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Preamble

Our Choice for Our Children: Two Lives or One?

We have a fundamental question to address with regard to educating our Digital Age children. How we answer this question will determine how we plan for and implement education in the broadest sense for many years to come. In its simplest form, the question is, *Should we consider students to have two lives or one?*

Allow me to restate this question with a bit more detail: Should we consider students to have two separate lives—a relatively digitally unplugged life at school and a digitally saturated life away from school—or should we consider them to have one life that integrates their lives as students and digital citizens?

The “two lives” perspective contends that our students should live a traditional educational life at school, much like their parents did, and a second, digital life outside school. It says that the technology that kids use is too expensive, problematic, or distracting to integrate into teaching and learning. It says that issues concerning the personal, social, and environmental impacts of living a digital, technological lifestyle are tangential to a school curriculum. Above all, it says that kids will have to figure out how to navigate the digital world beyond school on their own and puzzle through issues of cybersafety, technological responsibility, and digital citizenship without the help of the educational system.

On the other hand, the one life perspective says it is time to help students blend their two lives into an integrated, meaningful approach to living in the digital age. It says that if schools don’t make it their primary mission to help students understand not only how to use technology but also when and why, then we have no right to expect our children to grow

- **Citizenship requires balancing personal empowerment and community well-being.** A particular kind of behavior required for effective citizenship is the ability to balance both individual and community needs. This is particularly problematic for denizens of the infosphere, who are often physically disconnected from the communities they impact.
- **Citizenship requires education.** “Virtuous behavior” is taught, not inherited, and needs to be addressed through some kind of educational rigor, with an emphasis on literacy and character education, topics covered at some length in Part III of this book. Thus, society needs “a system of general education, which shall reach every description of our citizens from the richest to the poorest” (Jefferson, 1818) in order to produce an educated populace. Without such a system, citizenship is impossible. There seems to be universal recognition that full citizenship be withheld from people until young adulthood. Thus, we have until that point to formally educate our children about the basics of what it means to be a citizen and community member.
- **Citizenship requires our participation.** Without our participation, citizenship cannot take advantage of society’s single most important resource: the ideas and creativity of its people. Without our participation, citizenship becomes static and unable to evolve in response to changing social conditions. The digital realm is above all a participatory one. It is up to society to help students use their tools of participation effectively, creatively, and wisely.
- **Citizenship is constantly evolving, and thus requires our ongoing debate.** Citizenship requires a particular kind of participation: our willingness to debate and revise what citizenship means and how it plays out in real life. Citizenship is not just about “doing the right thing” as it is often portrayed. It is equally about deliberately reexamining our cultures and communities in order to cast new light on what the right thing is. In other words, citizenship is as much about perspective as it is about behavior. If we want the participation of our students, then we need to actively engage students in discussions about how the nature of citizenship can or should change. In fact, having them cultivate a metaperspective about their digital activities will help them self-regulate and engage in a reflective, creative reinvention of culture as we know it.
- **Citizenship must be inclusive.** There can be no more *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1946) approaches to citizenship, in which some citizens are more equal than others. When that happens, instability and revolution ensues. This speaks very directly to the issue of socioeconomic disparity, often referred to as *the digital divide*, that currently excludes some from citizenship. It also speaks to the issue of crafting school policy that