

ISTE - Metiri

Instructional Strategies to
Support Digital Self

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RESEARCH-BACKED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE DIGITAL SELF

One of the three critical areas of becoming a digital citizen is the ability to develop one's digital self. This section discusses the instructional strategies that teachers and administrators can use to build the capacity of students to cultivate, monitor, and grow their digital self. By using these strategies students will be able to demonstrate progress towards becoming a productive, contributing digital citizen.

NOTE: See Pathway 1 for background information and research, and more details on the Digital Self.

Discussion: In order to develop a healthy, positive digital self, students need good models and opportunities for guided practice. Research supports that the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that help students cultivate, develop, and manage their digital self can be impacted by direct experiences at the classroom level. These experiences must provide opportunities for students to practice, discuss, contribute, and interact in real-time in digital spaces. These experiences are part of the learning process that are integrated into regular classroom content with criteria for expectations that allows for reflection and development of student knowledge, skills, and dispositions. To fully develop one's digital self, students must be empowered to practice, reflect, fail, and correct as they learn to participate in digital spaces with understanding, ethics, wellness, and respect that reflect personal perspective, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Classroom experiences need to help students step back to assess their current online personas and how they can reflect, self-regulate, and act differently to improve over time.

Thoughtful cultivation of your digital self is crucial to meeting the ISTE Standard, Digital Citizen, most notably indicators 2.a and 2.d:

- a. Students cultivate and manage their digital identity and reputation and are aware of the permanence of their actions in the digital world.
- d. Students manage their personal data to maintain digital privacy and security and are aware of data-collection technology used to track their navigation online.

Using the instructional strategies below will support your students in meeting these indicators and becoming savvy digital citizens.





Defining digital self: A student's digital self is her digital record and online persona that together represent personal perspective, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and values.

Furthering the definition: Digital self is the result of an individual's awareness, reflection, actions, and participation with digital tools and spaces. It demonstrates an awareness that participation in digital spaces creates an online persona and digital records that will require understanding, ethics, wellness, and respect if the student is to actively shape her preferred digital self.

Profile: A student who cultivates, monitors, and grows her digital self:

- Understands the permanence of her participation in digital spaces.
- Upholds ethics and ensures her intellectual property and that of others is respected and protected.
- Finds opportunities to engage in purposeful and productive interactions that demonstrate respect towards others and respect towards herself.
- Can identify bullying and digital "drama" that can captivate audiences but simultaneously leave a negative impact on their own digital identity.
- Understands that she is creating a representation of herself as an individual through digital interactions and has the strategies and tools she needs to cultivate, monitor, and grow a truthful representation of herself.

To successfully foster the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions around digital self, teachers need to provide students with experiences, examples, and strategies in actual digital spaces. Teachers must support students by providing opportunities for them to use their own voice, test different approaches with interactions, have structured opportunities to reflect, and guidance on ways to improve when interacting in digital spaces. Educators should also build this instruction throughout their learning activities and when crucial opportunities arise, not simply as one-off activities or lessons. These opportunities should happen in an intellectually safe, collaborative culture of learning that fosters positive interactions and relationships (i.e., teacher-student, peer-to-peer, student-expert, etc.). The capacity of students to develop their digital self is dependent on their ability to reflect and



self-regulate independently. The goal is to create habits so that students can fully participate in safe, ethical, empathetic ways as lifelong learners in digital spaces.

For some time, most educators have approached participation in online spaces as something that happens outside of school, guided by independent trial and error, and often with high-stakes consequences for students. Which is why the approach taken in this pathway represents a rather new way of thinking about how students cultivate, monitor, and grow their digital self. This new approach to addressing digital self culminates in the development of an innovative skill set that is imperative to students in today's classrooms becoming productive and aware digital citizens.

Instructional strategies: To develop a student's abilities to cultivate, monitor, and grow her digital self, teachers can use the following research-based strategies:

1. Practice empathy in learning spaces, both digital and physical, and provide opportunities for students to cultivate empathy (e.g., the ability to understand feelings of others).
2. Develop self-regulation skills that encourage students to manage their own behavior, through observing their own actions and emotions and identifying areas of improvement.
3. Integrate opportunities for self-reflection (e.g., thinking about personal actions, motives, practices, beliefs, and goal setting).
4. Engage students in self-assessment that is guided by shared expectations and objective standards.

As with many aspects of effective teaching and learning, it is important that there is a shared perspective within schools and classrooms on what it means to develop a positive, purposeful, and personalized digital self. Teachers and administrators should work together to create a shared understanding, shared expectations, and even common assessments. These resources should move past identifying what students cannot or should not do online and embrace expectations using more asset based thinking (i.e., focusing on the positive—see definition below). These expectations should outline what students need to do to begin cultivating and managing their digital self through their experiences and activities at school. At the core, these expectations should empower students to demonstrate personal perspective, attitudes, beliefs, and values while demonstrating ethics, wellness, respect, empathy, and awareness.





Asset based thinking encourages focusing on what one has and can do rather than what one currently lacks. Using this mindset in digital citizenship shifts the focus from rules and policies on what should *not* happen in digital spaces and creates opportunities for setting expectations of what students should and can do to demonstrate their capacity to cultivate, manage, and grow their digital self.

TECHNOLOGIES TO EMPOWER THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STUDENT'S DIGITAL SELF

Technologies can be used in a variety of ways to enhance and accelerate opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to cultivate, manage, and grow their digital self over time. Examples of these technologies include:

- Use apps and tools that allow for ratings and have students develop rating scales with developmentally-appropriate descriptors that model what ratings represent. Or, create a rating system for lessons or learning activities so that students can learn to “rate” and provide feedback offline before transferring those skills to digital spaces.
- Create school-based social media accounts that provide for guided interactions around group work, assignments, peer-review, peer-support on assignments, and group planning or reflection. Use these closed networks to help students practice perspective-taking (e.g., the ability to understand that other’s perspectives and beliefs may be different than our own).
- Use cloud-based, collaborative documents that enable multiple persons to provide feedback and comments on student work to allow students to practice giving and receiving comments. Balance an emphasis on being helpful or useful along with kind or empathetic.
- Practice and develop opportunities for public web postings in blogs and articles that allow for feedback and commentary.
- Create private groups in social media platforms to allow students to practice interactions around a common goal or purpose with a safe group of peers with common expectations for interactions.

Getting specific about the strategies to develop digital self.

Each of the strategies is more fully discussed below, with examples of the strategy provided.



Strategy 1: Practice empathy in learning spaces, both digital and physical, and provide opportunities for students to cultivate empathy (e.g., the ability to understand feelings of others).

Discussion: Developing empathy can be directly taught through mindful experiences and discussions in the classroom. With the skills of empathy in place, research suggests that students can become more aware of bullying, more cognizant of unnecessary drama, compelled to help those in need, and more inclusive in their perspective (e.g., establishing an “us and we” instead of “I and them” culture). Teachers can practice empathy and provide opportunities for students to develop empathy by giving compliments; reading stories or books that model empathy; creating a culture where all students feel safe, accepted, and heard; engaging in shared service projects with students; directly teaching students the power of positive self-talk; and identifying what bullying is and is not and use examples to directly recognize the most common characteristics of bullies (e.g., they have often not been taught to think about how their actions impact others).

“The trait that allows us to feel what others are feeling has the reputation of being touchy-feely, but new research reveals that empathy is far from ‘soft.’ Empathy is core to everything that makes a society civilized and makes our children better people. It also is a key predictor of which kids will thrive and succeed.” –Michele Borba

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGY 1 FOR CULTIVATING A DIGITAL SELF

Ages 7-11

Mr. Patel’s class has recently read the book *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio, which tells the story of a boy who struggles because of a physical deformity but also finds friend and connection at his school. He wants his students to explore the word *empathy*. Mr. Patel guides his students in questions about the chances that the character in the book might have been bullied, whether they themselves have ever been bullied, and why people might engage in bullying. Based on their discussion, students use an infographic creator or multimedia tool to design a personal



kindness pledge that demonstrates their own commitment to empathy, both online and offline. They add this pledge to their digital portfolio.

Mr. Patel knows it's important to build his student's empathy in realistic situations as well as to give them opportunities to practice in the world beyond the school. He schedules videoconferences with interesting people discussing a variety of topics throughout the year. To continue the opportunities to develop empathy online, he is intentional about scheduling some of the videoconferences with people who have physical disabilities. Mr. Patel engages his students in ongoing conversations about kindness, empathy, and good digital citizenship before and after each of these digital interactions, with *Wonder* and their discussions as a shared touchpoint for understanding. He encourages them to continue to reflect on what they learned through reading the book and about the kindness pledges that they themselves created.



Strategy 2: Develop self-regulation skills that encourage students to manage their own behavior, through observing their own actions and emotions and identifying areas of improvement.

Discussion: Self-regulation is an essential component of healthy emotional development. Self-regulation helps students to focus their behavior towards a goal, even amidst unpredictable situations and somewhat anonymous digital spaces. Research suggest that self-regulation skills can be taught just like other academic content, through purposeful experiences and direct practice. Self-regulation skills that will support the cultivation, management, and growth of the digital self provide students the capacity to stop before reacting to digital communications or interactions or to disengage (e.g., unfollow, unjoin, etc.) with digital spaces, interactions, or content that is causing personal or emotional stress. Students need help to identify cues and triggers of personal or emotional stress and examples of what they can do to engage productively and when it is time to disengage. Similarly, students also need practice in disengaging from digital spaces or tools. Practicing purposeful disengagement will help students to self-regulate their own use and be able to independently start and stop use based on purpose instead of perceived need.

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGY 2 FOR CULTIVATING A DIGITAL SELF



Ages 4-7

Mrs. Allen has been encouraging her students to use mindfulness techniques to help them quiet their minds and pay attention. She takes video of her students before, during, and after the mindfulness activity. Students view the video clips, noticing and noting differences in behavior and class climate. They use a speech-to-text app to record their observations to a collaborative word processing document and refer back to their observations to see their progress. This technique allows them not only to see their growth in language development, but also in their self-regulation skills.

Ages 11-14

The students in Mrs. O'Brian's class has access to many technology tools and uses them daily for communication and collaboration. These tools include digital bulletin boards, blogging tools, and discussion forums on the class LMS. Mrs. O'Brian has noticed that the content and comments have become gradually less positive and more sarcastic and rude. When she calls this to her students' attention, they initially respond with comments like, "That's just how we talk to each other" and are not open to a discussion about the online conversations. Some of Mrs. O'Brian's colleagues think she should just shut down the online comments but Mrs. O'Brian knows she has a teachable moment. She presses her students to consider why they believe that that kind of discourse is acceptable, and she encourages them to recommit to the class norms that had been set at the beginning of the year. She asks her class to brainstorm how they should handle things if they see a classmate being negative or rude online. As the quality and tone of the comments improves, she has her her students reflect on the differences in class climate since they have taken a more positive approach.

Ages 14-18

In Mr. Neal's Health class, the students are encouraged to develop a wellness perspective on social media. He begins a lesson with a podcast or video about possible negative consequences of overinvolvement in social media (for example, the TEDx talk titled [Addicted to Likes](#), This American Life's [Status Update](#), or Eric Gill's photo collection [Removed](#)). The students create a multimedia project that will help educate other students in the school and initiate discussion about possible times and reasons for intentional disengagement from social media. This disengagement is presented as a "healthy choice" in the same way that exercise and proper nutrition are healthy choices.





Strategy 3: Integrate opportunities for self-reflection (e.g., thinking about personal actions, motives, practices, beliefs and goal setting).

Discussion: Self-reflection can ultimately help students to develop a rationale for their participation in digital spaces. Through reflecting on the process of cultivating, managing, and growing one's digital self, students can engage with key concepts like ethics, wellness, respect, and awareness. Students should be given time to reflect when contributing and producing content. Reflections can focus on the authentic representation of themselves, protecting and providing credit for intellectual property, or even how their participation and contributions were beneficial or detrimental overall. Structured self-reflection can take place in multiple formats but should be focused on students thinking about their personal actions, practices, and demonstrated beliefs. Self-reflection can serve as a very positive gateway for addressing bullying, poor self-concept, retaliation and other more sensitive situations with students in one-to-one conversation and support.

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGY 3 FOR CULTIVATING A DIGITAL SELF

Ages 7-11

In Ms. Evans' art class, students re-create works of classic art as they seek to understand specific artists' techniques. She discusses the terms "remix," "reuse," and "repurpose," and works with the school librarian to teach her students how to cite sources and credit the artists appropriately. Ms. Evans frequently refers to the students' original work as their intellectual property and encourages them to give credit to each other when posting or referring to others' ideas or work on social media.

Ages 11-14

At the conclusion of a unit on the role that immigrants have played in American history, Mr. Roberts wants to push students' thinking on current-day immigrants. He has students compare and contrast stories from a variety of online news outlets, asking them to note and discuss differences in substance and tone of the articles. Students discuss the points of view of the authors of those stories and draw conclusions about possible author bias. For a final project, students can choose from several options, including interviewing an adult who has an immigrant story to tell, creating a website or blogging about what they have learned, or proposing their own project. Students then reflect on what they have learned and how their beliefs about immigrants and immigration might have evolved.





Strategy 4: Engage students in self-assessment that is guided by shared expectations and objective standards.

Discussion: Self-assessment can lead to increased long-term attainment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support the continual management of one's digital self. Self-assessment can be formal or informal, formative or summative, and private or shared. The goal of self-assessment is to help students identify how their participation and contributions in digital spaces are contributing to or detracting from their own goals for their digital record. Self-assessments can be guided by shared expectations, specific objectives, or even personal learning goals. The important thing is that self-assessments occur over time and should empower students to demonstrate personal perspective, attitudes, beliefs, and values while demonstrating ethics, wellness, respect, empathy, and awareness. Self-assessments can help the youngest learners identify skills, while more mature learners might focus self-assessments on long-term goals and the positive or negative influence of their digital self on attainment of those goals.

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGY 4 FOR CULTIVATING A DIGITAL SELF

Ages 4-7

Students in Mr. Ginsburg's class have been using various apps to review and recommend books. Mr. Ginsburg works in a non-traditional school district where students are divided by age range instead of grade and he teaches 4-7 year olds. In addition to their review, the students have also worked with Mr. Ginsburg to create a rubric for what makes a good review and that speaks to different ability levels within the class. After collecting a few different samples, the students look over what they have created and select their "best" work. The rubric the students use is created by the whole class as a self-reflection exercise. This self assessment is the first step towards creating/using self assessment tools and strategies that will be ongoing throughout the year.

Ages 11-14

Each year, the student council conducts a fundraiser and awareness campaign on food insecurity. The sponsor, Mrs. Martinez, wants to encourage students this year to have more of an active voice in the event's purpose and goals. She leads the student council officers in a discussion about the many ways that the use of social media might positively impact this year's campaign. Together, the students establish the norms and expectations for using the



tools and then come up with slogans, strategies, and account names and begin to publicize their event. The students take digital photographs during the event and of the impact their efforts had on improving access to good food in the community and on community awareness. After the campaign is over, Mrs. Martinez has her students add a reflection to their digital portfolios that includes screenshots of their social media posts, photographs taken during the campaign, and written reflections. She engages them in a discussion about the kind of impact these artifacts will likely have on their digital presence and, potentially, as contributing positively to the world as well.

