Digital Citizenship

Saskatchewan School Library Association

SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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This article was originally published in the Living Sky School Division Newsletter.

Facebook, MySpace, cell phones, YouTube, Flickr and cell phones with multi-media capabilities… our students' online presence is growing along with their ability to connect with people from all over the world. Our first response is often one of fear and a desire to protect our children from any dangers they might encounter in this new online world that we don't understand. Blocking, banning and filtering may seem to be the best options but are they really?

Students are already using these tools in their daily life but I question, no, I know that they are not always using them ethically, responsibly or with full knowledge of what information is being extracted about them. However, when we block, ban and filter we isolate them from the real world and abdicate responsibility for teaching them how to be knowledgeable and safe online.

As the doors to the world open wider teacher-librarians will need to be even more vigilant in their efforts to defend students' right to read and their access to information. Banning, blocking, filtering are the new censorship tools of the 21st century. In the Web 2.0 world it is the medium not just the information that is censored. Blogs, wiki's IM, video and photosharing applications are now tools that are must-haves not only for the finding and consuming of information but to enable our students to be active participants in the creation and contribution of knowledge. Closing those doors will prevent our students from participating fully in the global community.

We can teach our students to protect themselves but we can only do this by using the very tools that they use to teach valuable lessons about ethics, responsibility, privacy and safety. This means a new learning curve for many of us as the technology is used in ways in which we may be neither familiar nor comfortable. However, as teacher-librarians incorporate the tools of the read/write web into their management, teaching and instructional leadership roles they will have a greater understanding of how to teach students to use online tools and information ethically, responsibly and safely.

Living Sky School Division's *Acceptable Use Policy* reflects the new thinking about the importance of education as a way to protect our students. Each school is expected to develop an *Acceptable Use Policy* within the parameters of the school division policy including a digital citizenship program for students and an outreach program to ensure that parents and community are informed about the many ways that technology will be used by their children to learn, to communicate, to collaborate and to contribute.

Luseland School in the Living Sky School Division has started the process of developing their policy. The in-school instructional technology support teacher, Priscilla Fjeldstom, is sharing her observations about the process by posting the draft document and her reflections on her blog.

> Ultimately I believe the staff response to be very, very positive. They had made good comments and had valid points. It was good to get them all involved and present it so that we could all be on the same page. Students will not be able to play us off of each other if we are consistent, and this is the key to successfully implementing this new policy. I believe that this could work; it may need 'tweaking' but that is to be expected of any new policy. So a trial run, then possibly an amended policy for the new school year.

As Priscilla has noted, staff involvement, discussion and consensus are key factors in creating a document that will guide student, teacher and parent knowledge about safe, effective and responsible use of the internet.

Resources:

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