Students as Digital Citizens

By Linda B. Bennett

From Twitter feeds on social media to virtual reality games with avatars, technology changes the lives of elementary students. Access to technology in schools and society is integrated into their lives, and their world is expanded through laptops, mobile devices, and whiteboards. While using the electronic tools, inquisitive and creative children investigate new topics, communicate extensively, produce projects, and disseminate their work to an extended audience. Through the study of social studies, students explore and participate as citizens in their local, global, and digital worlds.

Elementary Social Studies and Digital Citizenship

A digital citizen is any person who participates in society using information and communication technologies, for example blogging or making an online purchase. Elementary social studies teachers must begin preparing their students to be good digital citizens, that is, to use the Internet and digital tools regularly, responsibly, effectively, and safely. Children learn the skills they need to be responsible citizens and make informed, ethical, and safe decisions while using technology. A social studies class that uses technology effectively, and teaches digital citizenship while doing so, can help impart the skills children need to compete in a globally connected world and participate as digital citizens.

Social studies gives teachers an opportunity to let children take ownership for learning and to engage with technology beyond the walls of their classroom. Students studying social studies can use new tools to expand their world and help prepare them for college, careers, and civic life.

Safety Tips for Digital Citizens	
Never…	post personal information like your address or phone number.
Do not…	write or post things that you would not be proud to put your name on.
Do not…	illegally copy materials; always cite sources when referencing someone else's work.
Always…	treat others with respect online.

Digital Learning in Social Studies

Online tools such as timeline makers, mind mapping, video editing, podcasting, storyboarding, coding tools, and social media can be useful to social studies teachers at all grade levels. Countless teachers use these tools in the classroom to motivate children to have powerful learning experiences.

Students as Producers of Digital Information

Because digital experiences are now so common, it is more important than ever for students to learn about their roles, rights, and responsibilities as digital citizens. They share texts, photos, and videos instantaneously and contribute to the digital world as producers of digital information. Children establish a digital footprint that becomes their digital identity. As contributors, students need to understand topics such as privacy, copyright, cyber bullying and Internet safety.

Students as Consumers of Digital Information As access to online resources increases, it matters more than ever that students become critical consumers of information. Children need to ask questions about what they read and see online. Evaluating online sources, using multiple sources, and finding credible sources provides opportunities to interpret information and draw more accurate conclusions about a topic. With the abundance of online content, it is vital for children to learn strategies for detecting facts from opinions about historical, economic, political and social issues. Through the inquiry process, students begin to be better communicators, consumers, producers, and active digital citizens.

Today's Elementary Social Studies Classroom

The highly effective teacher provides a learning environment that maximizes the use of technologies so children engage with social studies content, use digital tools effectively with the larger world and understand multiple cultural, political, and ethical perspectives. Students are empowered to make informed decisions, communicate conclusions, contribute to society, and take civic actions.

With the on-going introduction of innovative devices and online tools, there will continue to be opportunities to develop new strategies for using technology in the social studies classroom. As life-long learners, elementary social studies teachers can be the leaders that guide children as citizens in the digital age.

From Theory to Practice

Your Guide to Digital Citizenship in *myWorld Interactive*

Digital Activities

- The activities include a rich variety of video, audio, and interactive experiences for each chapter and lesson.
- Online Skills interactivities enable children to learn the critical thinking skills they need to evaluate online sources for possible bias and reliability.
- Quest Kick Off, Connections, and Findings all support the inquiry approach to the program with online interactivities. They include research activities during which students can apply their skill in evaluating and analyzing sources.
- The Extras tab at the top of some interactivities provides extra support with challenge ideas, vocabulary support, and helpful hints.
- Student Edition eText allows students to use their text offline on a mobile device.
- For all digital resources go to Savvas.com/socialstudies.

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