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CREATING POSITIVE CONNECTIONS: AN ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE

A student is not a container you have to fill up but a torch you have to light up.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

The role of an administrator in digital citizenship can be one of the most difficult but also the most rewarding. Since the beginning of school technology use, the pendulum on administrator attitudes has moved. In the early days, administrators' concerns surrounded the safety of students or the problems they might cause, which led to the banning of devices except those locked down by the district. Today, educational leaders find that new curricular materials often include digitally charged features (for example, the companion app for your new science curriculum that allows students to login and track their lab progress), so they understand the importance of technology but are still cautious. Some, even those just receiving their administrative license, may lack knowledge of the depth of technology use in their school or district.

Administrators are now finding that merely having technology is not enough. There needs to be a program that supports every aspect of why and how the technology is being used in their buildings. In the Schoology 2017 report *The Global State of Digital Learning in K–12 Education*, of the top five priorities for administrators, creating a digital citizenship program ranked number three with

25.77% of the responses. Digital citizenship and its components can no longer just be seen as an additional task, a once-a-year assembly, but instead something that is practiced and applied every day.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has been at the forefront of helping educational leaders. Since 2001, the organization has been reviewing and updating standards and goals for technology use with school leaders in mind. Recent updates include a strand on digital citizenship. Listed is the latest ISTE education leader standard for digital citizenship and the underlying goals (indicators).

1. **EQUITY AND CITIZENSHIP ADVOCATE.** Leaders use technology to increase equity, inclusion, and digital citizenship practices. Education leaders:

    a. Ensure all students have skilled teachers who actively use technology to meet student learning needs.

    b. Ensure all students have access to the technology and connectivity necessary to participate in authentic and engaging learning opportunities.

    c. Model digital citizenship by critically evaluating online resources, engaging in civil discourse online and using digital tools to contribute to positive social change.

    d. Cultivate responsible online behavior, including the safe, ethical and legal use of technology.

The remaining standards help to guide educational leaders in the use of technology in their schools and districts. Many of these topics are interconnected with those of digital citizenship:

2. **VISIONARY PLANNER.** Leaders engage others in establishing a vision, strategic plan and ongoing evaluation cycle for transforming learning with technology.

3. **EMPOWERED LEADER.** Leaders create a culture where teachers and learners are empowered to use technology in innovative ways to enrich teaching and learning.

4. **SYSTEMS DESIGNER.** Leaders build teams and systems to implement, sustain and continually improve the use of technology to support learning.

5. **CONNECTED LEARNER.** Leaders model and promote continuous professional learning for themselves and others.

There are a few expanded points that administrators identify as issues as they move into leadership positions. First, understand the technology, then create a plan. Educational leaders go to conferences, listen to peers only to jump from tool to tool trying to balance cost with use. As districts continue to grow in their technology use, the technology "rules" are often centralized to an Information Technology department, but that can often mean waiting for repairs, for the next upgrade, or the next funding increase or opportunities to come along (e.g., new construction, district, or community grants). Does that sound familiar? Another scenario that can happen is that your school receives additional funding, a grant, or gift, which you can use to finally purchase the digital tools you've been dreaming about. However, a full plan needs to be in place to not only prepare for these opportunities but to maximize them. Leaders need to discuss their ideas with technology leaders as there is still the support as well as the infrastructure to make the technology usable for students.

The second point for many administrators has been the growth of social media. This double-edged sword has become the new school calendar, those half-sheet announcements that used to be sent home with kids in their backpacks. Before the explosion of social media in everyone's lives, there were webpages (either district, school, or classroom—and many still do exist today) that posted important news. As all eyes moved to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, schools followed suit in order to best reach the target audience. If this is where parents were getting their information, schools wanted to expand their base of communication. What some administrators have found is that, unlike webpages, social media also provides a platform for those who have questions, concerns, or perhaps even personal statements of the organization or individuals.

Many administrators have not only come to terms with this connection but thrive on it.

The next area of understanding for administrators has been personal devices. As more and more students come to school with their own smartphone, tablet, or laptop, they now have access to many more options than ever before. Many schools have moved down the pathway of 1:1 and have tried to separate themselves from needing to focus on students' bringing their own personal devices. There are still many schools that allow BYOD or BYOT (Bring Your Own Device or Technology). What are the policies or procedures of using the devices in the school? If students use these devices to photograph, video, or otherwise gather information, then how do school officials celebrate or deal with it (especially if it gets shared to their favorite social media site)? How do administrators deal with conflicts between students when done online? How is confronting bullying in the online world different from the past? For many it has been helpful to have access to these devices, as some students will do searches, connect with other students or teachers, create products, write papers, or complete assignments.

Finally, as changing views of technology occur, administrators are placed at the forefront to understand these changes and become a resource for their teachers and a role model for their students and faculty. Technology within education as well as the community at large becomes more a point of contention of what direction to lead others. Leaders need to use the tools when working with staff and they need to know that they are being evaluated on its use in the classroom. To do this, educational leaders also need to provide resources and professional development (learning) on the technology as well. As resources move more online every day, it is up to the administrators to understand the changes and how they can help their staff.

To assist educators in understanding the technology topics, a model was created to help with the process. Educational leaders should use this model in helping to explain lessons and concepts on the integration of digital citizenship into the classroom.

The reflection model has four stages:

1. Awareness
2. Guided practice
3. Modeling and demonstration
4. Feedback and analysis

Leaders can use this reflection model to help educators understand the appropriate technology use in a learning environment.

Stage 1: Awareness

Awareness focuses on helping educators better understand the topics surrounding the appropriate use of technology in schools today. The awareness stage goes beyond just basic knowledge of technology terminology, however necessary that knowledge is for discussions. Educators should reflect on these questions:

- Do I have a good understanding of how a particular technology works and how using this technology can affect my students as well as others?

- Do I understand the potential as well as the possible problems or issues related to using this technology?

- What rules (legal and ethical) govern the acceptable use of this technology?

QUICK ACTIVITY: SHORT SCENARIOS FOR DISCUSSION STARTERS

These are good ice-breaker questions for teachers to start talking about issues and how to address them. These are similar scenarios as the Digital Compass activity (see Chapter 1). These are more open-ended, and there does not have to be a right or wrong answer, just an opportunity to gauge where educators are as to the topics.

SCENARIO 1. When hanging out with friends, one student gets a cell phone call and conducts a conversation within the group. *What is the proper etiquette when using a mobile phone in a public place?*

SCENARIO 2. A student follows a questionable link to a website and downloads a malicious script that releases a virus on the school network. *Should users take time to verify questionable links before downloading material from unknown sites?*

SCENARIO 3. At home, a student uses a software package to copy movies and games for friends. *What should be considered when duplicating copyrighted materials?*

SCENARIO 4. Two students use messaging apps on their cellular/smartphones to pass information during class. *Is it wrong to send messages during class?*

SCENARIO 5. A student brings a USB flash drive to school with all the student's assignments. The student checks with the teacher before connecting the drive to the school's computer. *Is it appropriate for students to connect their own hardware to school computers?*

SCENARIO 6. Students obtain a copy of the final exam from the teacher's computer by using the teacher's password. *Is using the teacher's credentials to get to information wrong?*

SCENARIO 7. Your teacher allows students to bring in their own technology to use during class because the school has a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) program. There is a new student in class whom you have not met, but you notice that they do not have any electronic device while you have both a tablet and a smartphone. *What should be considered when sharing technology with others*?

SCENARIO 8. Your best friend says that they received a sext with a photo of a girl in your class. In the photo the girl is nude. *What should be done when nude or partially nude photos are shared*?

SCENARIO 9. The school blocks some of the social media sites that you frequent with a firewall. A person next to you in the computer lab tells you that they have a program that can go around the firewall. *If you believe a rule is wrong, should you do whatever you want*?

The discussions around these questions need to be open to the idea that technology has many useful applications both in and out of the school setting. Determining the balance between these two is critical for leaders within the school. If students are not part of this discussion, consider their perspective in how the scenarios are framed.

Stage 2: Guided Practice (... or Dare We Call It "Play"?)

Following instruction in awareness, leaders need to provide teachers an opportunity to learn more about the skills of digital citizenship to help them recognize and determine best practice in appropriate or responsible use. This should be an opportunity to learn the principles of digital citizenship in an atmosphere where exploration and risk-taking are promoted. Within this stage, teachers need to support and understand one another when mistakes are made. This will help when they are thinking about working with students and the choices that they might make.

As much as possible during this guided practice phase, have teachers use the same technologies they would in the classroom. This will allow for users to learn the same skills that they are asking of their students. Educators need the opportunity of guided practice for learning digital citizenship skills, just as the students do. Without guided practice, there is not an opportunity to gain skills for addressing situations that might occur outside the classroom. Everyone needs to have an opportunity to learn the skills in a safe environment.

QUICK LESSON: ROLE-PLAYING WITH CELL PHONES

Have teachers role-play situations using cell/smartphones in a public location (e.g., in a movie theater or restaurant). The cell phone usage here should be conducted in a loud and obtrusive fashion. Pose the following question after the role-playing activity: What would be the appropriate way to respond to this

situation? Ask what have been their experiences with similar situations? What could they have done?

Teachers can use the following questions to help students reflect on how they use technology:

- When I use technologies, do I recognize when there is an issue of inappropriateness? Why or why not?
- Have I considered the appropriateness of my actions? Why or why not?
- Can I differentiate examples of technology misuse and abuse? Why or why not?
- What do I need to do to become aware of my actions when using technology?

Stage 3: Modeling and Demonstration

Leaders should extend from guided practice to providing explicit "modeling lessons" that focus on appropriate technology use in the classroom. Teachers and other adults should, of course, practice the same good digital citizenship habits as they advocate. For example, teachers who use cell/smartphones should turn them off or put them on vibrate during class. If students are not allowed to answer or make cell phone calls during the day, then teachers should follow those same rules.

Parents should be enlisted to help teach digital citizenship. Sending home digital citizenship lessons and having parents engage in the same dialogue with their children can be a great way to reinforce digital citizenship principles. Adults need to be positive role models of good digital citizenship so children can follow their example.

QUICK ACTIVITY: REVIEWING THE SCHOOL'S ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY (AUP)

Have teachers discuss what is considered good technology use vs. misuse and abuse in your school or district, as defined by your AUP. Ask them to provide examples of responsible and irresponsible use and articulate the differences between them. Ask what changes they would suggest to these policies. Then review Scott Mcleod's suggested Empowered Use Policy (digcit.life/EUP) and see how they match up. Are they similar and do they exude a similar vibe? If not, how far apart are they? How could your teachers teach others to be more respectful when using technology inside and out of school?

Empowered Use Policy
(digcit.life/EUP)

Finally, committee members should be led to an understanding of cause and effect with regard to technology use. All forms of technology use, misuse, and abuse have consequences. Everyone should model appropriate technology use on a regular basis. While doing so, educational leaders should focus on the following questions:

- Am I violating laws, policies, or other codes by using technology in this way? Why or why not?
- Have I seen, read, or heard of similar situations? What were the consequences?
- Does digital citizenship provide direction for determining the appropriateness of my actions? How? Why?

Stage 4: Feedback and Analysis

The classroom should also be a place where students can discuss their use of technology inside and outside school, to see how they can use it more effectively and appropriately. Encourage teachers to analyze and explore why their students might use technologies in a certain way. Have teachers share their feedback so they can help students find ways to avoid or mitigate problems that may arise from inappropriate technology use.

QUICK ACTIVITY: TECHNOLOGY REFLECTION

Often users do not "go back" and think about their actions after they occur. Without the opportunity to self-reflect, however, inappropriate behavior will tend to be repeated over and over. Educators should think about a situation where technology was involved that had some consequences. Ask the teachers to reflect on their actions and ask themselves these questions:

- Am I satisfied with my decision? Why or why not?
- Am I satisfied with the outcome of the situation? Why or why not?
- Did my behavior have a positive or negative influence on others? Why?
- Did I go back and evaluate how I used the technology later?
- Did I think about possible alternatives of how to use the technology?

The Big Question for Administrators

It is important for educational leaders to have a basic understanding of digital citizenship. Some aspects may seem more familiar than others. Areas such as character education and empathy are old ideas, but how do we reframe them for a generation that has been raised on the internet? The skills are the same, but the methodology and modality are refocused. Today people share their most intimate and uncensored selves when online. While freeing for some, it is also difficult for the typical user to filter what is important from everything else. Our students are being sent messages through many media (mainstream and social) of who they should be, what they should think or believe. It can be difficult to provide help and support when they are being bombarded with images, negative statements, and even false information 24 hours a day. Digital citizenship needs to focus on what is possible when users (especially children) begin looking at the opportunities that technology provides. It is evident that these issues exist, and we cannot ignore that they are part of the online experience, but we can refocus

and understand what are the positive aspects of the online experience and help others to do the same.

These are easy things to say, but they are much more difficult in practice. For anyone who has been an administrator (even in the days before the technology explosion), the idea that everyone will get along is hard at best and seemingly impossible at worst. The more diverse the community, the more opportunity for conflict. With all the things that administrators need to deal with today (poverty, racial/social issues, hunger, homelessness, etc.), adding online kindness to the mix may seem a bit like piling on—and it is, but it is also a reality for many schools. So where can we begin? Let us begin online and work our way out.

In *Digital Community, Digital Citizen*, Jason Ohler has spoken, written and evangelized that the "best filter is the one between our ears" (p. 60). Discussions need to begin early with our children that not everything online is good, right, or positive. Everyone brings a certain bias to what is taught to our children, but they need to understand our hopes and know that they are supported, especially when they make mistakes. Technology has been one of those divisive topics that parents have handed over to the children by just telling them "you know what to do." Each new technology attempts to be more intuitive or "user friendly" than the last. Looking at the beginning of the "technology revolution" in the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan was already decrying the ease of the new technology and the changes it was making. Children's understanding of technology is not innate; developers have provided a level of ease to these tools to such a degree that even a child can use them (and in some countries many do). Not all information, experiences, or ideas are appropriate at every stage in a person's life, and not everyone is ready at the same time to be exposed to them. The importance of a community approach to technology use is to understand these differences and how to know when certain people may be ready for these tools when others may not.

As mentioned before, the areas of RL and DL (Real Life and Digital Life) are becoming more and more intertwined, and spaces such as social media cause that

blurring to occur even more. A report by the American Academy of Pediatrics defines Facebook depression as "depression that develops when teens and preteens spend time on social media sites and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression due to the intensity of the online world (2011)." These studies show that young people who have gone to these social media sites actually feel worse after visiting them. This could be from the comments they read, but it is also from seeing posts of other people enjoying themselves and sharing this with others. The feeling of not being able to enjoy these experiences oneself, or the feeling of envy of those who can, may drive some users to become despondent or depressed. There is a whole new level of conflict that can occur that may appear different from the past; now users, especially young adults, are always online and this information is always in front of them. Administrators today need to focus on the underlying issues for those students who cannot process the information that is constantly bombarding them.

The actions of students have not changed significantly but the platforms have. Technology tools today provide great opportunities but can also create even larger issues. Today's leaders need to understand what skills are needed to help their stakeholders and also provide resources on how to address the needs of their students. The concept of it "taking a village" to raise a child has never been more true. We all need to work together to help those in the classroom as well as those in the home to help raise Safe, Savvy, and Social adults.

Guiding Questions

1. What do you identify as the main technology "issue" within your school or district? How can it be addressed?

2. Where is the "gap" in being able to successfully lead a school or district in a digital citizenship program? What changes must occur personally or community-wide to address this need?

3. Where do you see your role as an educational leader in the process of technology implementation? Are there opportunities to be involved in the process?

Activities

1. Discuss with your staff the potential issues they identify with the implementation of technology in their classrooms. Prioritize a list of things that could be done differently or areas where assistance is needed to address these needs.

2. Share with staff some ideas on how to begin to implement or build upon programs already started that are related to digital citizenship. Work with various staff members such as library/media specialists, counselors, or others who might have programs with resources for digital citizenship on how these can be shared with the entire staff.