

Teaching Kids How to be Responsible Digital Citizens

Moderator: Dr. Patricia Agatston, Prevention/Intervention Center

Panelists:

Belinha De Abreu, Media Literacy Educator & Teaching Professor, Drexel University

Tammy McGraw, Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the Virginia Department of Education

Katherine Maher, Partnerships and Projects coordinator in UNICEF's Division of Communication, Youth Section

Maria José Cantarino de Frías, Corporate Responsibility Manager, Telefonica

Mala Bawer, Co-founder and Executive Director, CyberSmart!

The panelists discussed how teachers have been scared out of bringing the Internet to their classrooms and that they lack tools to keep students safe and educated about the benefits of the Internet. They agreed that digital citizenship must be integrated in a school's curriculum and that teachers are not solely responsible for teaching students digital citizenship.

Agatston began by listing the nine themes of digital citizenship including digital etiquette, digital communication, digital literacy, digital access, digital commerce, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security.

De Abreu suggested that although technology has made a huge leap forward, education has lagged behind and there needs to be a focus on what we are doing in schools to help make students cyber citizens. McGraw said that organizations have done such a good job of warning educators about the dangers of the Internet that teachers are less likely to embrace technology in their classrooms. She suggested that teachers need the tools to ensure that students are protected and safe on the Internet, but also to teach students how to make good decisions online.

Maher said that children need to be empowered and given the right to Internet access and information sharing. She suggested that there needs to be a recognition of literacy gaps, generational gaps, and a lack of understanding in a global context. Cantarino de Frías said there should be a stable balance between talking about the dangers of the Internet and its benefits. She stated that education is the basis for everything and that children who learn how to use the Internet are more likely to use it beneficially and be more aware of the risks. Finally, Bawer agreed with McGraw that the community has been "tremendously successful" in scaring teachers and that teachers do not feel they have the tools to keep their students safe.

Agatston asked the panelists what teaching methods effectively assist students in internalizing digital citizenship values. McGraw commented that these kinds of values must be integrated throughout the curriculum and should even be brought up daily whenever it is appropriate. De Abreu agreed that these values can be integrated by talking about plagiarism or how to research and should not be addressed as a stand alone topic.

Agatston also asked the panelists how the community should get involved in teaching digital citizenship. Cantarino de Frías said that because industry is part of the problem, it should also become part of the solution. Maher suggested that wherever there is a point of access like at Internet cafes, libraries, and community centers there is a responsibility to teach digital

citizenship. Bawer also stated that students are mentoring their teachers and that teachers appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with one another. De Abreu stated that although teachers do not want to lose their role, they could learn a lot from students in the classroom who should be educating their teachers as well.

A member of the audience asked about the role of administrators and De Abreu claimed that students, teachers, administrators, parents, and school members all have a shared responsibility in educating students and that policies must be put in place to encourage digital citizenship. Bawer shared an anecdote of a principal that found that blogging was an important way to reach the community. When asked how schools should assess the digital skills of their students, De Abreu suggested the International Society for Technology in Education website that provides a free test for assessing digital literacy, while Bawer stated that tests are not necessarily an accurate measurement and that students will be reaching learning goals if teachers successfully integrate the Internet into the curriculum.