Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Major Project

As more teachers have chosen to implement technology in their classrooms, a distinct need for digital citizenship awareness and practices has developed. Due to the increased access to a vast amount of information on the internet and the ability to connect with others instantly through the use of a variety of social media tools and online resources, educators recognize the improved prospects for online research, collaboration and presentations. However, it has often been found that youth are ill-prepared for effectively and appropriately making use of such online resources.

Issues such as the use of student permission forms, attribution of content, copyright issues and maintaining student safety while using online tools were both highlighted and taught during our OLTD coursework. However, today's students face an even larger number of issues, both in and out of the classroom, for instance, illegal downloading, cyberbullying and use of technology at inappropriate times and in inappropriate ways, to name a few. Studies have shown that students regularly befriend people unknown to them, share information and pictures that could potentially compromise their safety and/or reputation and hide behind the illusion of anonymity when commenting or posting on other people's profiles. Recent media coverage of high-profile cases have brought the issue of cyberbullying to the public's attention and media campaigns meant to curb the practice of illegal file sharing and downloading of digital content prove that such criminal activity is also on the rise. Participation in such behaviours not only puts students at risk in the short term, but can also affect their future college or career applications due to the online image that they are creating for themselves.

Authors such as Berson & Berson (2003), Hengstler (2011), Jones & Finkelhor (2011) and Ribble (2011) concur on the importance of digital citizenship and have shed light on the dire need for lessons to be incorporated into the classroom. A number of online resources such as Common Sense Media, CyberSmart and Netsafe have responded to the call and focus their efforts on educating youth and children in online practices that promote safety. Further, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has recently released a draft Digital Literacy Framework that outlines skills and understandings that they feel students must acquire in order to effectively work and learn using technology in the classroom, a vast part of which includes digital citizenship outcomes.

It is imperative that the education system adapt to meet the needs of a new online generation and provide students with a strong foundation in the principles of being a responsible digital citizen. Lessons identifying the types and amount of information that students can safely share online and guiding users on how to navigate the internet in controlled and meaningful ways must be developed and adopted in order to encourage a consistent standard of safe online behaviours, thus allowing students to get the most out of their online learning experiences while protecting them from the potential threat of those that would purposefully take advantage of them.

As a technology using classroom teacher in British Columbia, I take this issue very seriously. I have a vested interest in keeping my students safe online and providing them with an education in digital citizenship ideals. I have developed a number of lessons to cover various aspects of digital citizenship, but seek a comprehensive collection of tools and resources related to all aspects of digital citizenship. Some of these include illegal file sharing, copyright issues, posting pictures online, refining profile settings to maintain a safe online presence, avoiding online predators, and dealing with incidents or issues that might arise from technology use. A common place for teachers to develop and share lessons, ideas and activities to encourage digital citizenship

in a way that is tied directly to the Digital Literacy Framework is needed in order to ensure a consistent standard of education for students across British Columbia who use technology to enhance their learning in the classroom.

Justification of the Major Project

Over the last three years I have used mobile devices in my classroom and enhanced my teaching using tools and resources found both on the internet and through my coursework in the OLTD program. I have worked closely with the technology team in my district and supported other teachers in the implementation of technology in their classrooms. During this time I have seen first-hand the need for lessons that support digital citizenship. Incidences of inappropriate texting between students, searching and posting of materials that were not school appropriate and questionable practices of commenting on other student's profiles or posts in chat streams make up only a part of my experiences in using online tools. Initially, each incident was dealt with in a similar manner to any other behaviour incident in school; however, through my studies in the OLTD program I began to realize the long lasting and far reaching affects such online occurrences could have for my students. I grew concerned with the relative naiveté shown by my own students in using social media and online collaboration tools and quickly realized the need for lessons to develop the effective, safe and ethical use of such resources.

Researchers such as Debell (2003) report that students are using computers and the internet in their learning as early as preschool and my own experience points to toddlers who can turn on and operate Smartphones with ease. Social media use becomes prevalent amongst teens and pre-teens regardless of regulations (COPPA, 1998) in place to protect children from the collection of information about their social media use via imposed age restrictions. Boyd, Hargittai, Schultz and Palfrey (2011) showed that almost a third of 10 year olds polled in the UK used social media and

Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr and Rainie (2011) noted that 80% of American teens who are online use social media sites. This prevalence of internet and social media use is scary considering that most youth do not understand how easily accessible information on their profiles is, the potential long term consequences of sharing what they post and the fact that generally up to a third of the online contacts of teens are people whom they have never actually met (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith and Beaton, 2013). The potential for harm is extreme and students need to have a firm grounding in safe internet practices to avoid such damage.

As online tools and resources are being used more often in the classroom to research, connect and collaborate, teachers must take a leadership role in ensuring the safe and effective use of such tools. Though much of the realm of internet safety does fall to parents, teachers are also responsible in ensuring that resources used during school time and on school property, as well as extending to school work completed outside of school hours, is done so in a safe, responsible and ethical manner. Concerns that may arise through school internet use range from the potential for cyberbullying to personal accounts being hacked and information being used to the benefit of others.

All is not lost, however, and we do not need to caution teachers to power down and log off. There are huge benefits from using online tools and technology and the reality is computer use is becoming more the norm. However, just as one would not send their child out onto the highway after they have read a drivers safety manual, we should not expose our students to the vast information superhighway that is the internet without teaching them some rules and guidelines or taking them on a few virtual field trips first. As educators, the time has come to be proactive and provide students with lessons about cultivating positive online profiles, making responsible posts, protecting passwords, accounts and personal information online, and building an understanding of

how to work effectively and safely online. Lessons can be further extended to include issues of copyright, illegal downloading, collaborating with people from different countries or cultures while being cognizant of issues unique to that area of the world, critically analyzing sources of information posted on the internet and an individual's legal rights and responsibilities online. They could even go as far as exploring health issues associated with using technology, from ergonomic issues in how a workstation affects body alignment to the psychological effects that games and social media can have on users. There are many aspects of digital citizenship to be explored and a variety of quality resources available on the internet to challenge, educate and allow students to practice safe online skills.

Technology is simply a tool that is becoming more prevalent in our classrooms, as well as in society as a whole, and for many good reasons. The benefits of this tool far outweigh the risks of using it; however, students need to have an understanding of how to use technology safely, effectively and legally, and a large part of the responsibility falls to teachers to ensure that they have a strong foundation in digital citizenship skills in order to be able to use technology effectively in the classroom.

Challenge to be Addressed

This project will see the development of a resource hub where teachers, parents and students can find access to a variety of tools and resources on their journey towards digital citizenship. This comprehensive resource, usable mainly with intermediate students (grades 4, 5 and 6), will identify major themes in digital citizenship such as copyright, account security, effective online interactions and the critical analysis of online sources. Each topic will include a listing of proposed outcomes, developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education, a brief description which includes the reason each is an important topic of study, a collection of resources

tied to the topic and lesson plans and activity ideas to build understanding and help foster effective online practices. Once complete, the resource hub will be available online along with a presentation that will guide educators through the effective implementation of digital citizenship lessons in their own classrooms.

The intent of this project is to encourage the development of awareness and practices supporting digital citizenship in the classroom and will be aligned directly with the outcomes developed for the Digital Literacy Framework by the B.C. Ministry of Education.

Definition of Terms

The following general definitions are provided to assist readers in understanding the scope and purpose of this project:

Copyright – the legal ownership and right to share or distribute work by its owner or creator.

Digital Literacy – the knowledge and ability to be able to effectively implement digital tools in one's learning. Such tools can include online resources and/or hardware such as computers or mobile devices.

ICT – Information and Communication Technology. Often used in resources selected for this course of study to identify tools and programs that allow users to connect with others, gather and share information and create representations of their shared learning.

MEDL – the Master's in Educational Leadership program through Vancouver Island University.

Mobile Devices – any hand held device such as a smartphone, media player or communication device that allows users to use the internet or applications to connect and collaborate with others to complete work.

OLTD – the Online Learning and Teaching Diploma program through Vancouver Island University. The coursework for the OLTD program was a precursor to this Master's study.

Social Media – an online tool that allows users to create profiles, connect with others and share media or information with others.

Technology – though technology is typically defined as any tool that makes a process more refined or easier, for the purposes of this paper it is used to describe the use of tools such as iPods, Pads, mobile devices, laptops, computers and online resources to improve student learning in the classroom.

Brief Overview of the Project

Through my research I became aware of others in the industry who are also championing the need for a digital citizenship curriculum to ensure safe online practices. Using a variety of online and published resources, a website will be developed that will provide access to resources and tools regarding a variety of aspects of digital citizenship including copyright, attribution of content, online safety and sharing of information, analysis of websites and information found online, social media use and the building of effective digital footprints. Each topic will include an overview, purpose, outline of a lesson, activity ideas and potentially ideas to adapt lessons for younger, older or struggling students.

The outcomes outlined within the proposed Digital Framework, developed by the BC Ministry of Education and available at: https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/digital-literacy.htm, will guide the development of the lesson plans. A variety of books and online resources will also be referenced for topics, activities and ideas in the building of this resource.

Further, educators in my district, as well as members of my OLTD cohort, will be surveyed for topic ideas in the realm of digital citizenship lessons in the classroom.

Once the proposed lesson plans are completed and compiled on a website, the project will be peer reviewed and revised based on feedback gathered and discussions held. The three items that will come out of this project are a digital citizenship curriculum hub in the form of a website that will house the resource links and ideas, a presentation to accompany the resource hub and explain how to implement lessons and activities, and a process paper outlining the parameters of how and why the project was undertaken.

The intent is that this project will endure long after the completion of the coursework requirement of the MEDL program and evolve into a ready reference tool for any educators who want to implement and use technology in the classroom. By providing more opportunities for teachers and students to explore concepts surrounding digital citizenship and build understandings of how to safely and effectively use online resources, the further intent is that students will become more likely to incorporate these skills into their everyday dealings with technology and a safer online learning environment for all will result.