

Growing Up Online – Discussion Questions

Part 1: Internet in the Home

1. What is your initial reaction to the program? What do you like or dislike?
2. As a teacher, do you think it is important to explore social networking sites such as Club Penguin and MySpace with your students?
3. In the Part 1 of the program, Anne Collier compared the internet to the Wild West where nobody is really in charge. Do you think that is a fair depiction? If so, what implications does that have for our schools?

Part 2: Digital Media in Schools

1. In terms of writing, what are some different types of “cheating”? What elements would you include in your definition of “cheating”?
2. In which grade levels and in which types of classes are students most likely to use digital media for learning? How have you or your students used digital media in your classroom?
3. In the program, Mike Lasua states that “we can’t possibly expect the learner of today to be engrossed by someone who speaks in a monotone voice with a piece of chalk in their hand.....we have to be interactive because they’re accustomed to sitting in front of a screen, and they’ve got five windows up and they’re talking to three people at the same time”. How has your method of teaching changed over the years to meet the needs of our 21st century students?
4. Steve Maher states that teachers need to “cut through the cloud of information around them [students], cut through that media and capture their attention”. Do you agree with his statement? What strategies do you use to cut through all that external “noise”?
5. Rose Porpora states that technology has made her feel like a dinosaur as a teacher, that her time is over, that there are times when her students know how to do things that she can’t do technologically in the classroom. She just lets them take over. Are you able to relate to Rose’s sentiments? Do you think it is appropriate for a teacher to simply let students “take over”?
6. Rose Porpora states that “there are more students who struggle with the ability to focus than there were 30 years ago”. Do you agree with this observation? If so, what are some strategies we can put in place to address this issue?
7. Steve Maher states that “you take it as a given that students are going to take stuff from Sparknotes and from other sources like that. The question is how we react to that. And we can react and say ‘OK, this is something that we have to fight against.’ The other way to react to it is accept it as reality and say that that’s how the outside world works.....I’m not saying cheating is OK. I’m saying that cheating is something you have to look at closer to say what is cheating and what’s not cheating”. What is your position on students using sites like Sparknotes? What is your definition of cheating?

Part 3: Social Networking – Keeping in Touch

1. The narrator of the program states that the new “digital hangouts” have replaced real ones. What implications, if any, does this have on how we address these places with our children and students?

2. Students are increasingly hashing out conflicts through online settings. What implications does this hold when we speak to our children about conflict resolution? How have you addressed this in your classroom?
3. The program shows footage of fights that had been recorded and posted online by students. What is your reaction to this phenomenon that seems to be happening more and more often? Should there be any consequences for the students that record and post such video?
4. Anne Collier states the kids today are “definitely more comfortable being very public than we were. Discretion and privacy almost seem like a thing of the past. I think what we take so seriously, they take much less seriously”. Do you agree with this statement? What consequences, if any, do you see with kids today being less inhibited?

Part 4: Identity Play

1. Jessica Hunter recreated herself online as the Goth model/artist Autumn Edows. She stated that online she didn't feel like herself, but that she liked the fact that she didn't feel like herself. Do you believe that children's “recreating” themselves online is a healthy way to deal with internal issues? Why or why not?
2. After Autumn's principal informed Autumn's parents about the images she had been posting online, Autumn's mother stood behind her and made her delete every single file off of her computer. Do you feel this was an appropriate and effective response to the situation? How would you have handled the situation differently?

Part 5: Parenting, Privacy, and Control

1. In the program, we see parents who are actively monitoring teens' online use and other parents who are not. What factors play a role in whether or not a parent will be involved in monitoring teens' online media use? From your point of view, what forms of involvement are most useful? Least useful?
2. Shows like "To Catch a Predator" on Dateline NBC contribute to parental anxiety about online media. What elements of this FRONTLINE program are likely to increase parents' fears? What elements of the program might be reassuring?
3. Evan Skinner e-mailed parents in her community after she learned about the photos and videos taken when her son and other students went to a rock concert and got drunk. Ryan Halligan's dad contacted the parent of another teen whose Web site was full of suicidal thoughts and feelings. Do you think that the parents responded appropriately in both situations? What are some consequences of reaching out to other parents to share concerns?
4. During the congressional hearings we hear the witness state that “the bogeyman is real, and he lives on the net. He lived in my computer and he lives in yours. He's at home with your children.” What reaction do you have to this statement?
5. The program makes the case that most kids today know what to avoid and how to deal with unwanted solicitations while socializing online. One could make the argument that most kids also know how to react if a stranger approached them in real life, yet from a very early age schools put in place “stranger danger” programs. Do you agree with this position? Who is responsible for teaching children strategies to deal with unwanted approaches? How do we address these strategies in our classrooms?

6. Anne Collier states that we need to start thinking about our kids “less as victims and more as participants”. Does this change in mindset alter how we talk to our kids about online safety?

Part 6: Online Relationships – Healthy or Unhealthy

1. Sara found it easier to be herself while socializing online. Do you believe children are more likely to be genuine in an online environment? Why or why not?
2. Evan Skinner e-mailed parents in her community after she learned about the photos and videos taken when her son and other students went to a rock concert and got drunk. Ryan Halligan’s dad contacted the parent of another teen whose Web site was full of suicidal thoughts and feelings. Do you think that the parents responded appropriately in both situations? What are some consequences of reaching out to other parents to share concerns?
3. Does the girl from Ryan’s school that flirted with him, only to humiliate him later bear any responsibility on the tragic events that took place? Why? Why not?
4. The narrator states the “the Internet has become a new weapon in the arsenal of adolescence”. Is this a fair depiction of the Internet? Does this depiction have any consequences?
5. What are some ideas for projects your students can do that address the issue of cyberbullying and/or digital citizenship?