

## Learners' legacies as digital citizens

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### **Abstract:**

I first heard the term digital legacy about a decade ago. I was having lunch with a friend who worked as a freelance writer. She wrote articles for a wide range of publications. During our lunch, the conversation turned to technology, and she asked me if I was familiar with the term digital legacy. I told her that I had not heard of it and, of course, was intrigued. She was writing a piece on the digital life and information left behind following a person's death, also known as digital legacy (Digital Legacy Association 2019). She told me that your Facebook or Twitter (sorry, no Snapchat or Instagram at the time) accounts don't just disappear. These accounts don't know you are gone. The Internet goes on without you. As much as I work in technology this made sense to me, but it simply had not occurred to me. We as digital citizens were building these lives online that lived on long after we were gone.

**Keywords:** digital life | digital legacy | death | school libraries

### **Article:**

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**



**LEARNERS' LEGACIES AS  
DIGITAL CITIZENS**

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### Introduction

I first heard the term *digital legacy* about a decade ago. I was having lunch with a friend who worked as a freelance writer. She wrote articles for a wide range of publications. During our lunch, the conversation turned to technology, and she asked me if I was familiar with the term *digital legacy*. I told her that I had not heard of it and, of course, was intrigued. She was writing a piece on the digital life and information left behind following a person's death, also known as digital legacy (Digital Legacy Association 2019). She told me that your Facebook or Twitter (sorry, no Snapchat or Instagram at the time) accounts don't just disappear. These accounts don't know you are gone. The Internet goes on without you. As much as I work in technology this made sense to me, but it simply had not occurred to me. We as digital citizens were building these lives online that lived on long after we were gone.

The first book I read on the topic of digital legacy was *Your Digital Afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter Are Your Estate, What's Your Legacy?* by Evan Carroll and John Ramano. In the past few years new books have been published like *Digital Legacy Plan: A Guide to the Personal and Practical Elements*

*of Your Digital Life before You Die* from Angela Crocker and Vicki McLeod. Each book offers practical tips and ideas on how to deal with the lives, files, and materials we have created,

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*Our students in K-12 and higher education are creating so much digital information, are we instructing them to consider their legacy?*

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built, and saved online after death. These monographs are directed more toward adults and their estate plans. They are useful and thoughtful books

to start readers thinking about their belongings in a digital world when we so often focus on the physical.

The more I read on this subject the more I thought about how digital legacy tied into our digital citizenship. As a former school and academic librarian, I had taught hundreds of information literacy and research sessions to students. I started to think more on how important digital legacy should be to our students in terms of their digital footprints. We teach our patrons to search and evaluate the best online information, but do they learn about the digital lives they are building online? Our students in K-12 and higher education are creating so much digital information, are we instructing them to consider their legacy?

Death is not a popular topic for discussion, but the legacy we leave behind in both our physical and digital world is important. These legacies deserve recognition. The Order of the Good Death, an organization dedicated to making death a part of life, has eight tenets within their movement. Number two states, "I believe that the culture of silence around death should be broken through discussion, gatherings, art, innovation, and scholarship." In addition, tenet

seven says, "I believe that my family and friends should know my end-of-life wishes, and that I should have the necessary paperwork to back-up those wishes" (n.d.).

Our young digital citizens should recognize the long-lasting legacies they leave online. We as school librarians have an excellent opportunity to work with our students through scholarship to recognize those lasting digital legacies.

### Digital Citizenship

When you are defining digital citizenship, it is usually looked at as the responsible and appropriate behavior

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in technology and online use. This behavior can also include digital or online etiquette, ethics, and security. With online bullying and cyber safety a continuous concern, teaching our students to be responsible and aware digital citizens is imperative (Phillips and Lee 2019). School librarians, peer educators, parents, and the learning community at large can work together to aid young people in demonstrating what

being a strong digital citizen looks like. It is so important to develop that digital community (Hollandsworth, Dowdy, and Donovan 2011).

Jerry Fingal details five competencies of digital citizenship on the International Society for Technology in Education's website. These five competencies are inclusive, informed, engaged, balanced, and alert (2019):

- Inclusive means users are open, aware, and respectful of multiple users and their viewpoints.
- Informed falls under information literacy and evaluating resources and information found online.
- Engaged involves using our online world as a responsible citizen to aid, not hinder, our world.
- Balanced means that learners are making good decisions about how their time is being used online.
- Alert is awareness of actions online.

It is in this last competency where digital legacy and digital citizenship cross. Being aware and alert of online action, the lives we build online and the legacy that will remain for years to come.

### Digital Legacy

Death and dying is never an easy topic to discuss with anyone, least of all children and young adults. When talking about digital legacy it might be easier to come at the topic from the perspective of lives built or created online as opposed to those lives that are left behind online. Same idea with a different lens. It is more of a focus on a student's digital footprint, what life they are creating online, and understanding the permanent nature of information created and shared in digital environments (Dawkins 2020). Digital legacy falls in well with information literacy and



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digital citizenship instruction. As school librarians we are well trained and positioned to be leaders in this topic for our learning community.

### Tools You Can Use

The following resources can help school librarians in their digital legacy and digital citizenship instruction:

**Be Internet Awesome:** <<https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/>>. Brought to you by Google, Be Internet Awesome teaches young people about being good digital citizens. The site offers “The Internet Code of Awesome,” lessons for teachers, information for parents, and a fun game called the Interland where young people can play and learn about being Internet safe.

**Common Sense Media:** <<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship>>. Common Sense Media offers a fully searchable K–12 digital citizenship curriculum. If you are looking for lesson plans to train students on critical digital literacy skills that can be shared within your entire learning community this is a great resource to check out.

**IPassword:** <<https://ipassword.com/>>. This site enables users to store and share passwords, software licenses, notes, and other items that might be sensitive. It offers users a place where you can set up accounts for your family to share passwords, notes, and other sensitive information.

**Gmail Inactive Policy:** <<https://myaccount.google.com/inactive>>. Gmail offers a policy to plan for what happens when you die or when you stop using an account. Google gives users options to choose when an account should become inactive or be deleted permanently (for example after three months of inactivity). Users can also choose who to notify if there are long periods of inactivity. A digital wellness check in other words.

**Department of Homeland Security:** <<https://www.dhs.gov/be-cyber-smart/cyber-lessons#>>. The Department of Homeland Security offers videos, lessons, and information on how to be cyber smart. Some examples of lessons currently include WiFi safety, multi-factor authen-



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Department of Library and Information Studies. Her current research focuses on makerspaces and their technologies in libraries of all types and levels. Her latest book is *School Library Makerspaces in Action (ABC-CLIO)* and you can find more of her work in publications like *Library Hi Tech*, *TechTrends*, and *Reference Services Review*. To learn more about Heather and her work, visit [www.techfifteen.com](http://www.techfifteen.com), check out her YouTube channel “Tech 15,” or follow her on Twitter @actinginthelib.

tication, app sharing, oversharing, phishing, and device protection.

### Cyber Security Awareness

**Month:** <<https://www.dhs.gov/national-cyber-security-awareness-month>>. This event, sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security, occurs every October. National Cybersecurity Awareness Month is an annual initiative to offer awareness on the importance of cybersecurity. The site offers a toolkit (broken down by grade level), resources, and information to host your own cybersecurity event.

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