Chapter XVII
Becoming a Digital Citizen in a Technological World

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ABSTRACT

In todays changing global society, digital technology users need to be prepared to interact and work with users from around the world. Digital technology is helping to define this new global society. Being part of a society provides opportunities to its citizens but also asks that its members behave in certain way. This new technological society is drawing users together to learn, share and interact with one another in the virtual world. But for all users to be productive there needs to be a defined level of acceptable activity by everyone, in other words a digital citizenship. The concept of digital citizenship provides a structure for this digital society, by conceptualizing and organizing appropriate technology use into a new digital culture. Anyone using these digital technologies needs to understand the parameters of appropriate use so that they can become more constructive digital citizens.

INTRODUCTION

In the last five years, there has been evidence of an increasing pattern of misuse and abuse with respect to technology. This pattern of technology misuse and abuse has been documented in hundreds of articles, texts, and countless news broadcasts. Some examples include: websites to intimidate or threaten users, downloading music illegally from the Internet, plagiarizing information off the web, using cellular phones at inappropriate times (e.g., during movies, at church, or in a meeting). This situation has created users "who want to enjoy the benefits of digital technology without making the effort to use it responsibly" (Harmon, 2004). Organizations have created standards or Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) concerning how people are to use technology appropriately often without providing knowledge of what all the issues may be. In the article *Online Ethics Should Begin in Classroom, Educators Say,* February 16, 2000 issue of the *New York Times* the author

states "although most schools have 'acceptable use policies' outlining correct behavior online, educators said documents are often either flawed or insufficient to teach young people responsible use of computers" (Mendels, 2000). How individuals behave as members of a digital society has become a critical issue for technology users, and the focus of digital citizenship.

What is digital citizenship? *Digital citizenship has been defined as the norms of behavior with regard to technology use.* Ribble and Bailey (2004) defined digital citizenship to address the complex issues of technology use, abuse, and misuse. The focus in this context when describing norms are those technology uses that considered as acceptable through the consent of its users. The focal point is more on the acknowledged responsibility of the technology users than on setting standards.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) developed technology standards dealing with students', teachers', and administrators' knowledge of using technology (http://cnets.iste.org). Through a process of gathering information from various interest groups and then building consensus, ISTE created the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for Students, Teachers, and Administrators (ISTE, 2003). In each of these NETS, ISTE has a section related to the Social, Ethical and Human Issues (Teacher and Administrators – Standard VI, Students – Standard 2). With these standards, ISTE provides structure for students, teachers, and administrators how to use technology in a responsible way. By implementing these standards ISTE has shown the importance of appropriate use of technology in education. By 2004 the NETS had been used or aligned to by 49 states, showing the importance of technology standards as a part of the educational curricula. In 2007 ISTE has begun a process of updating and evaluating the NETS for students to stay current with the changes in technology. At their annual meeting in the summer of 2007 this updated draft of the NETS for students was accepted by the organization. Replacing social, ethical and human issues was the new standard of digital citizenship to encompass these ideas of ethics in the educational setting.

As new digital technologies emerge and evolve, it becomes more difficult to create a framework of codified principles for acting responsibly in using these technologies. Some laws have been enacted, and some groups and organizations have created rules or policies. Unfortunately, there is no universal agreement on how users should act when using digital technologies. The purpose of focusing on digital citizenship is to create a dialogue among technology users on the issues of misuse and abuse of technology. Digital technology provides great improvements in society and continues to change how users work, learn, and play. However, users should ensure that digital technology continues to enhance our society. The benefits it provides should outweigh the problems it creates.

DIGITAL ISSUES GROWTH AND THE NEED FOR DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Too often, new digital technologies have been made available without providing support for the users. As with all fields of study, education has been affected by the expansion of technology. Bork (1993) noted that schools bought the hardware, told the teachers to teach the programs, but did not provide the proper support to make their teaching effective. This same cycle has been seen in many other disciplines. Cuban (1986) suggested a parallel between unprepared schools and the use of untested drugs to release mentally ill patients out into the public. Just like the untested drugs, technology was sold as a *miracle drug* [italics added] for education. Although the consequences were not the same, the parallel of how technology was oversold in education was similar.

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