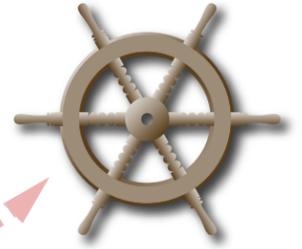




Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Teaching our Digital Citizens

by Betty-Jean Aucoin, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

We need to teach our children, youth and public to think critically and act ethically when using technology. Nova Scotia has an excellent public school program encompassing six essential graduation learning outcomes: aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication, personal development, problem solving and technology development. This allows teachers to follow a curriculum that teaches children from Primary to Grade 12 how to be contributing respectful citizens.

Teaching these important outcomes is not new. What *is* new is the explosion of technology, social media and online communication in the past 20 years. For the first time in history we have students surpassing parents and teachers in their understanding and use of a tool. Our children and youth are digital natives while we are the digital immigrants. We did not grow up with Google, social media and blogs. Texting, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are first nature to our children. So, we play catch up as our children drive technology without having the guidance of their parents and lessons taught at school.

Many educators, public partners and others are trying to change that. As parents and educators, we cannot take a back seat to our children and youth. We must teach them appropriate online conduct or digital citizenship along with our continued efforts to teach them how to be respectful to others and live by the Golden Rule.

One Nova Scotia school that is actively pursuing this goal is the Strait Area Education and Recreation Centre (SAERC) in Port Hawkesbury. I was honoured to present the keynote address *Appropriate Online Conduct and Digital Citizenship* at SAERC's recent conference on digital citizenship for Grades 9 to 12 students. Speakers and workshops brought awareness to the topics of cyberbullying and online responsibility. Staff, students and community members embarked on an educational journey to ensure all staff and students have the knowledge and

understanding of how to use technology to advance their learning and success and to act as thoughtful, considerate digital/school citizens.

During my workshops, I provide educators with resources and sites to support them in teaching appropriate online conduct. As Canadians, we do not have to look far to find relevant and supportive resources to assist us in teaching our students how to be thoughtful, considerate online citizens.

One resource that I provide to educators is a place mat on the six tenets of being a proactive digital citizen as described in Ian Jukes, *Digital Diet*. These tenets are: respect yourself, respect others, protect yourself, protect others, respect your intellectual property and protect the intellectual property of others. This is a great springboard activity, along with the digital citizenship contract created by the *21st Century Fluency* project, in beginning the discussions and actions of positive digital citizens. Teachers will find fluency21.com a great site to advance teaching in the 21st century.

As a participant on Nova Scotia's Task Force on Cyberbullying, I was afforded the opportunity to meet and hear from many experts and partner associations who have developed resources to support digital citizenship and address cyberbullying.

In Canada, the Media Awareness Network, media-awareness.ca, supports parents and educators with many relevant lessons and resources in teaching and parenting in a digital age.

Dr. Shaheem Shariff and her McGill University team have developed a site, definetheline.ca, to support policy makers, children, youth, parents and educators to engage, learn, network and share resources on promoting positive, thoughtful and considerate digital citizens. Educators can find useful video and media on this site to launch students into discussion on appropriate online conduct, sexting, bystander effect, safety online and much more.



Shaun MacDonald, Principal, SAERC; Betty-Jean Aucoin, Executive Staff Officer, NSTU; Monica Williams, Director of Programs and Student Services, SRSB; Lesley Bland, SAERC Grade 12 Student and Student Council President; Cst. Deepak Prasad, Chairperson SAERC School Advisory Council and RCMP, Port Hawkesbury Detachment, following the keynote address.

PREVNet.ca is another excellent Canadian site providing resources to youth, teachers and parents on how to stop bullying and cyberbullying.

In the United States, Parry Aftab has created the website wiredsafety.org to provide students, parents and educators with insights and resources to address cyberbullying and Internet safety.

In addition to these websites, one of the best resources we have is our students. We need to look to them to assist us in using technology in our schools to support learning, communication and relationships. Our students can and should be part of the solution.

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