

21st Century Teaching and Learning

Digital Citizenship and Digital Literacy

What Research Tells Us...

WHY ARE DIGITAL LITERACY AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT?

"In a world that is constantly changing, Ontario students will be better prepared to adapt, achieve and excel, regardless of the challenges they face". ([Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario, 2014](#)). In a technology-driven knowledge society and globalized world, preparing our students for success involves a focus on important skills and attributes such as digital literacy and citizenship.

The digital domain is changing how students both interact with, and respond to, the world. Technological innovations afford new opportunities for learning in and out of school and to connect learning communities around the world. Technology, including social media, is a way of life for young people that we can no longer ignore if schools are to remain relevant to our students. The innovations that make it easier to connect people, information and digital resources from across the globe also call for new knowledge, skills and social behaviours to ensure these powerful tools are used in responsible and ethical ways.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

The front matter of the Ontario curriculum policy documents addresses the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It highlights the importance of using ICT to support and communicate learning, but also cautions educators: "Although the internet is a powerful learning tool, there are potential risks attached to its use. All students must be made aware of issues related to Internet privacy, safety, and responsible use..." (The Ontario Curriculum, Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, 2013). As well, in the Ministry's resource, [Paying Attention to Literacy K-12, \(2013\)](#), the need to pay attention to adolescents and digital literacies is expressed in this quote by S. Kajder, "Traditional conceptions of print-based literacy do not apprehend the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices in people's lives enabled by new technologies that both magnify and simplify access to and creation of multimodal texts." [Kajder, S. (2010). *Adolescents and digital literacies: Learning alongside our students*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English Publications (NCTE).]

Closely linked with being digitally literate is the necessity to help students develop the skills of safe, responsible digital citizenship. Students need an understanding of human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology, and practice legal and ethical behaviour. We need to help our students to learn how to ensure that the 'digital footprint' they leave behind serves to reinforce positive relationships and helps them to be aware of how they can make the world a better place.

"This dynamic new world requires new comprehension and communication skills – as well as new codes of conduct – to ensure that these powerful media and technologies are used responsibly and ethically. Much of the interaction in this digital world happens at a distance, which can diminish kids' perception of cause and effect, action and consequence." ([Digital Literacy and Citizenship in the 21st Century. Common Sense Media. 2011](#)).

There are many definitions of digital citizenship, but at the core of each is the idea of students being citizens who belong to a community, and therefore the contributions they make to this community are productive, positive and responsible. The Ontario Curriculum, Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, 2013 presents a citizenship framework and describes four main elements of citizenship education – active participation, identity, attributes, and structures which reflect many of the aspects addressed in digital citizenship.

"Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills, and demonstrate good citizenship." [Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario, 2014](#)

PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES

Evidence from the 21st Century Innovation Research projects shows that district school boards are working to ensure that students are digitally literate and that local policies and codes of conduct promote respectful, responsible communication, safe, inclusive and accepting learning environments, and approaches to citizenship that take account of the digital domain. The following are just a few of the board initiatives aimed at developing positive digital citizens:

[Waterloo Region DSB](#) is ensuring that discussion pertaining to digital citizenship is part of regular planning sessions, meetings and ongoing digital life regarding technology use. They recently developed a "Responsible Use Procedure" (RUP), replacing the Acceptable Use Guidelines. The procedure outlines the responsibilities pertaining to digital citizenship, and makes connections between incidents that violate the procedure and the off-line equivalent. This procedure, which aligns with the district's Character Education initiative, can be found at: <http://www.wrdsb.ca/rup>

[Durham DSB](#) has designed a Digital Citizenship Boot Camp that introduces students in grades 5 to 8 to six modules (School and Board Policy, Internet Safety, Digital Law, Scenarios,

Netiquette, and Cyberbullying) of digital citizenship. After completing the modules, students receive their “Digital Citizenship Driver’s Licence”. The program is designed to help students understand their responsibility when using technology, and lessons are reinforced throughout the year.

Grand Erie DSB has developed a [Code of Digital Citizenship](#) to ensure that students make appropriate choices when engaging in activities online. The code has been created as part of an ongoing initiative through which the Board provides teachers and students with devices to facilitate technology-enabled learning. Educators are able to access resources that relate to each statement in the Code of Digital Citizenship.

Hamilton-Wentworth DSB generated modules for students in grades 4-6 <http://learning.commonshwdsb.on.ca/wiki/digital-citizenship/> that focus on 5 areas of Digital Citizenship:

- Participation--encourages reflection about the meaning of ethical participation and fosters the thinking skills needed to participate responsibly in online communities
- Identity—focuses on critical thinking of self-expression and self-exploration using new media
- Privacy--helps students reflect on the opportunities and risks associated with the capacity to share information with vast audiences on the Internet
- Credibility—encourages reflection about three facets of online credibility: 1) how to establish credibility; 2) how to assess the credibility of others and 3) how to assess the credibility of online information sources
- Authorship and Ownership—focuses on the difference between plagiarism and responsible “appropriation”

A video modeling how the concepts of digital citizenship may be embedded into every day lessons can be found at: http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/21stCenturyLearning/innovations_video.html

Ottawa Catholic School Board has developed a series of lessons for grade 1 to 12 teachers aimed at helping students engage in the digital world in a “proactive, responsible and compassionate manner”. The lessons, which are reinforced throughout the year, focus on what it means to be a citizen, a digital citizen, and to be part of a community. They are available at: <https://sites.google.com/a/ocsb.ca/ocsb-digital-citizenship/home-1>

DID YOU KNOW...?

- 13 DSBs (20%) identified digital citizenship as an area of impact in their innovation projects with 11 others indicating this to be an emerging theme (the ethical use of technology).
- As a result of innovation work, district school boards are developing/revising policies, procedures and resources for students and teachers, outlining the responsibilities, etiquette, and skills required for developing digital citizenship.

- School districts are also addressing the identified need for teacher and principal training in regard to understanding the attributes of digital citizenship.
- OSAPAC (Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee) is working in partnership with the Ministry on the development of teacher resources that integrate curriculum and digital citizenship.
- A mobile financial literacy App for students in grades 7-8 is anticipated in 2014. The App addresses key topics including making healthy choices, consumer protection, avoiding scams and fraud, digital safety and citizenship, e-banking and privacy and social media.

TIPS AND STRATEGIES FROM SYSTEM LEADERS

- Digital Citizenship needs to become part of the school culture—not just a class once a week with a different focus; addressing it in everyday life at school will help produce a ‘shift in thinking’ and rethinking of roles
- Set clear expectations around the responsible use of technology and address inappropriate use every time
- Develop an implementation plan and include professional development for teachers and parents as an integral part of the plan
- Connect the teaching of digital citizenship to what is already part of your board plan (e.g. character education, school codes of conduct) to allow for ease of implementation
- Promote collaboration between IT and Curriculum departments and discuss the digital citizenship connections.

An ethical citizen is one "who builds relationships based on humility, fairness and open-mindedness; who demonstrates respect, empathy and compassion; and who through teamwork, collaboration and communication contributes fully to the community and the world."

-Alberta's Inspiring Education, 2010

CONNECTIONS

Educators work diligently to promote a positive school climate and to prevent and address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour among students in our schools. Ontario’s approach promotes respect and understanding for all students. Since bullying also occurs online (cyberbullying) in the digital world, ensuring the development of a culture of positive digital citizenship supports the goals of Safe and Accepting Schools, contributing to the development of a positive school climate in which to learn. A Registry of resources for Safe and Inclusive schools can be found at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/bullyprevention.html> .

For more information on the Ministry of Education's 21st Century Teaching and Learning Initiative please see the “Winter 2014 Quick Facts” at www.edugains.ca: What’s New?