 is fast heading into the dustbin. Online safety curricula, steeped in fear-based approaches that attempt to shield students from the tremors of the Internet, only serve to drive a deeper wedge between children and adults. The Berkman Center's response to the FCC report captures the shortcomings of current approaches to teaching online safety: "the approach most take is adult-centered, dependent on the fears of adults rather than the realities of kids." Law professors like David Cole, and many school districts and communities fall into this same trap with Stage 1 thinking. The vision to engage with students to help solve problems that arise with technology as a vehicle will be difficult to realize with decisions to ban technology in learning settings.

Keeping technology outside of the school doors, and creating different islands of responsibility, from parents, to educators, to kids will do little to stem incidents of cyberbullying, sexting, and other online transgressions that play out offline. The landscape has changed in schools and Stage 1 schools need to make concerted, swift efforts to foster community-based programs that include and work with parents, educators, and students. The recent tragedy involving the suicide of Phoebe Prince as a result of repeated bullying both online and offline only underscores the need for schools to embrace and systematize education efforts, across grade levels, beginning in elementary school and moving all the way through twelfth grade. Much has been made in the media whether the school bears responsibility for not having a comprehensive education program and whether school officials acted with due diligence in responding to reports of the bullying of Phoebe Prince. In a letter to the New York Times, Karen Schulte O'Neill, who serves on the executive board of the New Jersey School Counselor Association, notes that "social media make it easy for bullies to enlist large, often anonymous groups to carry out relentless attacks with messages and compromising photos of the victim. Adults have been removed from the equation. We are not here to intervene." Adults need to be there to not only intervene when hurtful incidents occur, but also to nurture and communicate with students and parents from early ages through high school.

Stage 2 School

This is the school that opens the door to technology, but does so with the Cyber Safety/Police approach, and focuses on fear and concern, over opportunity for deep learning. Schools bring in cyber safety experts to talk with students about safe use of the Internet, with an eye toward being mindful of predators. There are a wide number of cyber safety programs that grow out of local police departments and are well-intentioned, but these programs too often rely on a one-size fits all approach to educating students. Programs like Internet Child Safety, run by Officer Steve DeWarns, introduce students to the perils of predatory behavior on the Internet. These types of programs give students a road map for how to create safe space on the Internet, and what to do in the event of unusual encounters in chat or online game rooms. In addition, students gain an understanding of what to do in the event of cyberbullying – whom to contact, what actions to take, and when to go to an adult for help. Bringing these programs into school communities signal to students that the school cares about student safety and well-being, and

even opens the door to students seeking contact with school officials or their parents, when unsafe situations arise. However, these programs let adult fears drive program development, instead allowing the “realities of kids” to serve as the focal point of development.

In addition, when problems arise, such as sexting or cyberbullying incidents, schools approach the problem in a top-down manner, with the school principal issuing harsh directives and threats to students to clean up their act in school. This makes a statement to students and clarifies the school’s position that it will not tolerate such behaviors, but does little to lead to enduring understanding or behavioral changes in students. One educator, who works in a school with a top-down directive approach when online transgressions occur, comments on the shortcomings of this approach. After a sexting incident had enveloped his high school, the school principal brought the students together and issued a stern warning, but there was no follow up with curriculum or work in small groups of students and parents. He writes: “that's the problem -- there wasn't enough follow up. There was informal discussion in advisory groups, but what we don't have (and need) is a program that works with kids and parents specifically on these issues. We have a bunch of stuff, but it's not coordinated at all -- it's really hit-or-miss and more reactive than pro-active.”

At a Bethesda, Maryland middle school, a student rented his iPod so that students could see photos of naked middle school and high school girls. The school’s response was to write a letter to the community, careful to point out that the posing for the photos took place outside of school. In a letter to the community, Pyle Middle School Principal Michael Zarchin wrote: “There is no indication that school computers were used to view, send, or receive the inappropriate materials.” Further along in the same letter Mr. Zarchin encouraged parents to talk about cyber safety at home and attached a link to a cyber safety site. While the school made attempts to educate parents and students about Internet safety through assemblies, parent seminars, roundtable discussions, and classroom lessons, the focus did not account for the 24/7 nature of digital life and the blending of home and school environments. As a result, the school now finds itself staring like a deer in headlights at national media, reporting on the outrageous behaviors of middle school students with technology.

Stage 3 School

This is the school that uses technology more widely, but keeps parent/student issues outside of the school doors. In other words, if something happens after 3:30 it is the parents' problem.

Stage 4 School

This is a one to one laptop school, but the laptops do not go home at the end of the day. A Stage 4 School espouses the belief that at home issues stay at home and the school does not deal with them.

The boundaries between home and school are clearly demarcated, but this does not mesh with the reality of digital life for kids. Kids have a blended sense of time and space with digital life. The notion that there are two separate spaces, one at home and one at school, no longer exists in the minds of digital kids. For schools, the choice to keep parents at bay and foist problem-solving exclusively on the backs of parents does nothing to serve the needs of kids. The argument that the transgression did not take place at school and the school should therefore not get involved is erroneous. The reality is that transgressions off campus, but online, play out each and every day in school communities. Teachers and students have to confront these problems and tensions and if administrators and parents ignore this reality, little progress will be made toward educating students in digital citizenship. In Australia, twenty high school students were suspended for “bullying a staff member on Facebook.” The Australian Prime Minister got involved and demanded a full investigation and is also considering appointing an ombudsman to deal with such incidents. In an article in Education Week, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said: "The

role of cyber crime and Internet bullying on children is frankly frightening and we need to be deploying all practical measures." It is good to know that the highest levels of the Australian government want to address cyberbullying, but where are the parents and the schools?

It is important to educate parents to know where their school community stands on digital media and how issues are handled.

It is critical to engage parents in a dialogue regarding digital media and how concerns that arise are handled. Parents and schools have optimal opportunities to “teach in the moment” and to support clear and consistently upheld standards of behavior when using digital media. Communities, schools and parents, working together in partnership, can and should co-create standards and expectations. In addition, this partnership should explore and exploit those positive uses and opportunities presented when digital media is used appropriately as a social and/or academic portal.

All too often, conversations are focused on fear. Parents need to know about all of the “cool” stuff kids and teachers are doing together. Unfortunately, the bulk of material out there, whether it is reports by the FCC or Frontline films like Digital Nation, get trapped in a mindset of safety concerns, and attempts at positive messaging get quickly lost because of these concerns.

Stage 5 School

This is a one to one laptop school, and the laptops do go home, or alternatively, where schools have one to one laptops that do not go home but where the school assists parents in obtaining hardware and access at home, ensuring learning can occur both at school and at home. In stage 5 schools, the school views the home as central to the learning process and involves the parents fully in creating norms for use. Additionally, the school engages with the families in problem-solving regarding problematic incidents that occur outside of school. One must hope that all schools are on a trajectory to ensure they are ultimately in this stage, and sooner is better than later given how limited one’s education is without a fully engaged technology integration opportunity.

In Stage 5, the school learns of inappropriate student activity on Facebook and immediately enlists the parents and teachers in problem-solving. In one incident at the Nueva School, we received the following email from a parent:

“Our son sent me the enclosed message string [the message string included harassing, inappropriate, sexually explicit language] last night. We were up half the night trying to figure out who this is and worrying that it is a pedophile harassing our son (it is not). My husband logged onto Facebook and discovered 10 friends of "Lloyd Wasp," all Nueva kids. Whoever this child is, this is seriously inappropriate and scared our son badly. He slept with several improvised "weapons" last night. My husband and I also think it is very very serious and disturbing. We had planned to contact the police this morning, again, thinking it might be a pedophile, but will place this first in your hands, as it is clearly one of our son’s classmates.”

We were prepared to handle this situation and thankful that the parents did not call the police. The situation brought up the worst fears of parents – contact with a pedophile and cyberbullying. They were desperate for help and genuinely concerned about their son’s well-being. Instead of responding to them with “it’s your problem. It occurred outside of school,” we worked closely with the family to get to the source of the problem. Ultimately, we were able to identify the student posting the inappropriate messages, through the name of the student’s Gmail account identification posted on the Facebook page as the student had posted messages to teachers with his Gmail account. When we informed the student’s parents, we learned that the parents did not even know their son had a Facebook page. Fortunately, these parents were appreciative of the school’s involvement.

In a follow up conversation in a Social and Emotional Learning class, the teacher discussed the use of Facebook among students. The teacher learned that many 6th grade students had Facebook pages. She contacted the parents of the students who shared that they had Facebook pages, because she was worried that parents might not know that their child had a page. Facebook has a requirement that users are age 13 and older, and the teacher was concerned also that parents might not know this restriction. The response from parents surprised the teacher. She writes: “Interestingly, a few parents emailed me back that they know and are ok with it and have an understanding. Wow.”

This is challenging work for schools and parents, especially when there exists a range of parenting styles, from those parents who restrict Facebook or other social networking use, to those parents who welcome the opportunity to educate their children at such a young age, despite the age restrictions imposed by networks like Facebook.

Also important to note is the need to support teachers’ understanding of what is appropriate in terms of Facebook and other social media sites. In our school, we found that a student had “friended” a teacher and a parent was concerned and brought this to our attention. Upon investigation, we discovered that the teacher had a separate Facebook account that he used only for his “teacher” role. His use was entirely appropriate, but it resulted in a lengthy conversation about the use of social media amongst the adults in our building, and resulted in our creation of a set of expectations regarding adult use.

Beyond handling situations that arise, the Stage 5 school also develops proactive parent and community education programs. At Nueva, we offer a Laptop Parent Education Workshop. The goal is to share tools to help parents help their kids manage time and content on their laptops. Several approaches to monitoring and filtering are presented, in addition to a discussion of specific parenting strategies to help foster a healthy home environment around technology. The Social and Emotional Learning teachers survey students ahead of time and share student points of view on technology use, both the challenges and opportunities, and the role of parents.

At the Frederick, parents come to school with their children in the evening and on weekends for a total of 27 hours of training. The program, Technology Goes Home, is supported by Boston’s Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and was developed to assist parents in understanding both the tool and the uses of technology. We train parents in a variety of uses that support their families. For example, we teach parents how to access student grades and attendance, how to access a variety of web-based learning tools, and how to use the tool to apply for jobs, to seek information on financial literacy, and to help them find available resources in addition to assisting them to understand and identify the potential concerns that may arise. At the end of the training, parents may purchase very reduced cost netbook ($50) for home use.

Of course, one of the challenges with the Stage 5 approach is when the home/school lines are blurred, and schools go too far with their involvement or investigation of student online activity. Lower Merion School District in Pennsylvania made this mistake and is bearing the brunt of parental outcry and public excoriation for its decision to use monitoring software to investigate student online activity at home. In the Lower Merion case, a student at Harriton High and his parents, “claim the school remotely spied on their son at home through a webcam on a laptop the school had given him,” according to CBS News. The family has filed a federal lawsuit. According to the family, the assistant principal at the school told the student that the student was “engaged in improper behavior at home and claimed the school had the webcam photo to prove it. “

One can only wonder whether there exist parent education programs at the school to inform parents of the ways in which the school attempts to safeguard student online activity. Strong partnerships between parents and schools go a long way toward ameliorating tensions when

problems arise with student online behaviors. In the Lower Merion case, however, school officials are now restricted from communication with parents and students about the laptop camera controversy. All lines of communication have been shattered and the goal of partnership between parents and school has dissolved. Any communication about the controversy has to go through lawyers. The case underscores the need for intelligent, community-based education programs for parents, schools, and students. In Education Week, Michael L. Levy, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, captures the meaning of this case for schools and communities: "The issues raised by these allegations are wide-ranging and involve the meeting of the new world of cyberspace with that of physical space."

The key question emerging is how to balance issues of privacy with notions of personally responsible citizenship, on the part of schools, parents, and students. Karen Cator, the director of the office of educational technology for the U.S. Department of Education, sounds the clarion call for school communities regarding digital learning. In an article in Education Week, she states: "We have to get way more kids over a higher bar and to do that, we really have to be looking at innovations and the kinds of things that will allow us to do that. Learning is at the center of the whole plan. Technology allows us to create more engaging and compelling learning opportunities for students and allows us to personalize the learning experience."

III. Program Development and Vision – Different Understandings of Citizenship

To get students "over a higher bar" school communities need to think carefully about digital citizenship programs that ask more of students, in terms of their understanding and practice of citizenship. Joel Westheimer from the University of Ottawa and Joseph Kahne from Mills College map three definitions of citizenship for schools to consider: (1) The personally responsible citizen, (2) the participatory citizen, and (3) the justice-oriented citizen. The personally responsible citizen

acts responsibly in his/her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, obeying laws, and staying out of debt. The personally responsible citizen contributes to food or clothing drives when asked and volunteers to help those less fortunate whether in soup kitchen or a senior center. Programs that seek to develop personally responsible citizens hope to build character and personal responsibility by emphasizing honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work.

Where the personally responsible citizen "would contribute cans of food for the homeless, the participatory citizen might organize the food drive." Advocates of participatory citizenship "emphasize preparing students to engage in collective, community-based efforts." Justice-oriented citizen programs "prepare students to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices."

Policy makers need to take these three models of citizenship and apply them to digital citizenship, to create customized programs for school communities. In the same way that there are different stages of schools regarding digital learning, there are varying stages of digital citizenship for students, depending on the type of school they attend, and the readiness of the school to embrace opportunities for digital citizenship education. The problem with the current standards on digital citizenship, from the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE) is that they are too heavily focused on teaching the personally responsible citizen, and they do very little to promote educating the participatory or justice oriented citizen. Current digital citizenship programs under development, like Common Sense Media's digital citizenship curriculum, stay below the "bar" and focus disproportionately on personally responsible citizenship.

Personally responsible citizenship is the baseline behavior expected in schools. In other words, it is the basic expectation of washing hands after using the bathroom. We do not reward students

for washing their hands; we expect it to happen. This part of a digital citizenship program could be where the concept of a digital passport is introduced and students pass through a series of entry points and receive stamps for completion of certain digital competencies, such as understanding of passwords, the legal issues surrounding software and file-sharing, email ethics around cyberbullying and privacy.

Participatory citizenship begins to move toward building collaborative communities with Web 2.0 tools. For example, the use of Twitter, Ning, or other social networking tools can enhance teaching and learning, invite student voice and authorship, and open students to local, national, and even global communities. This part of the program development should focus on the use of various tools, such as Comic Life, Pages, Mind Map, iMovie, and web-based applications like Twitter, Ning, Facebook, MySpace, Kerpoof, Bitstrips, Jing, and YouTube. This could also be where students participate in an online social game like Farmville to learn about collaboration, decision-making, and building community.

Justice oriented citizenship raises the bar even higher, and challenges students to devise solutions to problems in communities. Instead of merely participating or commenting on issues or problems, the justice-oriented citizen, using digital tools, helps to fix a problem, or improve the quality of life in a community. For example, the story of Alan Wells and the development of the Eco-Finder Application for the iPhone illustrates a justice-oriented citizen, working in partnership with government to provide a need for a community:

To help the City of San Francisco reach its aggressive recycling goals, Haku Wale has launched the City of San Francisco’s first iPhone app that uses data from the popular web-based EcoFinder tool. [...]

Until now, the EcoFinder information was only available as a web tool on SFEnvironment.org, but Alan Wells, founder of Haku Wale, saw potential to increase the accessibility of that information. Wells explained, "Bringing the EcoFinder information to an anytime, anywhere platform like the iPhone will make it easier for local residents to recycle and dispose of their waste properly."

To develop the EcoFinder iPhone app, Wells partnered with development firm Nextive, whose expertise was critical to making the EcoFinder iPhone app a reality. To help get the word out about the Ecofinder iPhone Application, Wells also partnered with AdMob, the largest mobile advertising network. [...]

The release of the EcoFinder iPhone app also signals the coming of Government 2.0 – what Wikipedia describes as “an attempt to provide more effective processes for government service delivery to individuals and businesses” using the advantages of Web 2.0 technologies. By providing an XML data feed of EcoFinder information developed by Tech Provider, SF Environment has embraced the open data philosophy of today’s world wide web. Mayor Gavin Newsom has been pushing for this kind of change in San Francisco. After announcing a new application that allows residents to contact the City´s 311 Call Center through the social network Twitter, Newsom commented that "We are changing the way cities connect with their government."

Another example of authentic student created content to support community engagement and access occurred at the Frederick in whose neighborhood the Mayor had started a pilot free wireless project. The project developers were in need of data about the level of connectivity of the network throughout the neighborhood, a costly project. The students, using web-based tools, took on the task. They walked the entire area, stopping at every intersection, creating a video to explain where they were and the level of connectivity. They then created a Google map and pinpointed each intersection and uploaded their videos. Their work was presented to the City of Boston's Mayor Menino and CIO Bill Oates and to his cabinet. The work was real, the students learned an amazing amount, and the city was able to use the information to improve the quality

of the network.

In Northern New Jersey, 18 year-old Michelle Ryan Lauto sounded the clarion call for public protest of state budget cuts in education on Facebook. Her message inspired 18,000 students to accept her Facebook invitation, and many walked out of classes to join hands in protest of the budget cuts. In the New York Times, Michelle Ryan Lauto explains her hopes for future students: “All I did was make a Facebook page. Anyone who has an opinion could do that and have their opinion heard. I would love to see kids in high school step up and start their own protests and change things in their own way.” This is a fine example of how to capitalize on the power of social networking to display justice-oriented citizenship.

Not all of our students can or should be expected to develop an iPhone application or to create and present authentic data to their city's government. However, they can be enlisted to think of problems that need solutions and then formulate action plans where technology is harnessed to improve community life. The beauty of the App economy is the democratization of knowledge and the push for more opportunities for justice-oriented citizens to take charge of a problem.

The flip side of this story is that applications for the iPhone have swelled beyond control and content management, in terms of what is appropriate and related to sorting and aggregating knowledge, is raising the importance of being a smart, savvy, and safe consumer. For example, when students explore the App Store and click on the top free apps under Entertainment, they might find "Beautiful Boobs: Sexy Girls Hot Sex Magic" and "Big Boob Girls" in the top 25 list. Surely, these apps are not out to solve an environmental or governmental problem, but they do signal the need for educating students in how to navigate, discern, and avoid perilous content. Similarly, the proliferation of violent content, in the form of Apps dealing with guns and shooting, offers another set of challenges. The notoriously violent Call of Duty stands at the head of the Top Grossing applications. iTunes has yet to figure out a rating system or solution to better filter content around age appropriateness and schools need to get out in front of educating students about the sea of materials in the app store and beyond.

One of the challenges of parenting and being an educator is how to redirect a child's energy away from the "wrong" thing to do. “Just saying no” does not cut the mustard with kids. Parents need to be diligent and observant, questioning, seeking information, and sharing of celebrations and concerns with regard to content as it will lead to much more acceptable outcomes.

The recently released report by the Federal Trade Commission on mapping virtual worlds sounds the alarm system for parents and educators and does very little to mitigate fear. The FTC press release about the report, "urges operators of virtual worlds to take a number of steps to keep explicit content away from children and teens, and recommends that parents familiarize themselves with the virtual worlds their kids visit." Yes, parents need to know and be vigilant about the sites their kids visit. However, the FTC report findings are a classic case of the outsiders looking in. Instead, policy makers, educators, and parents need to take the time to talk with kids, listen to their voices, and develop appropriate vehicles for education to happen.

One savvy technology educator has done just this. In a podcasting class, he asked students to create podcast reviews of some area of interest. Topics ranged from restaurant and movie reviews to reviews of violent video games. His initial response to one student who really wanted to review violent video games was to say no. The student resisted, pushed back, and challenged the teacher, who grew defensive at first. However, upon further consideration and reflection, the teacher shifted the focus of the exercise and asked the student to analyze and compare multiple violent video games and explain to the viewer why these games are appealing to teens. This particular student had gotten into trouble with the school many times for playing video games on his laptop in classes. However, this project, once the terms of the assignment were agreed upon, galvanized this student to spend hours researching and preparing his podcast, and to successfully redirect his prolific energy about gaming into a productive learning endeavor.

The final product was astounding in its depth of understanding and analysis. The student situates the viewer into the eyes of a player of a First Person Shooter virtual video game, and narrates the journey through the experience. Careful not to espouse violence in real life, the student smartly explains the allure of playing a video game, while at the same time, he underscores the distinction between the virtual and the real. Instead of shutting this student down, the teacher found a way to engage in a dialogue with the student to turn what could have been a fruitless learning exercise into one that met the student's interest level and challenged the student to be thoughtful and analytical about FPS games.

The relevance of this type of experience for a digital citizenship curriculum is profound. The learning experience requires the use of an application (garage band to create a podcast), demands critical analysis and ethical decision-making, and invites the student into pausing, reflecting, and considering audience and message regarding a violent video game. The student is creating media, contributing knowledge, and informing his community. He is acting as a participatory citizen.

In thinking about the design of digital citizenship programs, there needs to be clear articulation and definition of citizenship and Westheimer's paradigm mentioned above could serve as the framework for an innovative, comprehensive, and transformative digital citizenship programs for schools.

IV. Program Details and Approaches for Teaching Online Safety and Digital Citizenship

Here is the scenario, starting as early as 4th grade. A 4th grader comes home from school excited about a new web-based application his school introduced. The program, Destiny Quest, enables students to write, share, and review books for their grade level. He pulls up the screen and proudly shows his parents his list of friends and a review that he had written. The parents wonder if the school has discussed use agreements with the students and if someone at the school is responsible for overseeing the students' postings.

Sure enough, the next day the student returns home from school to report that two students had written inappropriate reviews. He genuinely could not believe that some of his classmates would do that. The student shares with his parents that the school will now read all of the postings and carefully monitor student activity. Where the day before, he was brimming with enthusiasm about the possibilities of the new application, he now is confused and uncertain about the participatory culture the school is trying to create for students.

This is the perfect learning moment for the school and the community. The possibility for collaboration, through peer to peer sharing of books, and the chance for students to get their feet wet with social networking, needs to be matched with communication and education for parents so that the home environment could support the school setting to accomplish the same learning goals for kids. School no longer ends at 3:30 and in the words of one school administrator, "there is no longer such a thing as a day school." Parents and schools need to partner to ensure meaningful learning with technology and foster a seamless transition from the end of the school day to the home.

The school described above is now back on its heels, reacting to student transgressions, instead of positively guiding students and parents through how to leverage the power of a web-based application to build community.

What could the school have done differently?

First, review appropriate use agreements with the students, anticipate potential problems that

might arise, and arm the students with strategies to overcome potential obstacles or concerns. Have students create the norms for use and develop consequences if there is a violation of the norms.

Second, communicate the goals of using the new tool to parents. Hold a parent meeting to introduce the application. Have students and parents come together to use the application, with students showing parents how to use the application.

Third, provide ongoing communication and support for students and families.

These three simple steps would go a long way toward helping students and parents maintain a positive outlook toward technology in schools, and create community around collaboration opportunities for students and parents. Parents and schools need to work together to help students stand in possibility with technology.

As part of a more customized program, there should be a real problem, growing out of the challenges in each community. The problem could be like the one described above, or it could run deeper into graver instances of cyberbullying or sexting, depending on the age group.

In this type of customized program, there are 4 elements:

• A problem
• A lesson
• Media creation
• Community follow-up and communication

The virtue of this approach is that it enlists all constituents in discussion of problems and consideration of solutions, and opens communication between home and school.

In developing and fine-tuning programs, there needs to be a gathering of problems related to each lesson. Interviewing school administrators and parents will yield a wealth of material to draw upon to create this component of the curriculum. In discussions with schools, the challenge is where the line exists between home and school, and many schools choose to keep home computer issues separate from school computer issues. This is the problem at the moment with digital citizenship education. There needs to be an inextricable link between home and school so students receive a clear, consistent message about digital life, and also so that students know that home and school are on the same page in terms of setting boundaries around appropriate use of computers.

There is a need to move away from “one size fits all” to a more customized community-based approach to meet the needs and interests of individual communities to educate students, teachers, and parents on digital citizenship. There are several phases that communities could embrace.

First would be the discovery phase, in which program leaders meet with key stakeholders – students, teachers, administrators, and parents. This might involve a one to two day series of focus groups.

Second, program leaders take the information gathered and develop a curricular action plan, pulling relevant materials from digital citizenship curricula, but customizing the materials to maximize learning for the community. In addition, program leaders would bring together parent education. Program leaders would then write up a full report with recommendations, timelines, and sequencing of the use of materials.

Third, program leaders would come into the school to run lessons with students (with teachers

and administrators observing), and then hold a parent education evening. The ultimate goal is to equip the school or school district to be able to then take the materials and use them on a more comprehensive scale.

Fourth, program leaders would provide ongoing support and guidance for each school it works with. This could involve helping schools solve problems related to computer use or misuse, by figuring out how to successfully bring together students, parents, and teachers and administrators. It could also include guidance on how to implement certain curricular pieces.

Fifth, program leaders should consider designing and hosting a teacher and administrator institute over the summer, to be followed by one-day institutes over the course of the school year.

One of the greatest challenges for schools is to figure out a vision for how to seize upon digital tools to enhance teaching and learning, in addition to coming to terms with the school culture issues that accompany a comprehensive transition to digital learning. Customized program development can help schools articulate a clear vision, based upon the needs and interests of each school community it works with. Creating in-house student and staff "experts" regarding appropriate use would make information immediately available and easily accessible.

There is no one size fits all for working with schools and designing curriculum that meets the needs and interests of each community. That is why the focus on grade level specificity is less critical than careful attention to the definition and evolution of citizenship concepts as outlined by Westheimer. The curriculum sequence could move through those three understandings of citizenship and each community will be at different places in their evolution. Models and notions of citizenship serve the purpose of anchoring digital citizenship program development.

One educator asks the key question about digital life: “When does the responsibility of a school end and the parents begin?” Another educator frames the dilemma of digital life for schools and parents: “Parents have no idea what rules to apply -- and how to apply them -- at home when their child is doing homework and multitasking with technology. Schools are part of the problem because they assign so much that is driven by technology. So they have to be part of the solution to help parents deal with their kids and the distractions caused by technology.”

However, the linchpin for success rests with kids, and school communities need to engage with kids and families online to foster digital citizenship.

About the Authors

Matt Levinson is the assistant head of school and head of the middle school at the Nueva School. He is the author of the book, *From Fear to Facebook: One School's Journey*, to be published by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) in August 2010. In addition, Matt has been published in The New York Times, The San Francisco Chronicle, Education Week, Teacher Magazine, and Learning and Leading with Technology Magazine. He has also edited and reviewed digital citizenship curricula for Common Sense Media, a national, non-profit based in San Francisco. In 2007, Matt led the launch of the Nueva School's 1 to 1 Laptop Program and has developed student, teacher, and parent education programs focused on enhancing teaching and learning with technology. Prior to coming to Nueva, Matt taught middle and upper school history at Princeton Day School in Princeton, New Jersey, where he also served as an upper school dean of students, and middle school history department chair. He has an M.A. in Social Studies Education from Teachers College, Columbia University and received his B.A. in history from Haverford College.

Deb Socia is the founding principal of the Lilla G. Frederick Middle School, a Boston Public School in the Grove Hall Neighborhood. She has led the one-to-one laptop initiative at the Frederick,

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About this Essay

This essay was written for the Risky Behaviors and Online Safety track of the Youth and Media Policy Working Group Initiative. The Initiative is part of Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. The Initiative is exploring policy issues that fall within three substantive clusters that emerge from youth's information and communications technology (ICT) practices:

• Risky Behaviors and Online Safety
• Privacy, Publicity and Reputation
• Youth Created Content and Information Quality

The Initiative is funded by the MacArthur Foundation and is co-directed by danah boyd, Urs Gasser, and John Palfrey. The goal of the Initiative is to engage practitioners and make policy recommendations that are grounded in and connected to research findings. For more information: http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/digitalnatives/policy

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