Developing Ethical Direction

When you read or hear an unethical suggestion, such as "Steal this article and sell it to another magazine," we're guessing that your internal compass indicates "wrong direction." In other words, your internal voice says, "No, that would be wrong!" Your internal compass tells you when something is right and something is wrong. In our example, your voice would be right—this article is copyrighted and stealing it would be illegal, as well as unethical.

Everyone has an internal compass, but adults need to teach children how to find and use it. *True north* tells us when we are going in the right direction and when we are going in some other direction. The complexity of technology and how society chooses to address technology use make it difficult for students to find true north.

Though we no longer use a compass regularly in 21st century education, it becomes an apt metaphor for describing how school-age children make decisions for using digital technology.

See Digital Citizenship and the Digital Compass Activity on page 38 for some scenarios that require students to use their internal compasses. Inevitably, students' responses to the scenarios will be varied. They will not always agree on what is right or wrong.

Why is there such discrepancy in the compass readings? True north should point students in the right direction every time, right? We believe a major reason is that students have not been taught to use their internal compass when using technology—they have not been taught the basic tenets of digital citizenship, which can be defined as how you behave when using technology.

If teachers are going to teach students about the potential dangers of misusing and abusing technology in the 21st century, a digital citizenship compass becomes a handy tool. Learning digital citizenship is rooted in discussion and dialogue and not in acceptable use policies (AUPs) that are simply lists of dos and don'ts.

Interpreting the Answers

None of the scenarios has easy answers. Students will not always agree on what is right and wrong because they have not learned the tenets of digital citizenship. Students often argue that there are shades of gray when interpreting each scenario. The purpose of the compass metaphor activity is to help students analyze the concept

of technology use and misuse. Teachers should review the following compass directions to better understand student opinions and to guide them toward appropriate technology use.

Wrong. Hopefully, students know the difference between right and wrong technology use. However, a small number of students cause problems for all other students. As a consequence, it is important to allow all students to explore their feelings about technology use, misuse, and abuse.

What's the Big Deal? Often students don't consider how others may feel about their behavior, and they believe "if it doesn't bother me, why should it bother anyone else?" Students traveling in this direction can't understand what the big fuss is all about. The teacher needs to help these students see beyond their own personal use of technology.

As Long As I Don't Get Caught. Students choosing this direction believe technology is there to be used, and everything will be fine as long as no one else knows. The trouble with this attitude is that what we do or do not do can and often does affect others around us. Many students know what they are doing is not right, but they believe that if no one knows, that makes it acceptable.

It's an Individual Choice. As technology becomes smaller and more familiar, it becomes integrated in our being. Because my cellular phone is mine, then what I do with it is my concern. These students believe that technology use is a right and not a privilege. Simply put, they don't want others to tell them how to use their technology.

Depends on the Situation. Some situations do lend themselves to new interpretations, but there is usually an overarching understanding of appropriate use of digital technology. There are times when a student needs to know that some activities are appropriate in one situation but can be inappropriate in another.

I Don't Know. Some students acquire technology with little or no training. They may not know what is appropriate or inappropriate. But, ignorance of the rules cannot be used as a defense of technology misuse or abuse. Digital technology citizenship skills must be learned before using technology.

I Am Not Sure It's Wrong. This is the path of the student who understands some aspects of technology but only knows enough to be dangerous. Sometimes, this can be worse than having no training at all. When no digital citizenship training is provided, students learn from others and can get poor advice.

Right. Going in the right direction of technology use is not as easy as it might seem. Even seasoned users of technology often travel in a misguided direction. The best way to help others to understand the right direction is through discussion, self-reflection, and role modeling.

Stimulating Additional Digital Citizenship Discussion

Explore the reasons behind student answers. Pose questions such as:

- Why do you feel that way?
- What would your parents say about this situation?
- What would adults do if they were faced with the same situation?
- Who are the role models of good digital citizenship behavior?

Brainstorm consequences for abusing and misusing technology with your students. Develop a set of digital citizenship behaviors that can be posted and used as a code of conduct when using technology. Discuss what can be done to help other students—and adults—understand the concept of digital citizenship.

Conclusions and Implications

The strength of the digital citizenship compass is that it does not dictate a set of right and wrong behaviors but is a tool that helps show that there are gradations of understanding when it comes to technology use and abuse. The digital compass assists teachers in stimulating dialogue and self-reflection. This activity resonates with students because they recognize it as real life. By having students reflect on the concept of true north as well as the other compass directions, teachers can help students understand appropriate technology use.

Digital citizenship needs to become a priority in school curriculum and staff development programs. Students need a way to find true north. Technology misuse and abuse is a societal problem that has reached an all-time high. Today's students are tomorrow's adults, and habits learned as a child follow us into adulthood. If school district curriculum and staff development programs do not begin to address digital citizenship, the problem will only get worse.

Students as well as adults are in various stages of development or understanding of digital citizenship. Some students have a good understanding of true north when using technology while others have not been given the opportunity to

By Mike S. Ribble and Gerald D. Bailey

Subject: Digital citizenship

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Standards: *NETS•S* 2; *NETS•T* II, VI (http://www.iste.org/nets/)

Supplement: http://www.iste.org/ll

Digital Citizenship and the Digital Compass Activity

Directions. Give each student a copy of the 21st century digital compass image. (***Editor's note:*** A version of the image is used on p. 36, and it is available as an online supplement to this article at http://www.iste.org/ll/. The author authorizes non-commercial use and duplication of this image.) Read the following scenarios. Instruct students to point to the direction that matches their opinion. After everyone makes a choice, allow students to analyze their answers.

Scenario 1. A student sends a harassing e-mail to another student. The receiving student retaliates with a "flaming e-mail." Is sending harassing and flaming e-mail messages wrong?

Scenario 2. When hanging out with friends, one of the students gets a cell phone call and conducts a loud conversation in a public place. Is talking in a loud voice on a mobile phone in a public place right?

Scenario 3. A student logs on to a file sharing Web site and downloads the newest song. Is downloading music from the Internet wrong?

Scenario 4. A student has a file on a disk that has been infected with a virus and uses it with school computers. Is it right to use files without checking for a virus?

Scenario 5. An hour before class, a student remembers that a writing assignment is due. The student goes to the library, logs on to a Web site, and copies/pastes information without giving credit to the authors. Is using Internet materials without giving credit to the authors wrong?

Scenario 6. At home, a student uses a software package to copy movies from DVDs for his or her friends. Is copying copyrighted materials right?

Scenario 7. Two students use text messaging on their cellular phones to pass information between them during class. Is it wrong to send text messages during class?

Scenario 8. A team of students create a Web site for a teacher at school, but the site cannot be read by students with special needs. Is it right to create Web sites that are not accessible to students with disabilities?

Scenario 9. During a regular class session, students use their handheld computers to beam information back and forth. Is it wrong to beam during class?

Scenario 10. Students obtain a copy of the final exam from the teacher's computer by hacking the password. Is hacking into the teacher's computer wrong?

discuss misusing and abusing technology. Digital citizenship is a developmental process of critical thinking, self-reflection, and maturation. Learning digital citizenship is a lifelong journey.

Teachers, administrators, and parents need to become a part of the discussion. Teachers are not solely responsible for teaching digital citizenship. It takes the entire community.

There is much to learn. The digital citizenship Web site at http://coe.ksu.edu/digitalcitizenship/ has many examples of appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology. The authors provide definitions of digital citizenship as well as materials that teachers can use.

There will never be a better time to start teaching digital citizenship. Begin by using the compass activity and compass metaphor. Get your students to discuss technology use and misuse, and start them on their journey.

The next time you get hate mail, cut-and-paste papers, or discover beamed cheating on a test, think about the importance of raising a generation that understands and practices effective digital citizenship. The time for action is long overdue.

Mike S. Ribble serves as the instructional services coordinator for the College of Education at Kansas State University. He has worked as a network manager at Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Nebraska. He was an assistant principal and before that a science teacher at Bishop Carroll High School in Wichita, Kansas.

Dr. Gerald D. Bailey is a professor of educational leadership in the College of Education at Kansas State University. His areas of specialty are technology leadership and staff development. Prior to earning his doctorate at the University of Nebraska, he worked as a classroom teacher, demonstration teacher, and supervisor in the Lincoln (Nebraska) Public Schools.