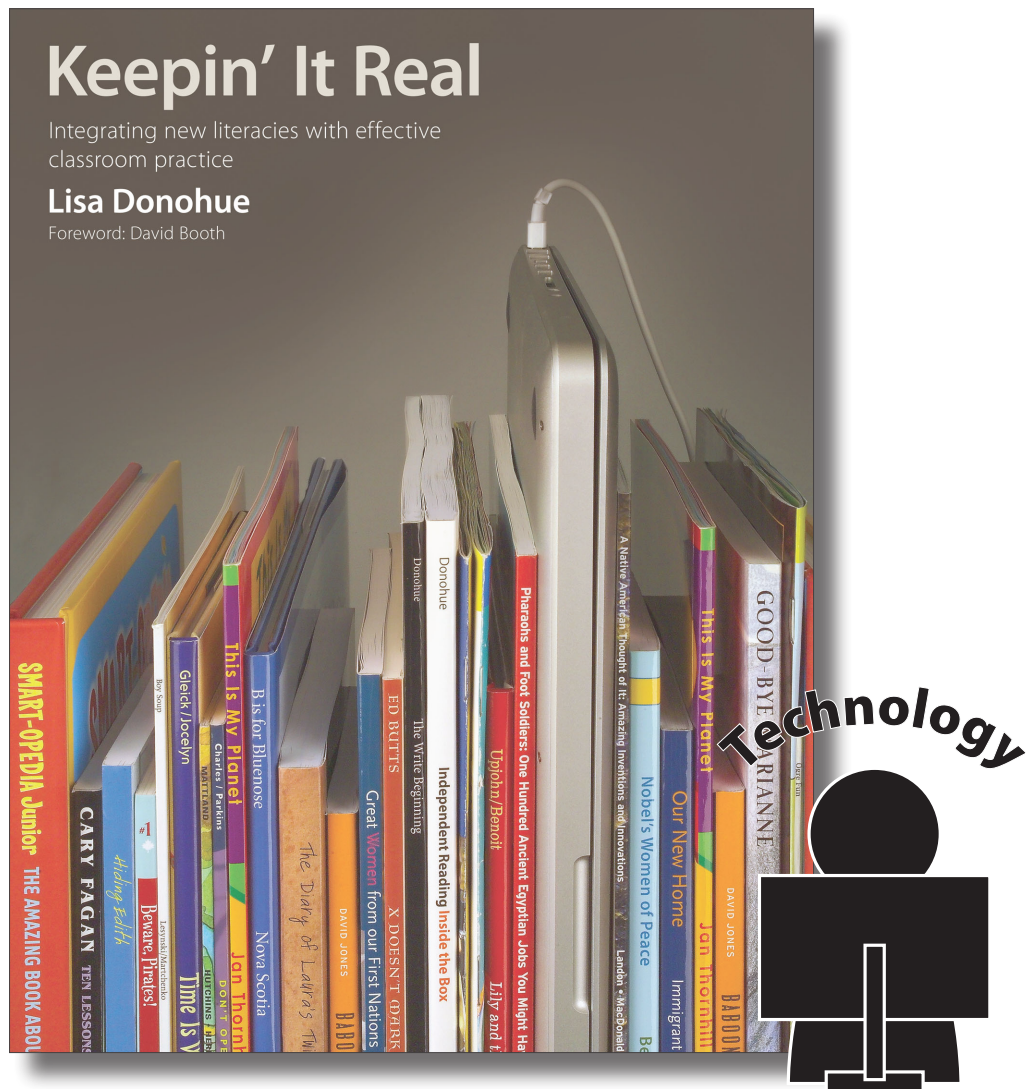


Digital Literacy

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Moving Into the Digital World

The Internet has brought the world into our homes and classrooms, and has provided us with a broader audience with which we can communicate. We can engage in face-to-face interactions or online communications that allow us to communicate with virtually anyone, anywhere. Social networking in the digital world has required us to become even more socially literate. Ironically, the biggest challenge that comes with broadening the circle of people with whom we communicate is that too often we lose sight of the fact that we are still communicating with real people in real places. We lose the human aspect of communication. Social literacy in the digital world requires a set of communication skills similar to those we use in the real world.

Netiquette

What is netiquette? Derived from the words “network” and “etiquette,” netiquette refers to a set of guidelines that help people use good manners when working in cyberspace. Often, when students are communicating electronically, they lose touch with the reality that they are interacting with other people. Some of the nuances of face-to-face communication are lost. They can’t use their facial expressions, tone of voice, or body language to help convey the message. Therefore, users need to be very careful of the words they choose to express themselves. Students need to be aware that their messages are taken literally and at face value; they need to be articulate and clear. When communicating with others online, they need to represent themselves in the best way possible—grammar and spelling do count! When your students are responding to the work of others, encourage them to make suggestions or ask questions instead of criticizing. Finally, students need to remember to treat each other with respect. They should never say anything online that they would not be comfortable saying in person.

Some teachers create netiquette norms with their students. A list of such rules might look like this:

- Use proper words and sentences.
- Be respectful and considerate of others’ work. Never criticize someone’s work; instead provide feedback or suggestions that may help them improve.
- Before posting your work, make sure you have checked it carefully and it represents your best thinking. Check your work for spelling, grammar, and clarity of ideas.
- Always be polite and use appropriate language. Never post something that will humiliate, embarrass, threaten, or discriminate against someone.
- Tell your teacher if you encounter anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. Never respond to inappropriate posts.

www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html

“Everyone needs to have good manners when they’re working with the computers. We need to be polite just like in real-life.”

—Marcus (Grade 3)

Creating a Social Identity

Many youngsters use social networking sites as a way of keeping in touch with their friends. They share stories, post pictures, and update their status on a regular basis. Many adolescents consider this an extension of their face-to-face social network. Unfortunately, many of them are oblivious to the public nature of the forum. Students need to be aware that they are creating an online social identity. The things they post can be easily accessed by schools, potential employers, and other organizations. Students need to realize that, in this day of social literacies, the words they use and the image they convey matter. And that image can follow them for a very long time. They may feel that the information they post on these sites is personal and private; however, if they are using a public forum, they need to consider the ramifications.

Cyberbullying

The Journal of Adolescent Health (2007) found that more than 80% of adolescents owned at least one form of digital technology used for communicating with others, presenting information about themselves, and sharing media creations. While the digital world has many benefits, there are risks associated with being so intricately connected, including giving bullies access to a whole new medium for targeting others.

With the high prevalence of digital access, the best approach to reduce cyberbullying is education. Students need to understand the reality of both sides of bullying. Victims need to know what to do if they are being bullied, and perpetrators need to realize that they are not as anonymous as they may feel. While some students might feel powerful behind the keys of a computer, others can feel powerless. Neither is the truth. If a student ever feels bullied, threatened, intimidated, or belittled, he/she should immediately print a copy of the communication that made him/her feel this way. The student should in no way respond; instead he/she should share the information immediately with an adult. Police take cyberbullying very seriously and have the tools to trace the source of the message.

Teachers should work with students to develop netiquette norms for online communications. They should also help students identify risks they may encounter. Educating our students about the risks and realities of cyberbullying is our best line of defense.

Streetproofing for the 21st Century

When I was a child, I remember the day I was entrusted with a key to our home. It was a great honor to be finally old enough to be trusted with a set of keys. This honor came with a great deal of responsibility. I knew that I was never to let a stranger into the house, I should never admit to being home alone, and I was to inform my parents should I misplace the key. As a child, I clearly understood the dangers. I could see the risk of someone entering our home and I could imagine the potential dangers.

It was much easier to detect danger when it was staring me in the face. Now the risks are much more subtle. Through the use of technology, the world is never far away. And, for the most part, that's a good thing. However, there is the danger that children can encounter people with ulterior motives. Streetproofing our kids is an essential social skill.

Evolution in Action

Will Richardson, a strong advocator for digital learning, has said, "Kids are coming to the Web earlier and earlier, and it's obviously very important that we prepare them for life online." He encourages us to have ongoing dialogue with our students and their parents about what information they can share and what information should be kept private. He also explains the importance of teaching our students what to do, should they encounter inappropriate content on a site. Will stresses the importance of preparation, especially when it comes to working with our younger students. We should be familiar with the sites we are asking them to visit, they should be knowledgeable about the information they are permitted to share, and they should know what they need to do if they encounter anything inappropriate.

See Digital Task Card: Substance Abuse on page 65.

Keep It Real

In a Grade 6 class, students used Prezi to create presentations about the dangers of various illicit drugs. Each student collected information, images, and quotes about different substances. They assembled their research using a Prezi. In this way, students were able to use the images, quotes, and information as "talking points" when sharing their work with the class. They recognized the danger of these illicit drugs, and used this medium to raise awareness and discourage their peers from experimenting with drugs. Students loved the fact that they were able to create hidden elements in their presentation, to zoom in and out of their information, and to create original and unique media presentations. They recognized the importance of trying to convince their peers that their message is important. These students were able to create a message for a target audience with the intention of affecting the decisions they make.

Cyber-risks and Strategies

The following are some risks that children may encounter in cyberspace. We can't prevent them from encountering these things, but we can educate them about what to do should it happen to them.

Flaming

A negative, hostile, or insulting statement made by texting, e-mail, or instant message.

To prevent flaming:

- Do not respond.
- Save or print the message and share it with a trusted adult.

Phishing

An attempt to get private information by imitating a trusted source.

To protect yourself against phishing:

- Always know who you are communicating with.
- Never provide user names, passwords, or private information, such as last names, addresses, or phone numbers.

Grooming

The intentional establishment of a relationship between a predator and a child; the predator tries to befriend and create an emotional connection to the child with the intention of harming him or her.

To protect yourself from grooming:

- Always know who you're talking to online.
- Never give out personal information.
- Never post pictures of yourself.
- Never agree to meet someone you've met online.
- Tell an adult you trust if you feel uncomfortable with any online communication.

Cyberbullying

Repeated threats, put-downs, and attempts at intimidation that are intended to harm someone.

To protect against cyberbullying:

- Don't give out personal information on the Internet.
- Don't send messages when you're angry.
- Never open messages from someone you don't know.

To respond to cyberbullying:

- Print or save as much information as possible.
- Do not delete the threats.
- Inform the police and Internet provider.