

Chapter 5

Digital Citizenship in Participatory Culture

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ABSTRACT

Global participatory digital culture provides collaborative learning opportunities beyond physical walls and without time constraints. Learners connect across the planet in real time. The virtual representation of self requires understanding the personal responsibility for digital citizenship and information literacy. Both the presentation of self and evaluation of content in all formats are new challenges for learners of all ages, including the youngest students born into an age of sharing and connecting. Virtual learning environments may transform education and certainly provide both advantages and disadvantages for educators and learners. Understanding the personal responsibility for digital citizenship is imperative to identify the best practices of education in virtual spaces. This chapter focuses on digital citizenship and information literacy in virtual worlds, virtual reality, and immersive learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

Learning in the 21st century has radically changed due to the toppling of the information hierarchy leading to a critical need for digital citizenship in participatory culture. We no longer live in an era of linear acquisition of knowledge by the individual with traditional publishing sources housed in libraries and carefully selected by “gatekeepers” at the top of the hierarchy. Participatory culture, a world where individuals have instant access to information on mobile devices and a vast array of content creation and curation applications, has allowed crowdsourced and user-generated content to overtake traditional sources in only a few years. In order to “participate” in participatory culture, through online tools and networks, digital citizenship has become critical. Without an understanding of the evaluation of information in the new gatekeeper-free era, an individual can be lost in an overwhelming flood of information. This chapter focuses on challenges presented by the change from a hierarchy of knowledge acquisition to one of global instant access and a critical need for personal responsibility for learning. This awareness of digital citizenship is imperative to the future of learning both for the individual and for our society.

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An example of participatory culture is Wikipedia, the largest encyclopedia in the world created by users across the globe which began with popular culture but (Joseph Deodato believes) is not fully embraced by politics and education. Deodato says, “However, the participatory culture of the Web, as constructed by online forums, blogs, social networks, and massively multiplayer games, empower users by offering opportunities to participate, create, interact, and engage in decision-making” (Deodato, 2014, p. 746). The ability to participate in networked culture presents a need for responsible behavior.

Today, no matter which devices or technology applications we use, each one of us lives and learns in a virtual world more often than in a physical one. The walls of physical classrooms have been lifted and learners can communicate through social media, Skype, or numerous live online formats. The shift to learning in a virtual world has powerful advantages but also has disadvantages and obstacles both obvious and hidden. Awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of virtual learning is part of digital citizenship. Through exploring and reflecting on how literacy and learning have rapidly changed, the need for digital citizenship becomes clear for ourselves and for learners of the future. Whether or not one experiences global digital participatory culture with an avatar in a simulated environment, we all live in a virtual world with mobile devices at our fingertips taking us to places beyond our physical bodies.

Background of Participatory Culture

Participatory culture can be defined as “a culture in which private persons (the public) do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers (prosumers). The term is most often applied to the production or creation of some type of published media” (Wikipedia, 2016).

Schools and libraries are embracing participatory culture and the Web 2.0 tools that arose at the turn of the 21st century, such as image and video creation, mash-ups and curation tools. Librarians like Buffy Hamilton at Creekview High School in Georgia, believe strongly in participatory culture as a way to promote inquiry-based collaborative learning through blogs, wikis, and building virtual learning portfolios. Hamilton says, “The participatory culture is also conducive to helping students create personal learning networks and environments to cultivate resources for accessing, evaluating, and sharing information locally and with the world” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 41). This move toward participatory culture has created a need for PLNs, Personal (or Professional) Learning Networks as a way to learn and discover trends and changes because it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to keep up with the exponential growth and change of computer technology. A PLN can be considered as a personally curated network of individuals to share learning opportunities, particularly in online platforms.

Educators and librarians utilize Twitter for the development of global professional networks as well as for ongoing professional development. Information science professor, Judi Moreillon, conducted a netnographic case study of librarians using Twitter for professional development. Moreillon concluded, “As they appropriate Twitter purposefully to achieve desired outcomes —school librarian PD [professional development]— participants demonstrate and develop 21st-century literacy practices” (Moreillon, 2015, p. 136). A netnographic methodology is an ethnographic study done entirely online.

Through social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others) and curation sites (Pinterest, Tumblr, ScoopIt and others) older students have instant access to shared content on a global scale. Younger students can utilize apps for learning and creating content, such as ShowMe Interactive Whiteboard or Skitch for adding text to images. Even kindergarteners are creating video book reports using augmented reality apps to link images and video into presentations that can be shared. Participatory culture means students are no longer bound by physical classroom walls. Through Skype and numerous online tools,

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