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Digital Citizenship for Elementary Students

Sherry L. Drader
Western Washington University

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Sherry L. Drader

Departments of Special Education and Educational Leadership, Western Washington University

EDAD 502: Readings in School Administration

Ian Levings & Beth Clothier

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the need for digital citizenship teaching in the elementary

school setting. It aimed to address the question, how can teachers effectively teach and

implement digital citizenship in a Kindergarten to grade 4 elementary school? A small purposive

focus group determined an obvious need for educators to have clear direction and guidance in

the area of digital citizenship at the elementary school. This group of educators emphasized

that digital citizenship is extremely important as the world increasingly offers online options for

many services, including education. Furthermore, it is imperative for schools to partner with

families in the area of digital citizenship. All stakeholders in the education system,

administration, teachers, support staff, parents and students would benefit from clear,

established boundaries regarding digital citizenship. Due to the ongoing global pandemic of

Covid-19, it is important to understand the role elementary educators have in helping to guide

and direct students about digital citizenship at a young age.

Digital Citizenship

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Chapter I: Digital Citizenship for Elementary Students

Covid 19 has proven to be a challenging time in all sectors, and the education sector is no exception. Many elementary students have been privileged to access learning opportunities through various digital platforms; however, they have engaged in these platforms with little to no accountability or instruction on how to have a safe, digital footprint:

Remote learning and working are privileges that are designed for so-called 'digital citizens', that is, individuals who can fully engage with technology from an educational, political, and participatory perspective. Nevertheless, many individuals do not yet identify themselves as digital citizens and are not even acquainted with the meaning and implications of this concept. (Ranchordás, 2020, para 1).

The evidence to support how students are accountable is clearly lacking- the research is extremely underrepresented. Öztürk (2021) recognizes the need for more studies in the implementation of explicit digital citizenship teaching (p. 38). Furthermore, the pandemic has necessitated the need for elementary educators to shift their teaching in some capacity to online learning (Government of British Columbia, 2021). In British Columbia, elementary students were expected, and in some cases, continue to be expected, to learn digitally regardless of student preparedness or awareness of digital citizenship (Government of British Columbia, 2021). According to Ribble et al. (2004), digital citizenship is defined as, "the norms of behavior with regard to technology use" (p. 2). The dependency on digital literacy is increasing in the elementary classroom, creating an urgent need for digital citizenship competency among educators and their students (Buchholz et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate a need to address digital citizenship in the elementary school. To determine this information, a small purposive focus group was selected, and then the data was collected. Once the focus study data was analyzed, it became blatantly obvious that there is a need for a baseline understanding of what digital citizenship should include in an elementary school setting. The data revealed that there is a desire for an effective and efficient approach to implementing digital citizenship in the elementary school setting.

Due to the increase in dependency of digital platforms, elementary students are increasingly engaging in online activities for both academic and leisure purposes. Common Sense Media, a well-known program used by educators worldwide, claims that,

> Children age 0 to 8 spend an average of nearly 2.5 hours per day with screen media, with 5-to-8-year-olds spending three hours per day with screens. More than two-thirds (67%) of 5-to8-year-olds have their own mobile device, and on average, children in this age group spend an hour and 15 minutes a day using mobile media. (James et al., 2020, p. 6)

Elementary students need to understand the term, 'digital citizen' and what this means for behaving appropriately and safely while online. Buchholz et al. (2020) state that:

> Being a digitally literate citizen encompasses the ability to read, write, and interact on/across screens to engage with diverse online communities, with an orientation for social justice. Within this larger frame of digital literacy, we advocate a critical literacy pedagogy that enables students to think at deeper levels about not simply how to read and compose in online environments but also how to do so as productive, responsible, and critical digital citizens. (p. 12)

There are many existing digital citizenship programs that serve as a guide for educators to help teach digital citizenship; however, for the purpose of this study, the intent was to identify how to best address the need for effective digital citizenship. Common Sense Media says, "Our goal is to support students, educators, and families in participating positively in the digital world" (James et al., 2020, p. 12). Common Sense Media is an example of curriculum that is designed to adequately equip teachers to prepare their students for the digital world.

Currently, many educators are experiencing significant fatigue due to the on-going Covid 19 pandemic. Sokel et al. (2020) state that,

> The current research suggests that although teachers are 'finding their feet' in terms of teaching during a pandemic —as indicated by greater accomplishment and efficacy for managing student behaviour in online environments —teachers are burning out. Initial losses in their positive affective and cognitive attitudes toward change within the current context of sustained exhaustion will likely be followed by negative behavioural attitudes toward change if we are not able to decrease demands and increase resources to the degree where teachers perceive they have a positive balance between stress and coping. As the frontline workers in our educational system, to ignore this warning from teachers is to welcome a threat to the very purposes of schooling. (p.7)

Digital citizenship is arguably needed now more than ever; however, requiring educators to 'do more' or implement new curriculum will be challenging. According to Doucet et al., "If we don't address teacher welfare, we are going to have more collateral problems than answers to this crisis" (2020, pp. 16-17).

Digital Citizenship

Research Question

How can teachers effectively teach and implement a digital citizenship program in a Kindergarten to Grade Four elementary school?

Institutional Setting

The institutional setting for this study was in an independent, K-4 elementary school located in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. The school is independently owned and operated by parents and a board of directors. The population of the elementary school at the time of this study was approximately 450 students and over 60 staff members, including 31 teachers, as well as several education assistants, support staff and administrators. The population of the school was largely white, protestant western Europeans. The participants for this focus group study came from varied and diverse ethnic backgrounds. Certified teachers from all grade levels, Kindergarten to grade four, were represented.

Methods

A qualitative approach was used for this research. A focus group interview was conducted to inquire and learn from educators in the elementary setting. The purpose of the focus group was to evaluate the flexibility, efficiency, and effectiveness of teaching digital citizenship. As a result of the focus group, it became evident that there is an urgent need to explicitly teach and implement digital citizenship within the elementary school setting. As a result, this school will be working with the administration and a technology coordinator to identify areas of need for digital citizenship, across grade levels Kindergarten to grade twelve.

Terms and Definitions

As defined by *Wikipedia*:

Digital Citizenship

Digital identity is "information on an entity used by computer systems to represent an external agent. That agent may be a person, organization, application, or device" (2021, November 5).

Digital literacy "refers to an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and clearly communicate information through typing and other media on various digital platforms. It is evaluated by an individual's grammar, composition, typing skills and ability to produce text, images, audio and designs using technology" (2021, November 25).

Digital citizen is "a person using information technology in order to engage in society, politics, and government" (2021, November 5).

Digital footprint is,

An acknowledgment that posting and receiving information online can be tracked, customized, and marketed for users to click and follow. Not only the internet use but individuals' digital footprints can lead to both beneficial and negative outcomes, but the ability to manage one's digital footprints can be a sub-part of digital literacy. (2021, November 5)

Chapter II: Literature Review

Digital citizenship is no longer a concept to consider- it is a concept fundamental to the well-being and healthy development of children today. As a result of the dependency and reliance on digital platforms, there is a desperate need for education systems to implement effective, comprehensive, system-wide digital citizenship protocols. Nanjundaswamy et al. (2021) determine that "today, with the present pandemic situation, digital pedagogy has become a vital part of education" (p.179). As well, Ranchordás suggests that,

> Remote learning and working are privileges that are designed for so-called 'digital citizens', that is, individuals who can fully engage with technology from an educational, political, and participatory perspective. Nevertheless, many individuals do not yet identify themselves as digital citizens and are not even acquainted with the meaning and implications of this concept. (2020)

By implementing and using digital citizenship programs, the goal is for students to develop and understand how to behave appropriately and safely in an online environment.

What is a Digital Citizen?

Educators view digital citizenship as critical; however, few are able to define what it is or how to teach it. Ata et al. (2019) suggest that in addition to understanding the term 'digital citizen,' educators must receive guidance and professional development to effectively teach digital citizenship before they are adequately equipped to teach (p. 419).

Digital Citizen Defined

In reference to education, digital citizenship is widely accepted as "predominately characterized by responsible and ethical technology use" (Davis, 2020 p. 46). While researchers

agree on the definition, implementing and teaching how to be a productive digital citizen

becomes more complicated.

Although the research is ambiguous on how or what to teach in terms of digital

citizenship, digital citizenship must be addressed. Ribble et al. (2004) say,

> There has been no universal agreement on how we should act in relation to digital
>
> technologies. Will reaching an agreement be easy? Quite the opposite; it will be very
>
> difficult to come to a consensus on how everyone will deal with digital technology. We
>
> must begin somewhere, and because the schools encompass our future, this is where
>
> the discussion begins. (p. 11)

Internationally recognized researchers in the area of digital citizenship suggest there are

nine areas of behaviour that make up digital citizenship:

> As a way of understanding the complexity of digital citizenship and the issues of
>
> technology use, abuse, and misuse, we have identified nine general areas of behavior
>
> that make up digital citizenship. 1. Etiquette: electronic standards of conduct or
>
> procedure 2. Communication: electronic exchange of information 3. Education: the
>
> process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology 4. Access:
>
> full electronic participation in society 5. Commerce: electronic buying and selling of
>
> goods 6. Responsibility: electronic responsibility for actions and deeds 7. Rights: those
>
> freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world 8. Safety: physical well-being in a
>
> digital technology world 9. Security (self-protection): electronic precautions to
>
> guarantee safety (Ribble et al., 2004, p. 7).

Of these nine areas, all can be applied and learned most effectively beginning at a young age.

Finally, digital citizenship must involve a holistic approach when teaching children, much the same as educators reinforce how to be well-rounded, contributing citizens in society. Öztürk (2021) suggests that digital citizenship is not much different than traditional citizenship (p. 32). As well, the responsibility of teaching how to be a decent digital citizen depends on a community, which includes educational institutions: "Citizenship takes place within a community and includes both rights and responsibilities" (Öztürk, 2021, p. 32). For the purpose of technology use in the classroom, Davis (2020) suggests that "Digital citizenship is predominately characterized by responsible and ethical technology use" (p. 46).

Digital Citizenship in the Elementary School

Recognizing the importance of digital citizenship, it is imperative that this development begin at a young age. Walters et al. (2019) suggest that "elementary-aged students are particularly susceptible to technology misuse because they are at the beginning stages of digital literacy and understanding of appropriate behaviors for interacting with others in real-world interactions and online interactions" (p. 4). This responsibility inevitably relies, in part, on the education system. Ribble (2004) suggests that "digital citizenship must become part of our school culture—not just a class or lesson but the way we do business in education" (p. 13). Furthermore, education systems have a responsibility to monitor student behaviour while engaged in technology at school. The use of technology is integrated into curriculum designed and required by governments, thereby making digital citizenship an integral part of every classroom. The curriculum designed by the provincial government in British Columbia (2021) suggests that technology "is important in the world today and key in the education of citizens

for the future" (Government of British Columbia, 2021). In recognition of this responsibility, it is important to understand what digital citizenship looks like in the elementary school setting.

The most widely used and recognized digital citizenship curriculum is produced by Common Sense Media. James et al. (2021) claim that,

> Since we released our original digital citizenship curriculum in 2010, educators have turned to Common Sense Education as a trusted guide on digital citizenship. We reach over 60 percent of U.S. schools and are committed to continue that work to reach a new generation of students (p.3).

However, the research regarding how this affects elementary age children is limited. Walters et al. (2019) suggest that "specific research on what teachers and students know or believe about digital citizenship, especially at the elementary level, remains dramatically understudied" (p. 16).

Teacher Efficacy/Educators' Perception of Digital Citizenship in the Elementary Classroom

It is widely recognized that digital citizenship is an important part of educating children today (Berardi, 2015; Common Sense Media n.d.; Holladnsworth et al., 2011; James et al., 2021; & Ribble, 2008). Researchers agree that integrating technology into the school setting is paramount to the success of students: "Our findings suggest that technology use is an integral part of elementary school classrooms, that educators consider digital privacy and security through the lens of curricular and classroom management goals, and that lessons to teach children about digital privacy and security are rare" (Kumar et al., 2019, p. 1). The question remains, why is the teaching of digital citizenship missing?

It is difficult to narrow down the most effective approach to digital citizenship in the classroom because educators have not been instructed about what to do or how to do it. The research is lacking, except to identify the need for it: "The school media specialist will need to interact with all grades, have a curriculum in place (information skills) to which digital citizenship can be added, and keep current with educational technology as part of their responsibilities" (Hollandsworth et al., 2011, p. 46). As well, teacher efficacy is imperative to teaching and implementing effective technology skills in the classroom (Ertmer et al., 2012). Teachers need to feel assured in their own technology skills to feel confident teaching digital citizenship: "Too often educators do not want to begin discussing these issues because they themselves are not well-informed of the recent developments and events related to technology" (Ribble, 2012, p. 150). To be informed and prepared about what to teach regarding digital citizenship, Ribble (2012) suggests following the nine elements of digital citizenship as a framework for discussion (p. 150) (see Appendix A). Indeed, countless researchers have studied and determined the need for developing and implementing digital citizenship in school settings (Common Sense Media, 2021 & Ribble et al., 2004). I believe that digital citizenship is imperative to children's development. However, there is little research done on the successful implementation of a digital citizenship program in the elementary school system.

Digital Citizenship During/After a Global Pandemic

Nearly two decades of research (Nanjundaswamy et al., 2021, Ranchordás, 2020, Ribble et al, 2004) has been conducted on the urgent need to teach students about digital citizenship; however, the evidence for a comprehensive and effective digital citizenship program in Canada is lacking. Recently, due to the global pandemic, educators in Canada and

around the world have been forced into digital learning platforms (Government of British

Columbia, 2021). This has caused children of all ages to engage extensively in some form of

technology to ensure continuity of learning. As overwhelming as this may be for school systems

and parents alike, perhaps this forces a more holistic approach to the teaching of digital

citizenship. Hill et al. (2020) suggests, "We have begun to re-envision our practice as teacher

educators focusing on five interrelated themes: anti-racism, wellness, decolonisation, respect

for the Land, and recognition of teacher expertise" (p. 572). If education focuses on these

interrelated themes, perhaps digital citizenship will become intrinsically motivating for

students.

Yet another consideration for teaching digital citizenship during a global pandemic is

addressing the inequities ever-so prevalent of minority groups and those marginalized in

society. Hill et al. (2020) suggest that educators focus on bridging inequities instead of focusing

solely on curriculum "Re-envisioning teacher education: putting equity at the heart of

education responses" (p. 571). Furthermore, specifically in British Columbia, the diversity of

students living in both remote and urban areas must be considered regarding digital citizenship

(Macdonald et al, 2020). Finally, when considering teaching digital citizenship during a global

pandemic, Bucholz et al. (2020) recommend that digital citizenship be voluntary, and that for it

to be successful, individuals must have a participatory mindset: "Citizenship must be viewed as

participatory" (p.12). They also suggest that instead of implementing explicit digital citizenship

curriculum, the education system should work on influencing the mindset of students,

"Educators must recognize that democracy, as is true of all complex social phenomena, cannot

be directly taught. There can be no successful curriculum that outlines and abstractly instructs

youth on how to be responsible democratic citizens" (p. 12). Bucholze et al (2020) also suggest

four ways in which students can begin to critically consider online presence:

> 1. How can I stay informed by evaluating the accuracy, perspective, and validity of
>
> online sources? 2. How can I locate and/or develop spaces online where I can engage
>
> respectfully with people who have different beliefs and experiences than me? 3. How
>
> can I use technology to engage, participate, and be a force for good in my community?
>
> 4. How can I learn to balance my screen time with other activities and social interaction?
>
> (p.13)

These four ways are a continuous evolution that need constant attention.

While digital citizenship is a critical aspect to teaching and instructing young learners,

especially during a global pandemic, researchers recognize the influence of the teacher as a

whole. Nanjundaswamy et al. (2021) suggest that "Technology cannot serve as a substitute for

the Teacher, and it retains both the educator and learner relationship as a whole" (p. 185). To

effectively teach digital citizenship, Hollandsworth et al. (2011) state,

> Parents have to be more involved and students must become the role models. Students
>
> will need guidance, accountability, and the opportunities to make mistakes and learn
>
> from them. Media specialists must become advocates for this delicate process of
>
> shaping a digital culture in collaboration with administrators, teachers, and technology
>
> professionals. It will take a village! (p. 46)

Implications for Research

The implications for research are proving to be interesting. While my assumption was

finding a desperate need to implement specific digital citizenship curriculum at the elementary

level, most research suggests a more holistic approach. For example, while a series of lessons

and curriculum can help guide students about digital citizenship, citizenship as a whole,

requires an intrinsic approach. Furthermore, there is a lack of research about the impact of

digital citizenship on students at the elementary age. All but two of the articles in the literature

review addressed the need for further research in this area. I look forward to researching and

discovering about the implications for digital citizenship at the elementary level.

Chapter III: Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore digital citizenship in the elementary school setting. More specifically, it aimed to discover best ways to support and guide educators in digital citizenship. Of special consideration is that this study began during a global pandemic, necessitating the use of digital tools to accommodate learning. Therefore, the research strived to provide answers to the question, how can teachers, teaching during a pandemic, effectively and efficiently, implement digital citizenship in a K-4 elementary school? The Western Washington University Institutional Review Board approved using a diverse focused study group for the purpose of this research.

Design of the Study

This qualitative study was implemented in the form of a focus group. A transcribed and recorded Zoom interview was guided and led by me, as moderator. Specific interview questions were generated to gain meaning and understanding about teachers' knowledge and understanding of digital citizenship (see Appendix B). Once the interview took place, the data was coded into themes, and patterns were identified.

Sample Selection

There were several requirements needed of the focus group participants. These requirements were established to ensure valid and meaningful representation and participation in this study. First, participants needed to be current practising teachers who gave informed consent to participate. Second, they also needed to be educators who experienced teaching during the global Covid-19 pandemic. Third, participants were required to be working in the

elementary school setting. Finally, it was imperative to have equitable representation of all

grade levels being addressed in the research, Kindergarten to grade four. Therefore, the final

selected participants were six carefully chosen, practising educators with a variety of teaching

experience. Participant 1 was teaching Kindergarten and was in her 2nd year of teaching. She

was born and raised on the beautiful island of Jamaica. At the time of this study, she did not

have children of her own but she played a key role in raising her younger siblings who, at the

time of this research, were ages eight, sixteen, seventeen, twenty and twenty-one. She says, "I

am not their parent, but when they are with me (especially the youngest one), we talk about

ways that long hours on apps influence their behaviours, the way they view themselves, and

their interactions with their peers, family and others around them. Participant 2 was also

teaching a Kindergarten classroom and was in her 26th year of teaching. She is a mother to 5

children, ages eight, twelve, thirteen, seventeen and twenty, spanning across elementary,

middle, secondary and post secondary school settings. She has seen a range of digital use and

about a dozen years of navigating technology as both a parent and a teacher. Participant 3 was

teaching grade one and was in her 2nd year of teaching. She enjoys making and creating crafts.

Participant 4 was in her 29th year of teaching and was teaching grade two at the time of this

study. She is a mom to two adult children, one daughter and one son. She says, "I've watched

as my children have grown up and wanted cell phones and ipads… I learned to text as another

means of connecting with our daughter because that is her language and talking/sharing is

more difficult for her. We wrestled as parents when the "right" age was to properly manage

technology and tried different ways of managing… like putting phones on top of the fridge for

night times, etc." Participant 5 had been teaching grade three for four years at the time of this

study. She loved using technology in her classroom and used the pandemic as opportunity for

growth in digital citizenship. She also has a background in dance and enjoyed dancing all the

way through university. Finally, Participant six had been teaching for seven years and was

teaching grade four for three years at the time this focus group. She is a mom to five boys,

ranging in age from ten to twenty-three. She says, "I'm very, very concerned as a mom about

digital citizenship and how my boys conduct themselves online and also what they are exposed

to/influenced by online." All participants in the focus group came from diverse ethnic and

cultural backgrounds. Every participant was employed by an independent school, and all

obtained current teaching certification requirements.

Data Collection & Analysis

Once the focus study interview took place, the transcribed and recorded interview was

carefully analyzed. Line-by-line coding was completed to categorize and find patterns in the

data. Once the data was analyzed, a qualitative, data analysis approach was used to format and

accurately interpret the findings.

Procedures

The research began by getting approval and consent from the Executive Director of the

private institution being studied. Once this permission was received, it was included in the

application for research approval by the Institutional Research Board. Once approvals for

research had been given by the International Research Board, participants were recruited

through an approved process. They gave electronic informed consent, and then participated in

the focus group interview. The focus group was recorded and transcribed on a secure server, and all participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Validity and Reliability

Several steps were taken to maintain the validity and reliability of this study. An equal representation of all grade levels being studied was present. As well, a manageable number of participants were recruited, to ensure valuable and honest conversation. Since the focus group was conducted on Zoom, all participants were comfortable to respond in their own familiar setting. According to Kreuger et al., it is important to "Pick moderators who make people feel comfortable and who are good at listening" (2002, p. 5). I practised and conducted mock interviews to become a good moderator. The questions I asked during the interview were open-ended to ensure accurate responses. As well, transitions were used to move fluidly between each carefully sequenced question. Probing questions such as 'think-back' questions were used to move conversation along (Kreuger et al., 2002). The questions were varied in nature and ended with a question that elicited final comments or feedback from all participants.

Positionality and Assumptions

At the onset of my research, it became obvious that I was determined to find a solution to an apparent problem I anticipated finding because of this research. I was determined to discover the best way to support and educate others about how to teach digital citizenship in the elementary school. As a result of this awareness, I intentionally avoided leading or guiding questions that would make others assume this potential problem. I also became aware of my own bias, and what I interpret as problematic in the elementary school, may not be interpreted by others as a problem at all.

Digital Citizenship

Limitations of this Study

There are several limitations of this study. First, the participants used for the focus group were all from the same school and had similar experiences teaching during the global pandemic of Covid-19. As well, all participants were female. Finally, the collective teaching experience of participants was largely in the independent school setting, which may have limited the findings of the study.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate educators' perspective on the accessibility and efficacy of the role of digital citizenship in the elementary setting. A balanced population representing a variety of grade levels as well as teaching backgrounds provided valuable insight about digital citizenship in the elementary school. The findings and data are revealed in the next chapter.

<center>Chapter IV: Findings</center>

This qualitative research study attempted to address the question, how can teachers effectively teach and implement digital citizenship in a Kindergarten to grade 4 elementary school? The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of how elementary educators view digital citizenship in the current classroom. It is critical to recognize that at the time of this study, the participants had been teaching for two years during the global pandemic of Covid-19. Over those two years, these educators had participated in partial to full online teaching and learning. At the school being studied, learning did not cease at any point- it was expected that all educators provide some source of learning regardless of grade level. Online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and an in house, online platform called myLearning, were all used to facilitate learning. Therefore, these educators had significant impact and experience in guiding and directing young students in the area of digital citizenship. Digital citizenship continues to be of significant importance as the world continues to offer many online services, including education. This chapter reveals the findings of how educators in one district consider the varying approaches and needs to digital citizenship in their elementary school.

After conducting the focus group interview, each line of conversation was carefully coded and as a result, five themes emerged. Much of the discussion could live in one or more of these themes; however, a comprehensive look at the responses resulted in five critical areas:

1. Definition of digital citizenship

2. Unclear expectations about responsibility

3. Desire for clear boundaries and baselines to be set

  4. Administrative support for training

  5. Has the job description of teacher changed?

Definition of Digital Citizenship

The first question I asked the focus group was, what is your understanding of digital citizenship? The results of this question were surprising. Only two of the six participants responded, both suggesting that digital citizenship included safe and respectful use of technology. Participant 5 said that digital citizenship is, "using technology in a safe and respectful way" and Participant 4 said, "there are two parts to it, safety being one of them as the user, as well as respectful in terms of output and what is being put out there." As only two participants responded, this may suggest that there is a general lack of understanding about what the term digital citizenship means in the context of an elementary school setting. Nevertheless, this was the first question asked in the focus group interview, so we moved forward in the conversation with the assumption that these definitions were adequate and sufficient in the context of digital citizenship in the elementary school.

Unclear Expectations about Responsibility

A second theme that evolved was significant discussion about whose responsibility it is to teach elementary aged children about digital citizenship. The discussion went back and forth between being a home/parent or school/teacher responsibility. Participant 1 was adamant that the primary responsibility comes from the parents. This participant suggested eight times that the home is where digital citizenship should start, "a lot of it comes from home first," and "…at home, that's where the foundations are set," and, "I think it should start at home first, that's where everything starts, that's your foundation," and "it starts there [at home] first, before it

comes into the classroom." While the home/parent responsibilities are important, all six

participants agreed that the responsibilities of digital citizenship must be in partnership with

both home and school. Participant 4 suggests,

> I think it has to be both at home and at school because some kids will get some good
>
> digital citizenship input from their parents and some are free birds out there, doing their
>
> thing, and they can get themselves in trouble without even really planning to.

Participant 2 agreed saying, "that's that village, or as we call it here, a covenant community,

where we look out for one another and support." Of special consideration is Participant 5's

awareness to the different technology exposures students would have at school compared to at

home:

> They're [students are] exposed to different things at home than they are at school, we
>
> don't let them have iPhones here, and they're not watching YouTube videos or playing
>
> video games. It's different technology that we use at school versus what they do at
>
> home so there'll be different rules or things to teach that the parents will have to do
>
> versus what we have to do.

Participant 6 further stated, "I don't think I know where the line should be of what is my

responsibility, what parts I should be teaching as a teacher, and what parts are up to the

parents." There was uncertainty in the discussion about where the teaching and learning about

digital citizenship should come from. There were good arguments made supporting both the

home and school as critical to the development of digital citizenship. The discussion evolved

into the varying and differing expectations for digital citizenship; however, all participants

acknowledged and agreed on the need for a basic standard or set of guidelines adopted by the

school to help guide the practise of appropriate and effective digital citizenship. If a basic set of

'rules' or guidelines could be established, all participants agreed that this would allow for

increased success when addressing digital citizenship in the elementary classroom.

Desire for Clear Baselines and Boundaries

One key question asked in the focus group was, "do you teach digital citizenship

explicitly? Why or why not?" The responses to this question varied, although all six participants

commented that they do not have a specific digital citizenship program that is taught.

Participant 5 said, "we have a unit on friendship, and we talk about bullying and so I kind of add

some parts in there." Participant 3 said, "we talked about it a little bit when we had a few

devices brought to school and they were brought outside." Participant 4 said,

> I've never used that term [digital citizenship] with my kids. We have talked about safety
>
> with computers a little bit just in terms of what I allow them to click on and what I do
>
> not, but it's been pretty minimal this year.

Participant 6 also said, "I haven't taught it [digital citizenship] like that, but more just that it

comes up in conversation or devotions." Participant 2 said,

> I don't use it [digital citizenship] a lot, but if I'm going to play fun movement songs these
>
> ads always pop up…I draw a bit of attention to it, and say, "Oh, we're moving on,
>
> because our attention is on movement and we don't want to get distracted by whatever
>
> pops in front of our eyes."

The second half of the question asked the educators *why* they did or did not teach digital citizenship explicitly. Participant 6 suggested, "I don't think I've been given tons of tools and I don't think I've been given enough training to know what I'm talking about. And I guess I don't know what part I'm supposed to teach." Creating a baseline would provide protection for not only the school but also for the teacher implementing areas of digital citizenship. Participant 2 says, "it [a baseline] backs you up as a teacher too, you're not just speaking on your own. If you have the standards, you can stick to it a lot easier and other have your back." There is also uncertainty about what the rules or standards are when it comes to digital citizenship. Participant 2 suggests,

> That [baseline] would be one way, if I want to efficiently speak into that [digital citizenship], where's the baseline as they come into the school, and expectations, or some sort of communication. As a parent, I appreciate that. When the middle school does this with my kids, then I know, there's standards at home and there's standards at school, so we're all aware of what they are and there's no surprises.

Finally, this baseline would create a starting place that acknowledges the expectations around digital citizenship at the elementary school. As the discussion continued, it became clear that there is a desire to teach digital citizenship within a defined structure.

Administration: Key Stakeholders in Establishing a Baseline

Technology has become a tool used in all levels of education and due to the global pandemic of Covid-19, even the youngest stakeholders, children aged four and five, were required to engage in online learning at Abbotsford Christian School. This caused an urgent

need for developing this 'baseline' as my participants labelled it. This baseline is best

understood as a set of rules or guidelines, possibly in contract form, that is required for all

stakeholders at Abbotsford Christian Elementary School. This baseline would create a

foundation for all parents, staff, and students, and all participants would have a clear

understanding of expectations regarding digital citizenship. This begs the question: how will this

baseline be established and by whom? Towards the end of the discussion, the participants were

given opportunity to discuss anything else they felt relevant to our discussion. The conversation

carried on for quite some time, considering the role administration should have in developing

digital citizenship protocols at the elementary school. Participant 1 began the discussion bravely

proclaiming, "It's up to admin to ensure that they are providing professional development to

their teachers. It's up to admin to set aside the time, hopefully paid time." Participant 6 agreed,

stating,

> I think there is a standard for middle school and up, they've thought these things
>
> through. I think we've been left to figure it out ourselves at the elementary, and I think
>
> that's one thing that should change. The elementary should have guidelines and
>
> standards and expectations.

It is, however, recognized, that establishing this baseline becomes challenging in the ever-

evolving world of technology. Participant 4 suggested one of the potential obstacles: "It's very

challenging and especially in an area like digital citizenship that changes so often. You couldn't

write something today that is going to be relevant in a year or two. So how, as an

administration, do you choose something?" Nevertheless, participants agreed that developing a

baseline or standard, even something simplistic, would provide guidance for teachers and parents alike, further strengthening the home and school partnership.

Has the Job Description of Teacher Changed?

As the discussion continued, it became clear that the participants were weary when talking about yet another area of need in the classroom. Participant 4 claims, "It's getting tricky because there's less and less class time, we keep chipping away- we're going to do this, so then we cut a bit more away from reading, writing, arithmetic. How do we incorporate these peripheral things that are very important but still get through our core?" Still, there was no denying the necessity for addressing digital citizenship within the elementary classroom. Within the discussion, it became obvious that the most important step towards addressing these needs was determining the extent to which digital citizenship is taught, and what boundaries or baselines were needed before moving forward. Participant 6 suggests, "Maybe that's where they [administration] really have to figure out what is our responsibility, because we could take on responsibility for more and more and more things as a school." Once this baseline is established, participants felt as though they can move forward in pursuing best practises for digital citizenship. Participant 1 says, "there is that fear of how to tackle those [digital citizenship] issues, how to respond when something happens, but then with this [boundaries/baseline], we would have our basis, that's our foundation on this." Although these details are important, the participants also began discussing the job description of a teacher in a classroom today. Participant 4 says, "We are doing more and more though, like counselling and emotional management in teaching, I mean like, Wow! The amount of time I spend coaching- life coaching- is incredible, actually." Participant 2 even goes so far as to suggest, "So

maybe it's not now so much teaching to read, write and to do math, because you can find an

app for that! We have turned into social emotional coaches, spiritual advisors and nutritionists

and counsellors, and yeah!" The participants recognized the need to help foster and develop

young digital citizens. The conversation revealed a strong desire to teach digital citizenship well;

however, participants communicated that adding another responsibility to the workload of

teachers was overwhelming and daunting. Participants recognized the immense responsibility

of educating children today. While they agreed that their job description appeared to be

changing, their commitment to educating the whole child had not changed.

This chapter reviewed the qualitative data collected, coded and analyzed regarding

teacher's perceptions about digital citizenship in the elementary classroom. Further, it

considered major themes that evolved from the expertise of a diverse and purposive focus

group. First, a recurring theme in the focus group was developing and defining the meaning of

digital citizenship. While the focus group educators recognized the value and importance of

digital citizenship, few understood what it meant in the context of the classroom. These

findings were like Ribble's discovery, "There has been no universal agreement on how we

[educators] should act in relation to digital technologies" (2004, p. 11). I believe that

establishing a clear definition of what 'digital citizenship' means at the elementary school is a

first step to creating an understanding to teach from.

The second theme that emerged during the focus group was unclear expectations about

who's responsibility it is to teach elementary aged children about digital citizenship. The

discussion began with most participants agreeing that most responsibility should fall on the

parents and the home. However, as the discussion continued, it became evident that the school

must also be prepared to teach about and acknowledge at least some responsibility in teaching

digital citizenship. Much of the research indicated in the literature review agrees that schools

play an integral role in teaching students about digital citizenship. If we, as educators, are

expected to and want to use technology in the classroom, we must be willing to take some

responsibility in doing it properly.

A third theme that emerged from the discussion was a strong desire for clear

boundaries and a baseline about acceptable technology use within the elementary school. I

believe that creating this structure will provide a foundation for developing excellent digital

citizenship at the elementary school. All stakeholders, parents, teachers, staff and students will

have a good understanding of expectations. Furthermore, this structure will provide a basis to

establish good habits and behaviours that influence a digital citizen (see Appendix A).

Although creating a baseline or clear set of expectations is important, the participants

recognized that these expectations must be established by administration. They also recognized

that once these expectations were in place, administration would need to provide clear and

direct training for educators. Educators are all at different points of understanding when it

comes to technology, so adequate time and training must be given to those that require it.

Finally, the fifth theme that emerged was the recognition of the ever evolving and

changing job description of educators today. Participants recognized the immense

responsibility of adequately teaching and educating children about digital citizenship. While the

job description of the teacher seems to be changing, the commitment to quality education,

including digital citizenship, is admirable.

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The themes that emerged were unintended and resulted in a different discussion than I had anticipated. I appreciate that because of this discussion, there are several aspects about digital citizenship in the elementary setting that had not been considered in my research thus far. Specifically, the recognition of a changing job description as an educator. I look forward to future research about how to address the changing needs of children while also equipping teachers to accommodate these needs effectively.

Chapter V: Implications and Recommendations

Discussion of Findings

At the onset of my research, I was intrigued to research and discover information about digital citizenship in the elementary school setting. The question I attempted to answer was, how can teachers effectively teach and implement a digital citizenship program in a Kindergarten to grade four elementary school? Key findings related to the literature review were identified throughout the focus group discussion and are outlined in the following sections.

Digital citizenship in the elementary school.

While it became clear that there was an urgent need to establish and implement some sort of program, expectations, guidelines, or baseline in regard to digital citizenship, the participants agreed that it is a much bigger topic or discussion- it is not as simple as picking out a program and implementing it into an already busy workload. Similarly, the literature review revealed that while digital citizenship is important to address in the elementary school, a holistic approach to educating the child is best practise (Öztürk, 2021).

Teacher efficacy/educators' perception of digital citizenship in the elementary classroom.

Further to implementing digital citizenship protocols or curriculum, educators have a strong desire to be informed and to understand what is meant by digital citizenship. While they are committed to the successful development of students as digital citizens, educators have feelings of reluctance due to a lack of understanding themselves. Most importantly, educators want training and adequate support to teach digital citizenship effectively.

Digital citizenship during/after a global pandemic.

Finally, while the participants recognized the need for addressing and teaching digital citizenship in the classroom, there did not appear to be an increased sense of urgency due to the current global pandemic of Covid-19. My assumption had been that due to teaching in online spaces, participants would have case stories and experiences that revealed elementary student's lack of awareness and training in digital citizenship. Surprisingly, the biggest concern was the amount of time spent on technology, not the misuse of technology. Further, the research indicates that, "We have begun to re-envision our practice as teacher educators focusing on five interrelated themes: anti-racism, wellness, decolonisation, respect for the Land, and recognition of teacher expertise" (Hill et al., 2020, p. 572). If we move towards a better understanding of these themes, perhaps digital citizenship will result in better well-rounded citizens, even during or after a global pandemic.

Implications

The research helped to address gaps and areas of need in how to best support educators with effective and efficient teaching of digital citizenship. The results indicated a necessity to establish a baseline or set of expectations that all stakeholders must agree to. Once this baseline is established, a better understanding of digital citizenship can be incorporated organically into the elementary classroom. It is imperative to recognize that both home and school are integral to the development of the digital citizen. Finally, it is essential to support and equip educators with the necessary training on how to implement and teach about digital citizenship. Educators are more likely to implement digital citizenship procedures when they are confident themselves.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, the participants used for the focus group were all from the same school and had similar experiences teaching during the global pandemic of Covid-19. Second, the research was conducted during a difficult teaching time- the participants were already feeling a heavy weight of the teaching responsibilities that were increased due to the pandemic. Research was therefore limited in that educators were speaking from an exhausting and trying time in their teaching careers. Third, all participants were female; however, this was not intentional. The female to male ratio of educators at Abbotsford Christian School is two to thirty-one. A final limitation to this research was the collective teaching experience of participants was largely in the independent school setting, which may have limited the findings of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is needed in deciding which areas of digital citizenship are most appropriate and needed at the elementary level. As was revealed in the findings, different applications of technology are used depending on the setting. Technology use in the school is different than technology use in the home. In the school setting, the question must be considered: who is most qualified and equipped to establish such procedures? The participants in this focus group expressed a deep concern for who would do the work of implementing best practises in regard to digital citizenship. What kind of training is needed to establish these guidelines? Finally, future research in the area of monitoring and evaluating effective digital citizenship practises at the elementary level would be highly beneficial for schools worldwide.

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Conclusion

The findings of this focus group study revealed the educator's desire to develop and implement an age-appropriate digital citizenship plan at the elementary school level. There is also an understanding that the partnership between home and school is critical to the development of digital citizens. There are some clear action items that can be explored to address digital citizenship in the elementary school setting. These suggestions are adapted and modified based on information provided by Ryan Berardi, a doctoral thesis candidate on the topic of digital citizenship (2015, p. 88):

1. Include digital citizenship within the elementary school planning documents.

2. Create a unified support system of well-informed and collaborative adults by including parent leaders in the community during planning meetings. Discuss how the school and home setting are able to support one-another.

3. Create opportunities for teachers to observe best practices, to teach their colleagues their particular strengths within digital citizenship, and to utilize resources that will allow staff members to feel abreast of present updates.

4. Employ digital citizenship instruction that enables all students to pre-discuss situation specific scenarios, engage in digital communication, and reflect on the strengths, as well as the needs, of individuals and the entire group.

Finally, while the job description of the teacher may be changing, the commitment to providing a safe and respectful digital environment remains paramount to the education of children today.

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Appendix A

Ribble's Nine Elements of Digital Citizenship

1. Etiquette: electronic standards of conduct or procedure

2. Communication: electronic exchange of information

3. Education: the process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology

4. Access: full electronic participation in society

5. Commerce: electronic buying and selling of goods

6. Responsibility: electronic responsibility for actions and deeds

7. Rights: those freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world

8. Safety: physical well-being in a digital technology world

9. Security (self-protection): electronic precautions to guarantee safety

(Ribble, 2012, p. 150).

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of digital citizenship?

2. Is digital citizenship important for elementary aged children? Why or why not?

3. If you answered *yes* to question #2, Who should be responsible for teaching elementary

   aged children about digital citizenship?

4. Do you teach digital citizenship explicitly? Why or why not?

5. If you teach digital citizenship, how do you teach it?

6. If you don't teach it, why not?

7. Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed your view of digital citizenship?

8. How could you, as an elementary school teacher, *efficiently* teach digital citizenship?

9. How could you, as an elementary school teacher, *effectively* teach digital citizenship?

10. Is there anything you'd like to mention about digital citizenship that we haven't discussed?

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Appendix C

Consent Form

Consent to Participate in ████████ Focus Group

Digital Citizenship in the Elementary Classroom- Conducted through Western Washington University

Dear Teachers,

Introduction

I am asking you to be in a research study. Participation is voluntary. The purpose of this form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about anything that is not clear. When I have answered all of your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." Please save a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a focus group endorsed by Western Washington University, under the direction of myself, ████████. The purpose of this focus group is to look at the role of digital citizenship in the elementary school. The information in this focus group may be used to determine how to implement and teach digital citizenship at ████████ ████████.

Procedure

1. As part of this study, you will participate in a small group discussion with other education professionals from ███.
2. For this study, I have received approval from both ████████ and the Institutional Review Board through Western Washington University.
3. The interview will take place on Zoom and will be audio and video recorded and will be transcribed. The duration of the interview will be approximately 1 hour.
4. I will take every precaution to protect your information, though no guarantee of security can be absolute. I believe the chances of you being identified are low due to the protections in place for your privacy.

Please note there are no right or wrong answers to focus group questions. I want to hear the

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many varying viewpoints and would like for everyone to contribute their honest thoughts. Out of respect, please allow all participants equal time to respond to the questions. Please be honest with your responses, even if your responses differ from others in the discussion.

Benefits and Risks

Your participation may benefit you and other teachers at ███████████████ by helping implement an effective and efficient digital citizenship program. No risks are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation.

Confidentiality

Your data will be kept on a secure server. You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group, and you may stop at any time during the course of the study. If you choose to withdraw from the focus group after the recorded interview, we will delete your portion of the interview after the study completes and the information you provide in the interview will not be used in the research.

Contact

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. After the discussion, I will analyze the data, but- as stated above- your responses will remain confidential, meaning that no names will be included in any reports. All recordings will be deleted after the research is complete.

Your data will not be used or distributed for future research without your additional informed consent.

Thank you for considering, I look forward to a possible discussion with you. Please follow the link below to provide informed consent.

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact:

██
███████   █████████████████████
████████████

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If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Western Washington University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) at ████████████████████████████

By clicking "Yes, I agree to participate," you confirm that you understand this information, are 19 years old or older, and agree to participate.

Link to provide informed consent:
██

Appendix D

Recruitment Email

Good afternoon!

I hope you are all well and enjoying the hope this new season of Spring brings! I am personally enjoying the warmer temperatures and taking my classes outside more often.

I am writing to you today requesting for your participation in a focus study group. As some of you are aware, I am doing some course work about digital citizenship in the elementary classroom. I am wondering if you would consider being part of a focus group that would participate in an online interview on Zoom? If you would consider, please see the attached consent form for more information. Should you choose to participate, please sign the consent form, and return to my mailbox or email me a picture of your signed copy. Thank you in advance for your consideration, I look forward to our conversation.