

Ethical Issues in Educational Technology

Ethical issues in Education Technology involves several different aspects, including proper “netiquette”, student safety and privacy, unauthorized access at school, and objectionable materials showing up at school. This is an important responsibility for teachers in the classroom that use technology in the classroom. As teachers are encouraged to use technology in the classroom, cyber ethics should also be a part of the curriculum. Jerry Crystal states, “Educators do need to address cyber ethic, but they can address it in the context of their current curriculum and incorporate the lessons into ongoing programs.” (as cited in Starr, 2003, n.p.)

Proper network etiquette or “netiquette” is a necessary skill for all people. Children are taught to respect adults, be courteous to everyone, never say anything mean, and other life skills from the time they were begin to speak. Cyber ethics should be viewed with the same skills. Shea (n.d.) has listed 10 core rules to proper netiquette. Because most people use a computer to communicate, the first rule states to remember that there is a human being with feelings on the receiving end of your communication. Secondly, remember that you have to follow the law in person and on the Internet. The third rule of proper “netiquette” recommends that you look around the site before you say anything so that you do not say anything improper. The fourth rule talks about sending the right information to the right people. The fifth rule is important because it explains that you should know what you are talking and to express yourself with using proper grammar and vocabulary. Sixth, share your expertise with others. The seventh rule denotes that you should not continually send angry letters and notes about the same thing to the same people. Rules eight and nine have to do with privacy. Respect other people’s privacy. The tenth rule has to do with being nice about correcting people. These skills are important to all people. Being a teacher, it is important to convey to students the importance of knowing these skills. Crystal states, “Above all, don't separate the online world and the offline world. Try to blend them together. It's the same world online and off. Just because there's a sense of anonymity online doesn't mean the rules change.” (as cited in Starr, 2003, n.p.) The younger students learn about these rules, the better. They are already learning it as “life skills”, now these skills can be transferred to their online communities.

Student safety and privacy is another important aspect of cyber ethics that teachers are responsible for in the classroom. Williard (2006) states, “The Children's Internet Protection Act requires that school districts develop an Internet safety plan addressing the unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal identification information regarding minors. School districts need to consider a variety of issues as they attempt to comply with this safety plan requirement.” The Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) states, “The high-speed Internet has made the Web much more interactive, with communication possibilities expanded beyond the written word. While young people tend to adopt new technologies more quickly than adults, many do not have the experience or knowledge to understand the potential risks. Parents, educators, and community members must encourage students to take advantage of the Internet’s benefits while reducing its risks.” As a parent, I would expect teachers to keep my child safe from dangerous or risky situations. I also understand the benefit of students being able to communicate with students from other countries and exchanging cultural and traditional information. It is the responsibility of the teacher and the parents to teach and model safe online communication with others. The younger the students begin learning about appropriate online behavior the better. Reminding students regularly helps reinforce the idea that these rules are in place for their safety. The Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) states that “students must understand that people are not always who they say they are. They should never give out personal information without an adult’s

permission, especially if it conveys where they can be found at a particular time. They should understand that predators are always present on the Internet. Students should recognize the various forms of *cyberbullying* and know what steps to take if confronted with that behavior.” Peter Gulotta recommends,

Establish a good relationship with kids. The kids who are most vulnerable to online predators are those who are already troubled and who don't have a good relationship with a trusted adult. Control the online environment. Don't allow kids to use a screen profile or provide personal information online. Predators will put a kid on a buddy list, look for the child whenever he or she is online, gradually become a confidant, and eventually start talking about sexual topics. Be frank about what's out there. No one knows you're a dog when you're on the Internet and there are a lot of people out there with terrible intentions. Kids need to know that. Do not post student photos on the Internet. It's tantamount to putting personal information online. "We're not saying your child is going to be hurt if his or her picture is on the Internet. We're saying they could be. Know what the parameters are; know what these people are doing; and then make your own decisions. (as cited in Starr, 2000, n.p.)

Cyberbullying is a new term that involves the safety of students in the digital world. "Cyberbullying" is when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones.” (Stop Cyberbullying, n.d.) The safety of our students is the teacher's goal. Crystal (2003) believes that "if we provide positive images and effectively communicate ethical values in all areas of their lives, those values will be reflected in the technological environment as well. How we teach kids to view themselves and their use of technology at this level is what they will carry with them into adulthood," (as cited in Starr, 2003, n.p.)

Another important aspect of ethical issues of technology in the classroom is the unauthorized access to certain websites at school, downloading unauthorized software or games, and downloading music or movies illegally. This is another part of trying to keep students safe while they are online. According to Crystal, “the most common problem isn't hacking (illegally accessing Web sites) or cracking (vandalizing Web sites); It's the unauthorized downloading of games and software.” (as cited in Starr, 2003, n.p.) It is amazing to me when students confide that they can get around the firewalls at the school to get different social networks. These students know that it's wrong. These students also know that there are consequences to these acts, but they still do it. I have heard of students gaining access to the school files. These students know they are committing a crime, but they think it is funny and that nothing bad is going to happen to them. Students also know that downloading current music and movies is illegal, but they still do it. Recently, I know that students don't have to use a computer at school to get to these types of websites. They have begun to use the Internet on their cell phones. So, what's the answer? Crystal answers that they deal with those cases by making students aware that how technology is used is as much an ethical issue as hacking or cracking. "If everyone does whatever they want on a network, it uses up a ton of space and interferes with other users. ... If they download a virus along with the software, they risk destroying the entire system -- incurring a tremendous financial loss." (as cited in Starr, 2003, n.p.) Students need to think about what they do and who they are affecting when committing these actions. By making students accountable for their actions, they are learning to be responsible cyber citizens. One answer is having students and parents sign an acceptable use policy that was created by the school district to make students responsible and aware of behaviors and consequences. To make it even more

concise, I believe all teachers should their own acceptable use policy to use in their own classroom as well as the school district. Students can contribute to the rules and consequences of the policy making them co-creators of the policy. Students should also be reminded and warned about their online behaviors and what is appropriate and inappropriate while working on the school computers. In this way, they know what to expect and what happens when considering unauthorized access.

Objectionable material is another part of cyber ethics in the classroom. I have heard a story of a group of boys who were able to gain access to a computer room where they searched for x-rated material on the computer and ended up broadcasting it to the entire school through the televisions. At my school, there were incidents of students having pictures of x-rated materials that were printed on school computers. Starr (2000) cites a study conducted for The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) that found that one in four regular Internet users younger than 17 was exposed to unwanted sexually oriented pictures online *during the past year*. (n.p.) NCMEC recommends that teachers talk specifically to students about the diversity of online dangers, including threats from youthful and female offenders, make students and parents aware of the existence and locations of resources for reporting and dealing with Internet offenses, develop different prevention and intervention strategies for youth of different ages, and encourage young people to take responsibility for youth-oriented parts of the Internet and to help clean up standards of Internet behavior. (as cited in Starr, 2000, n.p.) Students and parents need to know that this type of curiosity and searching, whether at school or at home, can lead to even more dangerous behavior such as meeting sexual predators or can lead to sexual harassment. Again, I will mention that teachers can include the prohibition of searching for these sites on their acceptable use policy as well as keeping a close eye on student access to computers.

Ultimately, I believe students and parents need to be made aware of all the dangers in cyberspace. A collaboration of teaching proper online etiquette and behavior between teachers and parents is where it needs to begin. Teachers can lecture and warn students of online dangers, but these students also have access to computers at home, or at friend's homes, or even on their cell phones. Crystal discusses that schools should, "develop a detailed universal plan for technology use and lay it out for everyone at once. Hold training sessions for parents and kids together. Show videos and discuss the issues. Make it clear to everyone that the ethical rules they live by also apply to technology." (as cited in Starr, 2003, n.p.) The first step is that all teachers should develop an appropriate acceptable use policy for their classroom use of computers. Students can be invited to contribute their ideas and rules. Teachers can also forward these to parents for review and input before a last copy is created. These policies will give students more freedom and responsibility when using computers in school and home. Teachers can also regularly review this policy with students, just in case they forget what appropriate and inappropriate online behavior involves. I think this would make it perfectly clear what student expectations are and they are able to focus on the assignments.

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