



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Digital Literacy in the Classroom

MONITA BELL

When my son, who’s now a college senior, was still at home and would ask me to explain a concept or to find a word, more often than not I’d say, “Don’t ask me. Ask Siri.” He had a smartphone years before I did. So, that was my way of encouraging him to use the tool right at his fingertips, or “voice tips.” He had everything he needed; he didn’t need me. That was my thinking at the time.

When it comes to technology and the young people in our lives—our students, children, nieces, nephews—how many of us think of them as quote “digital natives” who know what they’re doing? They’re growing up with Siri and Alexa and Tumblr and Snapchat, so we assume they know their way around all things digital. I know I’ve made that mistake.

And it is a mistake.

I’m Monita Bell, your host for *The Mind Online*. This podcast comes to you from Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Stanford University’s Sam Wineburg, one of my guests for today’s episode, wants us to flip how we think about digital natives.

SAM WINEBURG

The most dominant myth—and there are a bunch of them that we can run across—the most dominant one is that students are digital natives and they grew up with pieces of silicone growing from their fingernails, and because they were exposed to a technology from a very early age, they are fluent in it. Really, what we’ve done is we’ve mistaken fluency and handling a digital device with the sophistication that’s needed to actually discern the difference between true and false in terms of the information that those devices yield.

MONITA BELL

Get ready to rethink the myths you have around our collective understanding of digital technologies and how we interpret the information we receive digitally and definitely rethink your own understanding. Siri might have had an answer for my son, but did he have the answers he needed to dive deeper into that topic and to distill all of the information he received? Do any of us? We’ve all got something to learn, and that learning begins now. Right now.

In each episode of *The Mind Online*, we’ll explore an aspect of the digital literacy world, what educators and students alike need to know, and how educators can guide students to be safe, informed digital citizens. Today, in addition to Sam Wineburg, you’re also gonna hear from Rafranz Davis, Executive

Director of Professional and Digital Learning for Lufkin Independent School District in Texas. First, my conversation with Sam Wineburg of the Stanford History Education Group. Be on the listen now for the free assessments this group has made available for teachers.

Hi, Sam. Thank you for talking with me today. Can you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what you do?

SAM WINEBURG

My name is Sam Wineburg, and I teach at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. I am in the Graduate School of Education, and I also have a courtesy appointment in History and American Studies. For many, many years I studied the nature of historical thinking, and how people come to understand the past and how their understanding of the past influences their perceptions in the present. Over the last three or four years, we've really switched to understanding how it is that people make judgments about what they read on the Internet.

MONITA BELL

What does your research tell you about people's grasp of digital literacy?

SAM WINEBURG

Our research tells us that people's grasp is not too sure in terms of what they come across on the Internet, and that is a variety of different types of people from a variety of different types of communities and backgrounds. For example, we did a very large study of nearly 8,000 students from middle school through college, and we exposed them to a variety of different kinds of materials that they encounter online. The way that we can summarize the results, obviously there were variations in what we found in different places, but across the board, I think we're pretty confident in saying that the state of young people's understanding of the kind of information that they find on the Internet is bleak.

MONITA BELL

I'm glad you jumped right in there with young people. Our listeners are gonna be educators, so we certainly want them to have a sense of what's going on with young people and their understanding of the information that they get online. Given what you have found, this "bleak" news, why do you think that is? What are young people ... or I guess I should say, what's missing in education around digital literacy?

SAM WINEBURG

First of all, I want to make a slight correction to my previous point. Even though our study focused on young people, we've done other work where we give very similar materials to a range of intelligent people, people that we would say, "Gosh, they're really, really smart." For instance, students that are admitted to Stanford University, and we reject 95 out of 100 applicants. We've given our materials to academics, PhDs at three different universities.

Again, I think we have to be very, very careful in indicting young people for not really having a grasp of what they find online. I think really the situation is better captured by saying that the great majority of us have a difficult time making thoughtful discernments of what to believe and what to reject when we encounter things online. So, let's let young people off the hook, and let's just talk about pretty much all of us.

MONITA BELL

That's fair, and that makes sense. We certainly want to help educators as they are teaching young people about how to search for information and analyze it and evaluate it. I guess related to what you were just saying then, what are some myths about digital literacy?

SAM WINEBURG

Well, this is something I talk about in a book that just came out a couple weeks ago published by the University of Chicago Press. It's called *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*. I think the most dominant myth, and there are a bunch of them that we can run across, the most dominant one is that students are digital natives and they grew up with pieces of silicone growing from their fingernails, and because they were exposed to a technology from a very early age, they are fluent in it. Really, what we've done is we've mistaken fluency and handling a digital device with the sophistication that's needed to actually discern the difference between true and false in terms of the information that those devices yield.

It would be like assuming that I know how my fuel-injected engine works because I can easily drive the car out of my driveway while holding a latte in one hand. No. I know how to operate my car, but I really have no clue of how that fuel-injected engine works. Similarly, students can Google stuff, but can they make thoughtful judgments about what to believe in terms of what the search engine results page brings up for them? Often in many cases, the answer is no.

Now, that actually stems from a few things, and let's put it in a little bit of historical context. After Gutenberg invented movable type, rather than all mass literacy spreading without any kinds of problems and only quality books being produced because print became cheap, that is exactly the opposite of what happened. There was mass chaos. We are in a similar information revolution, and what has happened is that the speed of technological transformation has exceeded our human ability in being able to keep up with it.

In other words, our technological advances have outstripped our human technological advances. So, we have yet to develop the kind of teaching approaches and schooling approaches ... In many places, many schools try to protect their students from the Internet, when the Internet is their conduit to learning about the world. This is gonna take some time. It's gonna be a good decade before we really figure this out. We're tiptoeing around the tip of the iceberg at this point.

MONITA BELL

Yeah. I really like that analogy about the car too. That's really handy. So, technology has outpaced our ability to really keep up with it in terms of the way our brains process information, and across the board— young, old, no matter how smart you are—we all have trouble taking in and interpreting and evaluating the information that's coming at us so quickly. With that, for our listeners who are educators, they might be nervous about really digging into this and approaching it in their classrooms. What do they need to know before they jump in?

SAM WINEBURG

Well, the first thing they need to know is that while we're waiting for the new age to come into focus on the horizon, there are some very concrete things that we can do in the meantime. Let's go back to this idea of myths. There are many things that teachers in an innocent way convey to students that simply no longer are true anymore. The idea of sending students to the Internet and saying, "If it's a .org, it's good,

and if it's a .com, it's bad," that is an absolute ... Perhaps that held true in the Stone Age of the Internet when we used a dial-up modem to connect online, but that is just not true anymore.

Nor is it true that we can depend upon old markers like a 501(c)(3), a nonprofit organization. The IRS I believe in 2015 received over 15,000 applications for 501(c)(3) nonprofit approval, and they granted them in 97 percent of the cases. So, all kinds of organizations. It's like, "If you're gonna get up and apply for a 501(c)(3), get one for me while you're at it." It's that easy at this point to get it.

So, those kinds of markers, the traditional markers—are there flashing ads on the page, or are there spelling errors? We're in an age of cheap Internet templates where anybody with 25 dollars and a little bit of tech savvy can create a spiffy-looking website. All of the kinds of things that you can go online and look at and Google "Web credibility"; the great majority of the kinds of markers that we used to be able to rely on—is it a .org and is there a contact address listed— we can no longer depend on those things.

Now, one of the things that I didn't talk about was that we've also done research with professional fact-checkers at the nation's most prestigious news outlets. What they do is completely different from what we tell kids to do. So, that is another thing that I would tell educators. Let's learn from people who are really, really good at it, rather than relying upon some watchwords that no longer are helpful to us.

MONITA BELL

I'm really glad you brought that up. I've read about this in your research. Will you get into what are fact-checkers doing that we can learn from that we are not teaching kids when they're searching on the Internet?

SAM WINEBURG

Let's first talk about the way that an awful lot of us go online when we're doing a just-in-time search, when we're trying to figure out, "Okay, is this meme that just came across my feed, is it something that I should pass on to someone else?" We go to the website of the organization, and what many people do, and this is something that is an outcome of the research where we actually observed people as they were searching online in real time, and we documented and took screen captures of what they did; many of us tend to read digital information in the way that we would read print, where our eyes go up and down the page in an "S" pattern. We call that "vertical reading." It's something that we take from the world of print and we actually impose it into a medium where that kind of reading no longer makes sense.

We often will ... And again, this is something that we saw with academics: they trust their own intelligence, they are critical thinkers, they are critical readers. So, they will go to a website and carefully parse the prose and look at the meaning of words, and do the kinds of things that old-media literacy watchwords told us to do when we were dealing in a purely print environment. Who produced it, who constructed it, look at the language, look at the verbs, look at the adverbs.

Well, if you come to an organization, and I'll give you a very concrete example that your listeners can actually Google: the EmploymentPoliciesInstitute.org and a 501(c)(3). That is a professional-looking webpage with a professional-looking logo that claims to be a nonpartisan source for information about things like raising the minimum wage. Is that a good thing, or will it lead to greater unemployment

because people won't be able to afford it and prices will go up? Well, a lot of very intelligent people will spend four or five minutes on this site never really understanding who is behind this site, or going to the "About" page, which is absolutely useless in this day and age.

What fact-checkers do is rather than reading vertically, they engage in what we call "lateral reading." When you don't know about the organization that is purveying the information, the most thoughtful thing to do in order to learn about that organization is not to stay on the page, but to leave it. What fact-checkers do is very quickly they leave and they open multiple tabs along the horizontal axis of their screen, and they learn about the organization. They consult the greater Web. See, this is something that we couldn't do with print. You couldn't take a book off a library shelf and then automatically look simultaneously at eight different books while you're looking at the original source. On the Web, you can do that, and that's exactly what fact-checkers do. They will open up new tabs and they will investigate who is telling the information.

In the particular example that I gave you, the Employment Policies Institute, that actually turns out to be what Slate has called a "fake think tank," a public relations firm that creates these think tanks. This one is created by the PR firm of Richard Berman, and he is in the business of creating these kinds of websites for organizations that are in many ways cloaked. They are what are called "AstroTurf organizations." They look like they're a grassroots organization, but it turns out that, like AstroTurf, it's fake grass.

MONITA BELL

Thank you for specifying that particular example. Folks, definitely Google that. That is fascinating. While you're talking about the lateral reading, I just want to make sure folks are aware of the project that you were describing earlier where you studied young people's habits, or how they read information. That's Civic Online Reasoning. I just want to make sure people know about that.

SAM WINEBURG

That's right. We call it "Civic Online Reasoning," and we distinguish it from broader concepts such as media literacy or digital literacy, which can mean an awful lot of things, and an awful lot of important things. Let me stress that. For instance, information about the dangers of sexting or cyberbullying, or even creating digital media. All of those things are important. But the focus of our work really is the connection between people's ability to make judgments about the information that impacts them as people living in community and living in societies.

We call it "Civic Online Reasoning" because ... Let's take another concrete example. Should you support a soda tax? I am speaking to you from my home in Seattle, and there is a proposition in the state of Washington about creating a tax on sugary drinks. Well, we know that sugary drinks contribute to obesity, and they differentially affect communities of color and communities of poverty where these kinds of products are heavily marketed. So, you have these brochures saying, "Don't vote for this. It will raise your prices. Citizens for Fairness at the Cash Register."

This is an issue that affects us as citizens, and our ability to figure out who is behind this. Is this really a grassroots group, or is this a grassroots group that is only ostensibly grassroots, and is actually supported by the beverage industry? We believe that the kinds of things that we are teaching are absolutely crucial to the decisions that citizens will make about the future of their societies. So, our focus is narrower. We

don't deal with cyberbullying, as important as that is, or we don't deal with how to download a file or how to create an iMovie. We are focused on: How can we help people make better decisions about the things that impact their lives?

MONITA BELL

Thank you for breaking that down. You have assessments to go along with this, right?

SAM WINEBURG

That's right. We got into this whole area because a foundation in Chicago, the Robert McCormick Foundation, generously supported our work when they recognized that there are an awful lot of people making claims about all kinds of civic literacy and digital literacy programs, but largely the means of assessment were self-reports. So, asking you after you've gone through this curriculum, do you think you are a better judge of information? Or asking teachers, after your students have done this, are they better? Well, again, self-reports. They have a place, but if you were to ask me, "Are my children the best-looking children on the face of this earth?" I would tell you yes. That's a self-report.

MONITA BELL

Right.

SAM WINEBURG

So, we came up with a series of actual assessments with the kinds of material that students face online. For instance, the splash page of Slate, where there are some news articles and some advertisements. One of the things that we uncovered was that more than 80 percent of the middle-school students that we gave this picture of the splash page of Slate to mistook an advertisement for a news story. These are the kinds of things. Direct assessments, not proxies of what students will do, or not what people tell us they think they will do, but actually what do they do when they're confronted by digital information.

Our first generation of assessments are all online on our website, which is the Stanford History Education Group, sheg.stanford.edu. Those are free to download. Teachers can use them as formative assessments in their classroom to get a more calibrated and accurate understanding of what their students actually can do with these kinds of materials.

MONITA BELL

Oh, they're free. That's wonderful.

SAM WINEBURG

They are free. All of our materials on the SHEG website, the Stanford History Education Group website, are free downloads, just like your materials that are free. We don't believe that education for profit is something that we should be engaged in. If we want to strengthen democracy and create a more equitable society, the way to do it is to make high-quality education materials free for anybody who wants to use them.

MONITA BELL

I absolutely want to co-sign that yes. S-H-E-G.edu? Is that—

SAM WINEBURG

S-H-E-G.stanford.edu.

MONITA BELL

S-H-E-G.stanford.edu.

SAM WINEBURG

All you have to do is register on our site, and you can download the materials for free. I should also mention the MediaWise project that we have in collaboration with the Poynter Institute and the Local Media Association. That is supported by Google. And the materials that that project, we are engaged in large field tests of creating a civic online reasoning curriculum.

Within the next 12 months, we will start to have materials available that are supported through Google and supported through Poynter and MediaWise. Those materials will be free of charge as well.

MONITA BELL

Oh, how exciting. Congrats on that.

SAM WINEBURG

Thank you.

MONITA BELL

So, we know that there are these common myths that educators need to know about before they get into discussing this content with students, and we've already highlighted your wonderful free assessments that educators can use as well. What are some of your favorite strategies, or you think are the best strategies that teachers might use in teaching about this topic? We've already talked about the lateral reading, for instance, that fact-checkers use. Are there others that come to mind?

SAM WINEBURG

Sure, there are. Again, here's one of the big problems with people often in my position or very thoughtful librarians who are so excited about conveying information. We tend in our exuberance to spray people with a fire hose of recommendations, so many that it's impossible to know what are the most flexible and powerful ones. If we're only going to teach two or three, what are we going to teach and ensure that our students actually can master them? I often liken this to a carpenter who has to go to a worksite and she doesn't know what she's going to build, and she can only take two or three tools with her. What three tools is she going to bring? Well, you're not going to say some kind of very obscure measuring tool or a pneumatic hammer or something. No, you're going to say a regular hammer, a saw, maybe a screwdriver, and then you're gonna go ... those are the basic things if you don't know what you're going to build.

Similarly, my question is, if we can only teach students two or three things and we're going to hold their feet to the fire to do those things, what are they going to be, rather than the 80 things that we want to teach? In that spirit, because I can give you 80 things that we can teach, but if people want to really start with things that are flexible and powerful, they're not going to eliminate all of the errors that people make online, but they're going to take a bite out of them.

I've already mentioned lateral reading, which I think is the most powerful. When you don't know about a website that you've chanced upon, and it's got a fancy name and a fancy .org and a 501(c)(3), and they're telling you that they're offering dispassionate, nonpartisan information about the soda tax, then the smartest thing before looking and thinking that you are smarter than the Web, and you are a critical thinker and a critical reader and you can see through it, the smartest thing is to take the name of the organization, put it in your browser, open up a tab and ... open up several tabs. That's lateral reading.

The second thing that I can recommend is what we call "click restraint." When we have observed young people, when they Google something, what they tend to do is they engage in what we think of as "promiscuous clicking."

MONITA BELL

Interesting term.

SAM WINEBURG

They will click the first or second thing that Google brings up, often because they equate the placement in a Google search with trustworthiness. That's simply an unreliable metric to go by. Google results are SEOed. They are often determined by the cat-and-mouse game of search engine optimization, SEOs. This is big. This is a big business. How do you game your business or your organization to get it higher up in Google search results? No one knows Google's algorithm at this point. I don't think Google even knows its algorithm because so much of it is based on machine learning. But it is a cat-and-mouse game, and there are people with moneyed interests who want to get their website to the top.

So, the idea that you can simply give over to Google the choice of making the decision of what's trustworthy and what's not is a very flawed strategy. Now, what it is that fact-checkers do is they will enter things into their browser, and then they will look. They will step back from what in this kind of area is called the SERP, the search engine results page, and before clicking on any one result they will engage in click restraint. They will mine the snippets, the small little sentences that accompany each Google result. They will mine those for information and try to get a sense of, "Where did I land? What kind of information neighborhood am I in?" Because often the first click is destiny. You see it so many times. People click on something, they'll go down a rabbit hole, and five minutes later they'll be watching cat videos on YouTube. Again, this is true. It's happened to all of us, right?

MONITA BELL

Yes. Yes, it has.

SAM WINEBURG

We go and we Google something, and then about five or six clicks later we can't even remember how we got to where we got.

MONITA BELL

Absolutely.

SAM WINEBURG

What fact-checkers will do is they will sit back from the search results. Often they will go beyond the

scroll. They will scroll down and go to the second or third page of results before ever clicking on any ... before clicking on their first result. We try to teach this to students to help them understand, “Wait a second. Make a thoughtful first choice by engaging in click restraint.”

Then the third thing that I can recommend, and again, this is gonna go against some things that some of your listeners might think, “Oh, my goodness, this is something that I told my students not to do.” One of the things that we found that one of the first places that fact-checkers go when they’re searching for an organization they don’t know is, drum roll—

MONITA BELL

I think I know what it is.

SAM WINEBURG

... Wikipedia.

MONITA BELL

Wikipedia, yeah.

SAM WINEBURG

Now, often I have heard—and, again, I don’t mean to cast blame on anyone. I think to go back to my earlier remarks, this is all about the rapidity of change. Wikipedia has changed dramatically since 2002 and 2003. I’ve heard teachers say, “Don’t go to Wikipedia because anybody can change it.” Wrong. Wrong. For instance, go to the Wikipedia entry on gun control, and you will see up in the top right hand of the screen a small little lock, which means that it is one of Wikipedia’s protected pages. I think there are something like 11 different kinds of protected pages. It is not true that anyone can change particularly the more controversial Wikipedia entries.

For instance, the article on gun control is quite balanced in a country as diverse as ours, where there are many different opinions about gun control. It is a well-resourced article, and if you are a high-badged Wikipedian, you will know how to get into that page. But you or me? No. There’s just no way. That’s one thing that fact-checkers know about.

The second thing is that fact-checkers use Wikipedia in two profoundly different ways from the ways that most of us use it, or certainly the way that many young people use it. Fact-checkers engage in strategic ignoring. That’s part of their intelligence. In an era where we are faced by an information avalanche, we have to all learn strategies of how to intelligently ignore the flow of information that comes to us in order to focus on the things that are most important. What fact-checkers will do is they’ll go to a particular Wikipedia page, and they will often skip over the body of the article and they will harvest the resources at the end. Wikipedia has a policy of when you make a claim, it has to be sourced. It has to be linked to a source. What teachers can do is to teach their students about what are more bona fide and less bona fide sources, and teach their students to go down and look and see if there’s a more authoritative source purveying the information than the Wikipedia entry.

The second thing—and this is something that I would imagine will be new to the great majority of

listeners, the great majority of whom have been on Wikipedia in the last year. That is what fact-checkers will do is when they have a particular question about a knowledge claim, they will open up the tab that hides in plain sight right next to the “Article” tab, and that is the “Talk” tab. Now, I’m sure many of your listeners are saying, “The ‘Talk’ tab? Where’s that?”

MONITA BELL

Same. I’m saying that right now in my head.

SAM WINEBURG

You’re saying that right now in your head, and I’m sure you’ve used Wikipedia in the last month.

MONITA BELL

Yes.

SAM WINEBURG

On every Wikipedia article, right next to the “Article” tab, there is a tab called “Talk,” and the great majority of us never even press on it. The Talk page, I like to think of it as the sausage-making factory of knowledge. It is where the content of the article is argued over, where primary source evidence is adduced to make different claims, where people take issue with what is in the article, where you can see, I think of it as “street-level knowledge-making.”

MONITA BELL

Wow.

SAM WINEBURG

It is a very useful ... it’s precisely what we don’t get when we look at a textbook. Textbooks, whether you’re looking at a conventional U.S. history textbook that is approved by the state or Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, you do not know how the author came to his or her conclusions. Well, the “Talk” page on Wikipedia opens up the hood on knowledge, and we can see the inner workings of the knowledge carburetor.

MONITA BELL

Oh, my goodness.

SAM WINEBURG

So, it is a very useful resource that fact-checkers know about, and we should be teaching kids how to use it and to think of it as another way of expanding their horizons about a particular topic, whether it is, I don’t know ... We just experienced Columbus Day. The debate over Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples’ Day, it would be a perfect example of looking at how do people argue about what should be in an entry and what is their evidence for the claims that they’re making?

MONITA BELL

Wow. I’m mind-blown right now. I had no idea. I had no idea. So, we’ve got these three key nuggets here that we want folks to be able to take away. We’ve got lateral reading, click restraint and use Wikipedia.

SAM WINEBURG

The wise use of Wikipedia. The wise use.

MONITA BELL

Yes, the wise use of Wikipedia.

SAM WINEBURG

Wikipedia, according to many surveys, is the sixth-most-trafficked site in the English language.

MONITA BELL

Wow.

SAM WINEBURG

Not to take advantage of this resource is to be cutting yourself off from an amazing resource.

MONITA BELL

Yeah, absolutely. I've been attesting to the things you are saying that have changed since we first started talking about digital literacy. I was taught to trust the .orgs over the .coms, and look at the spelling, and don't use Wikipedia and all of that. I have since learned, pay attention to the sources in Wikipedia, but I really thank you for opening this up. Like you said, we've got this avalanche of information coming at us, so we really need to be smarter about how we parse it.

SAM WINEBURG

If you need more proof of this, think of what voters in California encountered in the 2016 ballot. There were 17 different initiatives on that ballot. I write about this in my book. There were 17 different initiatives, and everything from making the death penalty easier to apply, to condoms for porn stars during live sessions, to bond issues for schools. If the average citizen spent 10 minutes online learning about each one of these issues, we would consider that a pretty worthy act of citizenship. But really, the question for our age is how to make those 10 minutes count. Right now, awful lot of people are confused by what they find in those 10 minutes. For us to figure out how to use the Internet so that it enhances our ability as citizens to make thoughtful decisions, we've got some hard work to do.

MONITA BELL

Yeah. But we need to be up for the challenge and do the work, right?

SAM WINEBURG

For sure.

MONITA BELL

Yeah. Sam, thank you. This—I think, folks will find this extremely useful. Thank you for taking the time again, most certainly. Will you just one more time tell us who you are and what you do?

SAM WINEBURG

First, thank you very much and thank you for having me, and hello to all the listeners listening to this podcast. I think it's great and Teaching Tolerance is great, and the work of the Southern Poverty Law

Center is fabulous. My name is Sam Wineburg. My official title—my university will be happy—is the Margaret Jacks Professor of Education and of History by courtesy at Stanford University in Stanford, California. Go Cardinal.

MONITA BELL

Well, thank you for the kind words, and absolutely thank you for your time today.

SAM WINEBURG

My pleasure.

MONITA BELL

All right. Take care, Sam.

SAM WINEBURG

All right. Thank you.

MONITA BELL

That was Sam Wineburg of the Stanford History Education Group. Next, my chat with Rafranz Davis, who wants us to reconsider how we think and talk about diversity in the field of ed tech, and to stop treating digitally related instruction as something separate from the rest of the curriculum.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I'm very excited. First, will you just introduce yourself and tell us a little about what you do?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

My name is Rafranz Davis. I'm the Executive Director of Professional and Digital Learning for Lufkin ISD. We are a public school located in East Texas about 90 miles northeast of Houston.

MONITA BELL

How did you get into this work, and what excites you about it?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

I started my career in education as a math teacher. I actually started in my hometown, which is located about two and a half hours away from here. As I started in the classroom and started to work with students who were a lot like me actually, I just had a sense that maybe what I had to offer in terms of the opportunities or ideas with my students could be better served if I had an opportunity to share with a greater population. So, I got into technology and instructional technology and started working with teachers and working with teachers outside of my own school district. I guess that's the short answer for how I got to here, but I'm excited, really, about any of the opportunities that I get to help students find pathways that would have otherwise been closed because of technology. That truly excites me every day, especially when you see the look on a kid's face when they're able to do something that they could not have envisioned otherwise.

MONITA BELL

I love that. I think you're in a special position because you've spent this time as a classroom teacher, but

now you are supporting classroom instruction in the work you currently do.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Right.

MONITA BELL

With those two worlds coming together, so to speak, when it comes to digital literacy instruction, what do you feel are the most basic concepts and skills that students should come away with? If you could narrow it down to the most important few, what do you think they are?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

First and foremost, students need to know how to tell the validity of resources. You would be surprised how often they do not, or maybe you wouldn't be, from the rate of articles that even adults share on social media. Then I'd like to also call the validity of dynamic sharing, meaning when I get an email do I click the link? Do I open this email from this person? Do I share this thing that someone has just sent me? Is it going to be okay on their end? I've had a person who is actually not from my school district, I've been working with them for months because they accidentally gave away their entire Google account and YouTube channel to a bad link from a Fortnite game. It's just really interesting just how much real-time sharing happens, and how much we don't have those conversations with students.

Then last but definitely not least is digital copyright. I think social media blurs that line for what copyright means and nobody seems to care anymore. But it's a real issue, and I think that absolutely is something that we need to bring down and work with students on.

MONITA BELL

Will you talk more about that? What are the issues you see happening with this lack of understanding digital copyright, and what are the ramifications of that?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

For example, we definitely do live in a social sharing generation where something can appear on television that we're watching, and within seconds it becomes a meme online. At the same token, something can appear on television or in an online video, and it's immediately downloaded and uploaded to another channel. When people are doing that, they're actually stealing the creative rights of those who were the original creators. But we often don't think of that because we think, "It's online, it's here, I can just share it." But there are actually real ramifications to that. There is someone who has worked tirelessly to create that content for it to be taken and utilized in various ways.

Now, copyright, of course, allows us to have commentary on certain things that we're experiencing, but it doesn't allow us to take ownership of it. I think the big problem is that we forget who the owners are of this content because it gets trampled and re-downloaded and re-copied in so many different ways, and we're just ... I don't know how to get a handle of that when that's what the world is doing.

MONITA BELL

That's an important point. I think what we don't talk about a lot is really just the ethics of engaging digitally.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Yeah. That's a better way of putting it, absolutely.

MONITA BELL

Yeah. Thank you for that. I think my next question is related to what we were just talking about in some ways, but I'll let you break it down. What would you say are some of the major misconceptions that teachers might have about teaching digital literacy?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

For one thing, we assume the teachers know, and typically they just don't. I don't even know how you build in that knowledge of learning while you're also trying to learn everything else, but it is important to what we teach. The other part of that is that teachers are often ... Some teachers are very guilty of not following the rules themselves. They feel like because we're educators and we're in education, we can utilize content in a certain way, whether it be grabbing an image and just throwing it into a lesson or throwing it into a presentation. Sometimes you can, but there are times when maybe it's not so appropriate to do that. We don't always model effectively, in my opinion.

Then, of course, the other part of that is how we are creating that environment within our schools for teachers to thrive on that. Teachers often feel like that they are alone, but schools with librarians—and that brings up a whole 'nother equity issue because not every school has one—but schools with librarians are a great resource for teachers, and I'm not sure that they always utilize those resources as they should.

MONITA BELL

I'm actually planning to talk with a few folks, including Julia Torres, about the role of librarians on this topic. You mentioned the equity issue. I was planning to talk about the lack of equity and some of this later, but we can totally get into it right now. I think that's leading me into two questions. One, will you talk more about the role or the roles that librarians and media specialists should be playing when it comes to making sure students are learning the skills they need on the digital literacy front?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Well, part of the study of library sciences is understanding the research component of understanding the validity of resources, and understanding the accuracy of what students are finding and how it relates to maybe the topics that they're looking for. When we don't have librarians in school, we lose that aspect. That's not taught in teacher education. That is literally taught in library sciences.

That's coming from me. I took some library sciences courses and of course my teacher education courses. It was vastly different in terms of how we talked about research. Even though I was writing as a teacher when I was learning about the mechanics of research and how that operates, that's something that was absolutely a topic within just learning the part about library sciences.

Now, of course, I didn't take that route. I continued with being a math educator. But I walked into school knowing that this was a person that I needed to be an ally for me in my school. Whether it was that I was looking for a deeper dive into what I was teaching, or as my students were studying math history and math historians, that we were looking for someone to help them understand the difference between, at

the time, what they were finding in a now-defunct encyclopedia, or what they were looking for online. Just having that person there to help them navigate those spaces was important.

Librarians do more than check out books. They become a lifeline to resources, whether it be digital, active community or whatsoever, and we definitely need those roles in schools to help support this learning with teachers and students.

MONITA BELL

But increasingly we're seeing schools that don't have librarians, like you were saying.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

No. They've gone to media specialist roles, and often those people in those roles are not certified librarians. I actually was almost a media specialist at one point in time in my career, but it didn't happen. I for one knew that I definitely did not need to be in that role. Then the second, I knew that I wanted to focus more on technology, but even as I was halfway transitioning and not transitioning, in the back of my mind, I always knew there's a responsibility here. It's not about maintaining the order of the library; it really is about being a sounding board for the students or teachers when they come in. Not as the person with all of the information, but a person that can help guide them. We absolutely need that, especially when you're talking about digital literacy. Those librarians are amazing allies.

MONITA BELL

You were just making a distinction there between librarians and media specialists. Can you talk more about that? Maybe it's differences in terms of training. Can you just get into that a little more?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

I think it is. Now, some schools, of course, have media specialists with certified librarians in those roles. Let me be very clear in saying that. We have some in our district as well. But the roles actually differ, honestly, school district to school district. You really can't even pinpoint exactly what that is. In certain cases, the media specialist might be the person who is helping with the digital resources across the district. They might be helping students with some type of digital learning within the library space, but then helping to support that in classrooms. That is how it works in our school district. But in other school districts, the media specialist/librarian role is basically an interchange of titles where they're doing the exact same thing from the librarian perspective, but now they've added on maybe technology support.

MONITA BELL

Right. We were also talking about equity. In addition to, because of funding or whatever the reasons might be, there are some schools that don't have librarians. What are some of the other equity issues? I know we can get into the technology too of course, but can you speak to some of the other equity issues that exist in this space, and ways that schools can make sure they're getting this instruction to kids in spite of those equity issues, or work around them?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

I know we'll talk about devices later, but I don't know that you can even talk about equity without talking about access to the tools themselves. The second thing is a filtered Internet versus an unfiltered Internet versus a super, super-filtered Internet. I've been in school districts that block everything including

email. I've been in some that only block YouTube because we still see video media as the devil in schools without thinking about all of the different ways that we learn through video or that we utilize video versus print text.

Then of course, just the equity of people to help in that process and the equity of the seat at the table to decide what's good and not. We're not giving students enough choice to make a lot of these decisions themselves. We're automatically thinking about the one or two students who will make mistakes, and even when they do, we don't think about how to help them through those mistakes. We immediately do things like block them from all access whatsoever, which happens across the board. So, I think equity is just such a broad sense of sometimes the adults get it wrong, but in most cases, we do it without students at the table and without thinking about how we are helping to prepare them beyond the homework that they do in school.

MONITA BELL

Yeah. I really appreciate you introducing basically the student agency aspect into this conversation about equity. Students should play a role in deciding what they're using, what they have access to, it sounds like what you're saying.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Yeah. The other day I posted something on Twitter about I was ... I don't even know what I was doing. Oh, I was learning something myself, and I happened to find out how to do it on YouTube. So, I was making a broad statement that it's crazy that we still block this resource in schools; that when I think about how to learn something, I go to YouTube. That is my number one place. You would be shocked at how many adults were pushing back. "Well, we could do that if the kids didn't look for porn," or, "We could do that if there were better filtering," or, "The kids would get off task." That was the number one thing from non-educators. These are from parents: that YouTube would make the kids be off task.

That brought it back full circle. Are we treating them like people who have a say in what and how they learn or are we treating them like people who just can't make the determination of what is important at the moment? All of that to me is about teaching about the learning process entirely, which we don't stress that part enough. We immediately jump to "These are all the reasons why we can't do it," instead of "We really do need to open these opportunities up and then as we encounter certain issues, here is how we deal with that." I think that's across-the-board education. That's not just one single school.

MONITA BELL

I know you've spoken to this before in your work about pretty much preparing our students to engage with the Web in the way that the world engages with the Web.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Right.

MONITA BELL

Like you were saying, not just for homework, but even that example you gave about looking for something on YouTube. Every tutorial imaginable that you need is on YouTube. I think just about all of us adults have gone to YouTube to learn how to do something or to see how something is done. But then

to deny students that access in schools is just not realistic for how we use the Web, just as an example.

Can you think of other examples then? What are other ways that I guess from a systemic perspective we are hampering students or hindering them from really using the tools that we have at our disposal?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Well, for starters, when students are young and we start to teach them how to do research, we give them the places where they can research. I think that's a normal thing to do to exhibit that control. We say, "Go to these five websites, and that's it." Well, what if I'm searching for something and it's not contained within these five websites? Can I go someplace else? Well, the answer is typically, "No, you can only use these resources." So, we limit, not just ... not even taking YouTube off the table. I'm gonna use ... There's a very big multimedia resource that is currently in a lot of different schools, and there's a large community attached to it. I don't want to call them by name. There's a large community of teachers that use it, attached to it, and they have video and they have images and they have some primary resources that are part of that too. But they don't have everything.

But I've seen teachers build their entire lesson around this one resource, that "We are gonna use this, this and only this." To me, what is different from using that and saying you can only use the textbook? Because you're still only allowing students to search and to learn within a walled garden. We're very good about creating walled gardens, but we are terrible about helping students to navigate outside of that.

MONITA BELL

Thank you for that. I guess this is a good place to go ahead and get into the various ed tech tools, what I know is something that you're very passionate about and obviously have a lot of expertise in. This is related to the equity issue too in some ways, but it's very hot right now for people who can, for schools that can, to get what's the latest thing or the latest tools and just make sure they've got them in those classrooms. I know you have some thoughts about that. I would love for you to just explain what's your philosophy when it comes to implementing these various tools in the classroom.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

I definitely have some thoughts on that, and it might shock a lot of people. I used to be very much so, "We should only get the technology that is applicable to the lesson or to the learning and what kids need," and I still believe that to an extent. But I've also seen what happens when we have no technology at all. I've seen what happens when the only thing that kids have is the one visit to the library once a week, and typically to use the computer to do the math lesson for the day or the reading lesson for the day. So first and foremost, I think we have to stop looking at technology as a separate thing from pencils, paper, notebook. I think that it is just as critical or even more so than the standard tools that we use every day. So, that's first.

I think every classroom should have access to those tools, but I also think that we need to be open to student exploration of it. Even as we're younger, we still—if we have technology, we—create projects that are geared toward the technology. "We're going to make green screen video today. We're going to use our blank-blank apps to do X, Y and Z." But we don't allow students to explore and research.

I have a nephew who is now 13. When he was eight, he started to teach himself how to make puppets,

Muppet-style, crazy, insane art puppets. In the five years that he has been doing this—I think that’s five. I had to count, Miss Math Teacher ... In the five years that he’s been creating, he has gone from making puppets to molding clay figurines to—he’s actually designed and made my mother’s entire Halloween yard pieces with ... You’d be shocked at the things that he makes.

MONITA BELL

Wow.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

He sews, he does all these things, and everything he’s learned, he’s learned how to do it online. But he can do these things because he has access to technology. He has his own iPad. He has his own computer that he can draw on. It’s not filtered when he gets home. When schools do one-to-one, we often will filter the computer before it goes home, so even if it goes home they have no access to do anything but homework. In that case, you’re still cutting kids off from the world. You’re not trusting them; you’re not trusting their families to help them be stewards of the tools that they’re using as well. He’s able to do those things because he has unfiltered access to learn whatever he wants.

So, I absolutely think that we have to think about the tools that kids need, the tools that are part of the world, and put them in front of them so that they can use them. But I also think that we need to trust them to use them outside of the assignments that we create and the rules that we create for them. I don’t know how soon we’ll get to that, but I think as long as we keep going to tech conferences and someone is waving a “Here’s the next way to control what students do” in front of the people that make those decisions, we’ll never get away from doing that.

MONITA BELL

Since you mentioned conferences, I know you have spoken at a number of tech conferences. You’ve spoken at ISTE, for example, and you’re kind of a big deal. But I know you’ve spoken out a lot about the lack of diversity in the ed tech field. I’m wondering, how do you think that lack of diversity affects the apps and tools that our youth are using in classrooms and beyond?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

The one thing that I’ve learned in the last six or seven months ... I’ve been heavily involved with the technology community, but I have also been an advocate of self-care. For me, that meant stepping back and re-figuring out what I was passionate about and what I loved outside of this world. I started to connect with people that had nothing to do with technology: going to art shows, going to museums, going to sporting events. I flew to a concert with my daughter; it was my very first time doing that. But connecting with people in different types of spaces, which I think is important.

The one thing that that experience has really taught me is it made me look at diversity even more differently. From us, it has always been kind of black and white. It’s that the students of color within tech spaces typically translated to black. But of course, that “students of color” is a diversity of students from places, of course here in the States, but all over, that are often not considered. What I’ve found is when we take those conversations and we leave them along those two lanes, we’re doing two things. Number one, we’re leaving out the students that are being worked with every day by teachers, typically teachers of color, who speak

multiple languages, multiple dialects, in different places, but we're also leaving out those experiences.

That typically still happens. It happens so much. So now, I want us to not just come in and talk about being a person in a space, but what type of work are you doing? How are we bridging gaps between the students that have and don't, the students who have never connected with someone outside of their own communities, the students who only know one language and may need to connect beyond that as well? So, I would like to see us change and really diversify our conversations around diversity. Hopefully, we will. I think I'm now starting to come back into this, and hopefully bringing some of those experiences with me.

MONITA BELL

Yes, thank you. Wow. Thank you for that. What was the concert you saw with your daughter?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

BTS, of course.

MONITA BELL

Yes.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Korean pop band currently taking over the world. It's so funny because everyone is like, "Rafranz, I don't know how you do that. You don't even understand what they're saying." That, to me, even opened up more doors in terms of technology, access, equity, because I've been able to experience the world in ways that I would not have otherwise, and that I think is hopefully going to be reflected in my work as well.

MONITA BELL

I think that brings me even to I would say two summary questions that I have for you, based on what we've been discussing here. The first is: What can schools, and classroom teachers in particular, do to create learning environments that are ripe for exploring digital literacy and technology and all things related to that?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Sure. First, and I'll repeat this again: Partner with your librarians. If you don't have one in your school, connect with your local librarian in your community, you more than likely have one of those. To learn; I think that as a teacher, even though the time is sometimes lacking, it is our responsibility to learn better ways to engage our students across the various forms of media, whether it be digitally or non-digitally, and we need to do that.

The second thing, of course, is being stewards of what is right. For example, Drake released this song "In My Feelings." The "In My Feelings" Challenge went all over the place, and all of a sudden we see all of these bulletin boards with big pictures of Drake and the lyrics to the "In My Feelings" Challenge in different schools, which is great. But I saw some things like books that are being represented on walls where it's completely ... They're all white authors and all white characters.

So, my question was, here we are talking about ... let's talk about literacy, media literacy for one. This is coming from a borrowed challenge within hip-hop music that is prevalent within the black community.

You're teaching students that are predominantly students of color, but yet every book that you are offering them is a book that doesn't represent who they are and is on this wall. That stuck out to me that that was a conversation that we still had to have.

So, completely educating yourself first and foremost on whether you're utilizing media that you have engaged with in trying to bring that into your classroom, or you are physically utilizing media in a digital way. You have to become a model of the best practices. That means stepping out of your comfort zone if possible, asking questions and learning.

MONITA BELL

That Drake example is a really good example that everybody I know is gonna be able to relate to because, like you said, yeah, I saw several pictures from schools that were latching onto that. So, thank you for that, in particular. I guess my last summary question comes back to the equity issue. We've talked about the fact not all schools have librarians, not all schools even have access to Internet or wired devices or even computers for every student. Or if they do, it's like you said, going to the library once a week or whatever the case may be. Even with those barriers right now that we need to work to dismantle, how can educators make this instruction more equitable?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

You're right, not all schools have devices or Internet. Even some of our schools, the Internet is lacking in different parts of the building. I think that's reality—even some of our buildings are so old. I think first and foremost again is often even students who ... This has multiple tiers. Number one, the students who have. There are students who will have their own devices, being open to them bringing their devices into the classroom. They might even have Internet in some way. I've even seen students who may be lacking in other areas, but they might have a phone. That's one way. If that exists, you need to be open to students bringing it into the classroom, and not always assuming the worst, 'cause it's not always the worst.

Number two, connecting with stakeholders in your community who might be able to help provide certain tools or even connectivity that maybe your school can't. It may be a portable Internet device or it may be used technology from their office buildings that can be refurbished or re-utilized in classrooms. The third thing is, even if students have devices, being flexible with how you assign for the times when they might not have Internet access. I've had students who have Wi-Fi at home, but something happens, the Wi-Fi gets turned off, so they didn't have that access at home to do homework or didn't have that access at home to send some message on the school message board, whatever the case may be. So, creating the environment where if a student may be dealing with some sensitive issues why they may not have certain connectivity, that they can come to you and that you have some solutions that are ready for them without ridiculing or making them feel in some kind of way for a situation that they can't control themselves.

I'm really always sensitive to that because I've seen it happen even within my own family, of having Internet and then it being disconnected or having a phone and it being turned off. We assume, one, that all students have it. That's one assumption. Then the second assumption, we assume that all of them don't. I think that we have to plan for both in some capacity.

MONITA BELL

Thank you. Yes, yes. That was perfect. Really just one more thing is, do you have any resources that you

would recommend to educators? I know you've been talking about how important it is for teachers to educate themselves, and for all of us really. Do you have any go-tos?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

I do. The ITLA, is that the one for the International Teachers and Librarian Association? I think I could be saying the wrong name. But one of my favorite ones is N-A-E-Y-C. It's National Association for the Education of Young Children. They have a lot of great resources of reading materials about ... There's lots of great resources there specifically about digital literacy and equity. That's first and foremost.

For parents, one of my favorite ones—'cause I do get to teach parents about ways to protect their kids at home and digital literacy from a parenting perspective, and I always share connectsafely.org. If you're a parent and you are wanting to learn more about how social media works, which you should, connectsafely.org actually has parent guides that are based on the different social networks. I think that's a great place for parents to start to learn more about how kids are connecting. Even if you're not a parent or you're a teacher, that's a great place for you to learn more about how kids are connecting and how we can educate them. Because whether we provide access in schools or not, they're doing it. We are going to have to have stronger conversations and learning about how to do it safely. Connectsafely.org.

MONITA BELL

Well, I think that's a great way to wrap up. Just one more time, can you tell us who you are and what you do?

RAFRANZ DAVIS

My name is Rafranz Davis. I'm the Executive Director of Professional and Digital Learning for Lufkin ISD in East Texas.

MONITA BELL

Thank you, thank you, thank you so much.

RAFRANZ DAVIS

Thank you.

MONITA BELL

You just heard from Rafranz Davis, Executive Director of Professional and Digital Learning for Lufkin ISD in Texas. Thank you for tuning in to *The Mind Online*, a podcast of Teaching Tolerance, which is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. I'm your host, Monita Bell, Senior Editor for Teaching Tolerance.

This podcast was inspired by Teaching Tolerance's digital literacy framework, which offers seven key areas in which students need support developing digital and civic literacy skills and features lessons for kindergarten through 12th-grade classrooms. Each lesson is designed in a way that can be used by educators with little to no technology in their classroom. The digital literacy framework and all its related resources, including a series of student-friendly videos and a professional development webinar, can be found online at tolerance.org/diglit. That's tolerance.org/D-I-G-L-I-T.

This episode of The Mind Online was produced by Jasmin López, with help from Andrew Greule and Eilis O'Neill. Production was supervised by Kate Shuster, and I want to give special thanks to our guests, Sam Wineburg and Rafranz Davis, and to Teaching Tolerance Senior Writer Cory Collins. If you like what you've heard, then do us a favor and share this podcast with your friends and colleagues, and remember to rate and review us on iTunes or wherever you listen.

And Teaching Tolerance Senior Writer Cory Collins assisted with the script. Our music comes courtesy of John Bartmann. If you like what you've heard, share this podcast with your friends and colleagues, and remember to rate, review and subscribe on iTunes or wherever you listen.