

KIDS AND ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

The difference between “careful” and “responsible”

By Anthony Carabache

My son Julius is seven years old – the eldest of four children. The morning he told me he wanted his own YouTube channel, I leaned on my kitchen counter, looked at my wife and said, “Already? Really?”

If you know who I am and what I do, I invite you to relish in the irony... it’s actually okay with me. I told him that his mother and I would discuss it and then lay out a plan to get his channel going. The next half hour was spent contemplating how to delay the inevitable.

When I finally came to my senses, I went to work digging through my presentations looking for something – anything – to fix the situation. From laptop to Dropbox to Drive, I just knew that somewhere in the Cloud I had a presentation or a talk or a handout that would make it all better. But I was frustrated and worried. How could I, a designer, author and implementation strategist for technology integration in education be stymied by my seven-year-old’s desire to start a YouTube channel?

The 21st Century Learner

A few moments later, my two-year-old tried to climb up onto the kitchen table to reach my iPad. When my wife gently told him to “be careful,” it hit me! I ran back to one of my machines and pulled up a graphic that had been driving many of my talks about the 21st century learner. I had overlooked it while I was thinking “defence.”

The graphic I uncovered has a simple, yet profound message. It is the promise I make to teachers and parents across Ontario and via Twitter to the world: **We should change the word “careful” to “responsible” whenever discussing our online behaviour.** The beauty of this simple change switches us, as a collective, from defence to offence.

Being careful entails waiting for something to happen, and then treading softly as we negotiate that “something.” Being responsible requires us to act by a standard we created ahead of time. One is passive (waiting for something to happen) and one is proactive (anticipating what’s to come).

Empowering Students

As a teacher, when you change the dialogue in your classroom from careful conversations to responsible ones, you empower your students to take control of potentially harmful situations.

When you ask a child of seven to seek out videos on YouTube about Minecraft that only have positive language, you open yourself up to the question, “What is bad language?” Of course, you have to answer that question. But when you answer, you can explain how speaking in light of Christ’s teachings is what makes us who we are. You can tie that responsibility to the beauty of Christ’s story and draw that connection between our faith and your student’s behaviour. When you do that, you begin shaping a very potent young person.

When next you speak to your students about the dangers of the World Wide Web, try to catch yourself before you utter the word “careful” and replace it with the word “responsible.” It is then that you will witness what incredible ideas, lessons and conversations will follow.

In the end, we did start up a joint YouTube channel for our son. He is learning that his parents are the current gatekeepers to the web, and that the only way to get there is through “responsible” action.

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