By Julie Lindsay
and Vicki Davis

Navigate

How can we teach digital citizenship when the digital landscape is changing so rapidly? How can we teach proper online social interactions when the students are outside our classroom and thus outside our control? Will encouraging students to engage in global collaborative environments land teachers in hot water? These are the questions we hear from our peers around the world who are grappling with such issues in administrative offices and teachers' meetings every day.

Digital citizenship is far more than digital literacy, just as 21st-century skills encompass much more than simply "skills." Digital citizenship is not about creating a list of things to do or a stagnant curriculum that you can use for the next 10 years. It's about transforming yourself into a professional who can effectively research technology trends, monitor the uses of technology in your school or district, avoid the fear factor that can easily paralyze you, and empower student-centered learning to create vibrant, exciting learning projects.

As you embark on the path to becoming a digital teacher, we offer some advice to consider and pitfalls to avoid.

> Transform yourself into a professional who researches trends, monitors technology, avoids the fear factor, and empowers student-centered learning.

the Digital Rapids

Customize. In the book *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World,* author Don Tapscott cites customization as one of the characteristics of this generation. Our students thrive on customized tools, such as mobile technology, and customized learning environments. They reject one-size-fits-all curricula that go unchanged year after year.

Teachers who avoid customization often claim they cannot customize and meet standards at the same time. But meeting standardized learning outcomes does not mean you have to standardize the process. In fact, if you involve students in student-centered,

globally connected projects, each student's learning experience becomes markedly different, and each classroom becomes as unique as the students and teachers who learn there. A customized classroom and national standards can coexist and lead to rich learning.

Digiteachers use digital tools like colors on a painter's palette, mixing them in a variety of ways to create pictures of learning. Digiteachers do not let standardized outcomes limit them; they meet the outcomes with artistry. Good administrators empower these digiteachers in their drive to customize and connect with their students' unique learning styles and interests.

Of course, the first step to "flattening" your classroom is to be connected yourself. Connecting students to other classrooms requires teachers to have a good understanding of how the technology works, especially the collaborative Web 2.0 tools, such as wikis, Nings, and blogging platforms. They need to develop their own personal learning networks and have some understanding of what connected learning looks like and how to harness its power.

Monitor and be engaged. Using an educational network to support learning in a classroom is not the

Flat Classroom Projects

Julie Lindsay and Vicki Davis started the Flat Classroom Project (www.flatclassroomproject.org) in 2006 to bring together middle and senior high school students in a global collaborative effort. This network is for educators who want to transform learning through global collaboration. It is a place to connect with other educators and proliferate ideas for worldwide connections. The project embraces a holistic and constructivist educational approach to help students become competitive and globally minded. The idea is to use Web 2.0 tools, such as wikis and Nings, to "flatten," or lower, the classroom walls so that instead of each class working alone, two or more classes join virtually to become one large classroom.

The topics studied and discussed are real-world scenarios based on the book by Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat,* which was the inspiration for the project. Students analyze the trends of information technology and research the effects on the future of education. Classrooms are flattened as teachers blog, share personal learning networks via Nings, collaborate on wikis, and reach out to those who share a curricular perspective.

Several other projects have evolved out of the Flat Classroom Project:

Net Generation Education. Formerly called the Horizon Project, Net Generation was created in conjunction with Don Tapscott, author of *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World.* Students study the annual Horizon Report on emerging technologies and envision the future of education via Web collaboration and video. Tapscott posts weekly questions to the discussion forum, leaves video messages to the students, and hosts a webinar. Find more info at http://netgened.wikispaces.com.

Digiteen. This project was inspired by the ISTE book *Digital Citizenship in Schools* by Mike Ribble and Gerald Bailey. The project links classrooms of middle school students from countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, Spain, and Qatar to promote better online citizenship through research and discussion. It culminates with each school taking action within its own community to promote digital citizenship. Ribble is an adviser to the project and interacts with classrooms globally. Find links to past and current Digiteen projects from the Flat Classroom Project wiki at http://flatclassroomproject.org. All participants also belong to the Ning at http://digiteen.ning.com. A teacher's guide is available at http://bit.ly/digiteenguide.

Digiparent. This network for parents and teachers is a place to share resources globally and interact while exploring the best ways to communicate digital citizenship ideals across a whole school community. Find more info at http://digiparent.ning.com.

Eracism. Launched as a pilot project in October 2009, Eracism is a global student debate that includes a virtual world component. Middle school students used VoiceThread to debate the topic "Differences Make Us Stronger." Find more information at www.eracismproject.org.

same as using a social network to connect with friends and family. We stress to our students and to the participants in our Flat Classroom projects that an educational network is a professional group of people coming together for the purpose of sharing experiences in a focused and monitored environment (see "Flat Classroom Projects" on page 13). All students and teachers should conduct themselves in a professional and culturally sensitive manner. This includes the types of avatars they choose, the styles of language they use, and the quality of material they upload.

Sometimes participants slip into a social-network mode of communicating. They may use textspeak or even inappropriate language, or they might upload pictures that are not acceptable in all global classrooms. This is where teachers must monitor in an engaged manner.

It is not enough to open the gate and let the sheep out to wander aimlessly. The role of the teacher is to gather, lead by example, and make sure students don't cross the line. When misunderstandings happen, teachers must coach students about responsibility and sensitivity.

Have a plan. In Flat Classroom projects, teachers strictly moderate all online collaborative and networking sites for membership and content. When students step over the line, all teachers understand the process to deal with it.

The person who discovers the offensive material makes a screenshot of the item, such as a picture or comment, shares it with the student's classroom teacher, and reports it to space administrators, who remove it. The classroom teacher decides the appropriate action, which may include

asking the student to apologize to the educational network or, in some cases, suspending or even banning the student from the network.

One of the advantages of working as a global team on these projects is that the networks are monitored 24 hours a day, and RSS feeds make it easy to see new content as soon as it's posted. It is very rare that a student deliberately or maliciously sets out to be offensive when collaborating online as part of a project. In fact, we've suspended or banned fewer than 10 out of 3,000 students in more than three years.

Overcoming the fear factor. Testing the waters of digital citizenship can be turbulent—not unlike a rafting trip one of us took last summer with a group of kids, including two beginners, on a North Carolina river. Although the river has mostly Class 1 and Class 2 rapids (which are easier to navigate), the Class 3 rapids were right at the beginning. The two inexperienced students hit the first whitewater and began to scream. As they yelled, they could not hear the guide coaching them about what to do, and they threw their paddles up in the air. Without paddles, their raft turned sideways and dumped them into the frigid water. They were pulled out five minutes later cursing and swearing that they'd never raft again.

We use this analogy to illustrate that the toughest waters often come at the beginning of this digital citizenship journey. Our biggest opposition and hardest questions came before the implementation. Sure, there are still rapids we must navigate, but we are more proficient now.

When you start out, realize that you are not alone. Others have navigated the waters of connecting their

classrooms and immersing their students in authentic digital citizenship experiences. Learn from them. They can show you the way to go and alert you to the pitfalls. You might just find that it is an enjoyable experience.

Dealing with objections. Is "Internet safety" an oxymoron? How about "traffic safety" or "hunter's safety"? Life is full of risk, which is why most new drivers are expected to take a driver education course. Unsafe drivers cause accidents, whereas educated drivers make the roads safer. Likewise, educating students makes the Internet a safer place.

When should we begin educating students? As soon as they start using digital tools for communication, collaboration, and creation through connections online or offline. A kindergartener can use Skype in the classroom and learn about virtual communications. A 6-year-old can create a VoiceThread project and collaborate globally using images and sound. A 9-year-old can create a digital portfolio and invite peers globally to respond via the discussion tab. Digital citizenship awareness can begin as soon as tiny fingers tap the keys.

Privacy levels and the information that students are allowed to disclose should be age appropriate. But resist

Using an educational network to support learning in a classroom is not the same as using a social network to connect with friends and family.

the urge to be overly cautious. If all content is created on school servers and is deleted at the end of each year without the option to export to external sites, students are having their digital academic legacy taken from them by the very institution that should help them build that legacy.

Straying off topic. One excellent example of the power of a student voice is the conversation Maddi from Australia started on the Digiteen Ning more than a year ago. Maddi, who was in the Digiteen Project, created a discussion forum with: "Do you believe everything happens for a reason?" The question garnered 53 replies from teachers, observers, and students. The question wasn't related to a classroom project, but that's OK. We encourage fruitful interactions and opportunities for students to connect and share differences and learn from experience how to respond and reach out to others in an appropriate way. The time to foster this is during their school years and in more controlled environments where good online citizenship

practices can be molded. We've seen conversations about literature and history crop up in other projects as well and found that often these off-topic conversations (if monitored) can create positive learning experiences.

Put the learning in the hands of students. When students have admin rights and personalization of digital tools, they develop appropriate online content and global citizenship along with digital fluency. By "admin rights" we mean the ability to have a mobile computer/device on the school network but still be able to install and update software as needed without referring to a higher body, such as the IT Department, for permission. This allows them to customize and personalize digital tools and set up individualized learning environments on their mobile computers.

When students graduate from high school, they should have a positive digital footprint with academic material included. It is only a matter of time before colleges begin requesting hyperlinks for e-portfolios and other online work, and we should help our students build positive, impressive digital footprints while still protecting their privacy.
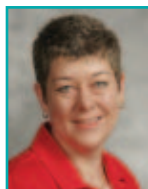
Julie Lindsay is an e-learning coordinator at Beijing (BISS) International School in China. She also blogs at E-Learning Journey (http://123elearning. blogspot.com). Find her on Twitter and Skype under the name julielindsay.

Vicki Davis writes the Cool Cat Teacher blog (http://cool catteacher.blogspot.com) and is IT director at Westwood Schools in Camilla, Georgia. Her Twitter handle is @coolcatteacher.