Thematic Working Group 8

Placing *Global* Digital Citizenship and Literacy
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Introduction

As the Thematic Working Group 8 discovered, placing digital citizenship and literacy within a global context is a rather complex issue. At an international gathering, such as the EduSummit 2013, with so many researchers, educators and policymakers from across the world, it would be natural to assume a *global* perspective when addressing digital citizenship and literacies. Simply put: what are the universal characteristics and features that would define digital citizenship and literacy across the globe?

However, before attempting to outline a global citizenship and literacy, one might reasonably ask if a locus for digital citizenship and literacies even exists? In other words, if scholars are divided on the very existence of *global citizenship*, how should we reasonably approach discourse on global *digital citizenship* and literacy? A cursory review of the literature on *global citizenship* could better frame the issue.

For example, simply combing the terms “global” and “citizenship” adds intricacy: “Things become even more complex when we join citizenship and global together. Those who invoke the term global citizenship could be thinking of very different things, or combinations of different things” (Byers, 2005, p. 3). And, the invocation of the term can be packed with intent: “Global citizenship is a powerful term because those who invoke it do so to provoke and justify action” (Byers, 2005, p. 6).

As Green (2012) points out, “National citizenship is an accident of birth; global citizenship is different. It is a voluntary association with a concept that signifies "ways of thinking and living within multiple cross-cutting communities—cities, regions, states, nations, and international collectives…” (citing Schattle 2007, 9).
In fact, for some, the notion of global citizenship represents a rather Western point of view, which cannot easily be adopted across the globe. As Samra (2007) puts it, 
...there are many barriers in facilitating the construction of global citizens; 
the language of cosmopolitanism and global citizenship itself, as 
conceived in the West, proved to be inaccessible to those that live in the 
developing world and have very different priorities.

Does the same dilemma hold with global digital citizenship and literacies? Is our 
digital “citizenry” largely an accident of birth? After all, we are born into societies 
whose technical infrastructures and government policies frame our digital 
experiences. Some have even argued that contemporary ICT culture could lead to 
a more diffuse society

...the Internet is, and could increasingly become, a major tool for the self-organising of social groups.... This could re-balance power relationships in 
the public sphere...to another kind of society—a move away from mass society, towards a more localised kind of networked society, based on the 
co-existence of varied subcultures. (Servaes, 2013)

Servaes (2013) cites the work Van Dijk (2012) and Qiu (2009) to support the 
notion of diffused, rather than centralized, networks created through modern 
technologies. Thus, while Web 2.0 media may, increasingly, be having a global impact; the networks they create could be, progressively, more specialized, 
leading, ironically, to less globalized interactions.

How much do these external factors shape the extent and quality of our digital 
citizenship? To what extent is our development as digital citizens (and growth in 
digital literacy) empowered or limited by factors related to nation-state identity, 
gender, regionalism, religion and religious tolerance, socio-economic status? Is it 
even possible for all individuals across the world to achieve the same levels of 
digital citizenship and literacy?

Perhaps the solution to the dilemma of placing a global digital citizenship lies in 
the work of Parekh who has written extensively on the topic of global citizenship 
(Parekh, 2008, 2003, and 2002). Rather than arguing for absolute global 
citizenship, he suggests that “…citizens should be globally orientated, and able to 
discharge their duties to global others by exercising their responsibilities as 
democratic citizens and where necessary challenging nationalistic policies which 
are against the interests of mankind” (Parekh, 2003). This framework would allow 
the world’s citizens to move toward a global orientation; yet, within their region and 
nation-state contexts. Likewise, ICT leaders might also consider a globally 
oriented digital citizenship model.

After all, there are clearly aspirational characteristics of digital citizenship and 
literacy that we hold as goal for all people to achieve. For some, they must reflect 
the realities of a contemporary, 21st century society, which will likely see an 
increasing presence of social media, across all sectors, from business, to
education to health care. For example, Mossberger and colleagues (2007) see a clear link between digital citizenship and a participatory culture. Many recognize certain cultural and socioeconomic limitations on full acceptance into a digital society, often referred to as “digital divide” (Bimber, 2012; Kularski, et. al, 2012), and treated extensively at the EduSummIT 2011 (Resta, et al, 2012). And some (Ohler, 2010) directly address the intricate relationship among youth, a digitally mediated society, and formal educational structures, i.e., schools. The interrelationship among schooling, virtual spaces, formal and informal learning has been a consistent theme at EduSummITs 2009, 2011, and, now 2013.

Another model is articulated by the non-profit iKeepSafe organization (http://www.ikeepsafe.org/), which works across the world with public and private schools, school districts, corporations and governments. In this model, citizenship in the 21st century is not confined to country or geographical location. Adopting a “global citizen approach,” iKeepSafe contends that modern technologies like telephones, television, and most of all, the Internet, allow for a global society where individuals can access information from around the world—in real time—despite being thousands of miles away. Significantly, these technologies do not simply allow for the transmission of information, but also facilitate two-way communication and participation. For example, entire communities thrive on social media platforms (chat groups, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), founded on mutual interest rather than proximity. For iKeepSafe and others, an individual’s ability to participate as a citizen in this new global society is contingent on a few key factors. For example, some of these factors include

**Access:** One must have convenient technology/internet access

**Bandwidth:** One’s ability to participate on various online platforms may be determined by whether or not their technology allows for streaming, real-time updates, etc.

**Right to freely to communicate:** One will be hesitant to voice opinions or participate if doing so is against their government’s laws.

**Victimization:** One’s participation may be hindered by cybercrime, identity theft, harassment or other threats that arise from using an unsecure network.

As with many organizations of its kind, iKeepSafe must robustly address the topic of “safety” and “cyber-bullying” in today’s society. This is a contemporary ICT problem, to varying degrees, across the world. Such an orientation has led iKeepSafe, in conjunction with Microsoft and AT&T, to develop its BEaPRO index (http://www.ikeepsafe.org/be-a-pro/info/) that addresses these core competencies and skills that it believes must be addressed for successful digital citizenship. This “six pillar” model features

**B- Balance:** Balancing Digital Usage

**E- Ethics:** Practicing Ethical Digital Usage

**P- Privacy:** Protecting Personal Information
These concepts materialized as the *iKeepSafe* organization extensively reviewed existing research and measures regarding digital safety, security, privacy and health (for a list of resources supporting this work, see [http://www.ikeepsafe.org/be-a-pro/info/](http://www.ikeepsafe.org/be-a-pro/info/). Once identified, *iKeepSafe* designed an online questionnaire to assess and measure digital safety attitudes and competence in each of the six areas. The findings indicate that although many individuals *want* to foster good digital citizenship practices, most have limited knowledge about how to do so. It is important to identify areas of concerns for youth and families because some countries use these challenges, like children’s access to pornography, as their public reason for filtering and restricting web access. This restriction significantly impacts the opportunity for full digital citizenship. *iKeepSafe* has even developed an App, for mobile devices, to allow parents to monitor their knowledge and awareness in this area (see [http://www.ikeepsafe.org/beapro-parent-app/](http://www.ikeepsafe.org/beapro-parent-app/)).

Yet, for others, international digital citizenship is highly contextualized. For example, in one of the US-based StarTalk language training programs, designed to develop proficiency in Hindi and Urdu, students were paired between US and Indian schools (for Hindi) and US and Pakistan schools (for Urdu). (Brief descriptions of the program can be found at [http://paanizindagihai.webs.com/](http://paanizindagihai.webs.com/) and [https://sites.google.com/a/kean.edu/startalk2013/home.](https://sites.google.com/a/kean.edu/startalk2013/home.) Rich discourse using social media tools, and supported through mobile devices and laptops, became the forum for which language (and ideas and thoughts) were negotiated. The resulting “projects” were shared by students and faculty through the target languages, a major objective of the Startalk program. While there could be general consensus on the use of social media and mobile devices to leverage student interest, participation, and language proficiency, the identification and context of tool use was never too far from the project’s successful implementation. For example, investigations of the use of Facebook versus Orkut, Skype vs Oovoo, were initiated at the project’s beginning; yet, final decisions on optimum tool use could only be fully understood once the project had actually commenced, and communications among students and faculty, from across the participating countries, was launched. Beyond the technical intricacies of fostering communications among young people (mostly minors) from various countries, cultural dynamics demanded contextually based experiences. For example, one summer’s programming occurred during the Muslim Ramadan holiday, requiring great flexibility and sensitivity for those in the Urdu program. Additionally, there were cases of salient distrust by some families in this heritage based program’s faculty and staff, who were perceived to be extensions of government based institutions.

Likewise, a project where a US university was being established on Chinese soil,
featured web-based and social media tools to support faculty and student based activities (Searson, et. al, 2013). Related interactions were designed to take place not only at the Chinese campus, but also among faculty, staff and students at the home-based US institution. As the project emerge, some critical differences in the employment of technology between US and Chinese users began to emerge. For example, while young people in the two countries can be seen staring at their mobile devices and texting endless messages to each other, the tools they use are largely mediated by certain bandwidth and policy issues.

Thus, participating students, faculty, and staff learned to develop contextualized digital literacies, reflecting technical, bandwidth and policy constraints, e.g., when to use a VPN (virtual private network) vs. a public network; when to switch from Facebook to QQ; Twitter vs. WeChat; YouTube vs. Youku; the features of their mobile devices that worked best, depending on where they were being used.

Given the early development and burgeoning of digital use in Western society, one must be sensitive to the critique that any global digital citizenship would be a largely Western construct. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the globalization of technology use and participation from nearly every country and culture. With the introduction of new players, many of whom come from rich and diverse cultural backgrounds, there is great need to more clearly define which behavioral and ethical codes apply for digital citizenship. In order to achieve a construct of digital citizenship more representative of global views as a whole, it is necessary to include in the conversation a wide and diverse community.

Recognizing that development of global digital citizenship and literacy may be contextually based, it is reasonable to ask what are the baseline characteristics and features necessary to achieve any level in this membership? Once such a baseline is established, one could then begin to identify aspirational elements of digital citizenship and literacy, i.e., under ideal conditions—unlimited by technology barriers and policies constraints—how would optimal membership manifest itself? What would the full global digital citizen look like? How would s/he behave? What do educators; researchers and policy makers need to do to support such development? What can they do to maximize development of digital citizenship and literacy in any context?

**EduSummIT 2013 Activity**

During EduSummIT 2013, participants in TWG 8 engaged in the following activities:

- Discussed a contextually based approach to digital citizenship and literacy.
- Identified the characteristics that would establish both baseline and optimal development of digital citizens.
- Delineated the steps that the educators, policymakers, and researcher can take to support optimal development of digital citizenship and literacy, within
the context and scope of their work.

- Considered the development of a survey, to be administered as broadly as possible to the international community of educators, policy-makers and researchers, to assess the relational development of baseline and aspirational digital membership.
- Discussed ways in which the work of this thematic working group and the general EduSummIT can be disseminated in the countries and organizations that they represent.
- Determined outreach strategies to multiple stakeholder group practitioners most likely to benefit from EDuSummIT’s work.

**Recommended Plan of Action**

Based on discussions during the EduSummIT 2013, the TWG 8 participants recommend the following plan of action:

1. Continue discussions on contextual vs. universal based approaches to digital citizenship and literacy.
2. Identify the characteristics that would establish both baseline and optimal development of digital citizens.
3. Ensure that a balance of educators, policymakers, and researchers be involved in all facets of the identification, delineation and discourse related to a global approach to digital citizenship.
4. Consider the development of a survey, to be administered as broadly as possible to an international community of educators, policy-makers and researchers, to assess the varying perceptions around digital citizenship around the world.
5. As part of the survey in item #4 or as a separate initiative, develop an international inventory that identifies acceptable use policies from varying countries, scrutinizes case studies regarding best practices, current models being implemented, and existing curricula around digital citizenship.
6. Consider means that formal discourse can play, through professional associations and publications, in disseminating the current and future discussion of global digital citizenship.
7. Once a comfortable baseline for global digital citizenship is established, consider the implications for digital literacy.

More specifically, the following **Action Steps** are recommended:

1. Create a “relational model” to gain better insight into global public opinion of digital citizenship
   a. Partnership with international organizations e.g. UNESCO, ITU
   b. Distribute survey through organizations
   c. Determine next steps toward packaging ‘Digital Citizenship’ to
diverse communities

2. Raise awareness
   b. Disseminate to policy makers, educators at all levels, community leaders, practitioners

3. Gather an Inventory
   a. Acceptable Use Policies
   b. Case studies (best practices)
   c. Current models being implemented
   d. Existing curricula
   e. Student voices
References

AboutBeAPro http://www.ikeepsafe.org/be-a-pro/info/


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