Building Community Online

Estimated time: Two 45-minute lessons

Essential Question: How can websites foster community online?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students examine websites that foster positive community. They explore the factors that increase community engagement on the Internet, such as social media messaging and sharing photos, videos, information, or opinions. They then apply what they have learned about building online community by designing their own websites that foster community.

objectives

Students will:

- Observe and analyze the factors that foster positive community, both offline and online

- Identify characteristics of websites that excel at creating positive online community

- Demonstrate their understanding of how to build positive community online

Digital Ethics Focus:

(Self)   (Family and Friends)   (Community)

Materials and Preparation

Materials

- **Sites That Build Community – Blank Version**

- **Sites That Build Community – Sample Completed Version**

- **Design a Community Website Student Handout**

- Large sheets of drawing paper or butcher paper, several for each group of four or five students, and colored markers

Preparation

- Browse the following websites listed in the chart in Teach 1, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Wordpress, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Goodreads, Yelp, Wikipedia, and Digg. Students will be asked to describe how some of these sites help build community. (Note: Make arrangements to get access to sites that might be blocked by the school filter.)

- Re-create or project the **Sites That Build Community – Blank Version**

- Read over the **Sites That Build Community – Sample Completed Version**

- Copy the **Design a Community Website Student Handout**, one for every group of four to five students

Parent Resources

- Send home the **Social Networking Parent Tip Sheet**

Differentiated Instruction

Adjust the content load for your students by having them fill out the **Sites That Build Community** chart on their own, but choosing the number of sites they research based on their abilities.

Key Vocabulary

- **Foster:** To nurture or encourage

- **Social media:** Online communications that promote user interaction, feedback, and content sharing

Introduce *(15 minutes)*

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary word **foster**.

DRAW a concept map with the word *community* in the middle. Have students suggest events that foster community, and list them in circles around the central word.

Sample responses:

- *Events like football games and dances*
- *Extracurricular activities like clubs, sports, and yearbook*
- *Group projects in class*

ASK *What kinds of things make a community feel positive and foster participation?* (Encourage students to think about the following ways that community is fostered):

- *Options for getting involved*
- *Helping everyone feel welcome*
- *Sharing interests*

ENCOURAGE students to think of some ways that community can break down within a school.

Sample responses:

- *When some community members are mean or disrespectful to others*
- *When there is little opportunity for input by community members*
- *When members don't find the activities fun or interesting*

POINT OUT that there are many similarities offline and online about how community is built or broken. Explain that they will explore sites that use different methods to build positive online community, and that such communities can thrive only if users are engaged and participating.

Teach 1: Investigate Model Websites *(30 minutes)*

RE-CREATE or **PROJECT** the **Sites That Build Community – Blank Version**

INVITE students to provide sample responses orally for at least one of the sites in each column. Refer to the **Sites That Build Community – Sample Completed Version** for sample responses. These responses should reflect specific ways that each site builds community. Students might point out ways that a site encourages people to share their ideas, how a site offers tools for posting information to the community, or how a site allows users to see each other's opinions and reviews. If students are stuck, you may visit some of the sites and analyze them together.

DISCUSS how building positive community online depends on the quality of both the website and its users. A website that wants to engage its users includes fun or interesting features and encourages people to actively participate. Users then begin to create their own content, and invite more users to join in. Users are more likely to want to participate if there is a positive and welcoming environment, and if the content they find there is respectful and accurate.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **social media**.

ASK *How do some of the websites you identified fit the definition of social media?* (Encourage students to draw on their examples of how sites foster community to describe how users interact and create content.)

ASK *What would happen to each site if it failed to build an online community?* (Have students explain why Facebook, Twitter, and other popular social media sites could not exist without their users and the interactions among those users.)

ASK *What do you think might happen to these sites if they were full of negative, disrespectful, or inaccurate content?* (Guide students to consider how fewer people might want to participate in a site dominated by this kind of content. Also, guide them to think about the negative impact on anyone who is insulted. Discuss how some content of this kind will be inevitable on a site where people are mostly free to post whatever they want.)

Teach 2: Create a Community *(35 minutes)*

DIVIDE students into groups of four to five and distribute the **Design a Community Website Student Handout**, one per group. Also provide each group with large sheets of drawing paper and markers.

INTRODUCE the following list of guidelines for building online communities:

• Assign someone to manage the community
• Make the purpose of the community clear to users
• Involve users in some way and feature the members
• Build relationships with users who have strong voices or are very active
• Encourage debates, but make sure users feel safe
• Look to members to recruit their friends
• Allow users to help run parts of the site

Adapted from Richard Milligan's article, "The Fundamental Laws of Online Communities" http://www.feverbee.com/2009/10/11fundamentallawsofonlinecommunities.html

CHALLENGE groups to design a community website. The site should be aimed at building a community of users who interact and collaborate. Have students follow the directions on their student handouts to plan the site, and then have them sketch out their home page on paper.

INVITE students to share the concepts for their websites with the class and describe what community features they have included, and why. Have them name which guidelines they applied in designing their websites.

Wrap Up and Assess *(10 minutes)*

You can use the questions below to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives, or you can ask students to evaluate another group's website design based on the criteria for building community.

ASK *What are some of the similarities and differences between building a community online and offline?* (Similarities: It is vital to have group participation and interaction. Differences: Online communities usually include people who have never met face to face. Also, the online community is often larger, and communication among its members is sometimes more public.)

ASK *What kinds of social media sites depend on a community of users, and how do they build community?* (Students should be able to identify, explain, and give examples of several of the types of sites explored in Teach 1.)

commonsense
media

The **GoodPlay** Project
Harvard Graduate School of Education

DIGITAL LITERACY AND CITIZENSHIP IN A CONNECTED CULTURE
© 2011   www.commonsense.org   3

ASK *How did you apply the guidelines for building an online community when you created your site?*
(Students should be able to name and explain several of the points outlined in the guidelines for building an online community, discussed in Teach 2.)

ASK *What kinds of things foster a positive online community and help it grow, and what factors might make a community break down?* (Students should recognize that a respectful, inclusive environment with interesting and accurate content is more likely to attract and maintain a community of users; the opposite factors can make a community break down.)

Extension Activity

Students can build their community website with Dreamweaver, or online at Wix (www.wix.com) or Weebly (www.weebly.com). Have students create websites with the community-building features they listed on the student handout. They can add mock (or real) text and photos to fill out the page. For features that are difficult to build out, the webpage can be designed but not be functional. Students who do not have computer access at home can sketch out the pages of their website on paper and then create it on a computer in the classroom or school library.

Homework

Have students add content to a Wikipedia page for your school, which they can contribute to online (www.wikipedia.org). You should set up the entry in advance so it includes headings about community, such as community events, extracurricular activities, and community service.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students© 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

1. Creativity and Innovation
  a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
  b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression
  c. use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues
  d. identify trends and forecast possibilities

2. Communication and Collaboration
  a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
  d. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems

3. Research and Information Literacy
  a. plan strategies to guide inquiry
  b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media
  c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks
  d. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

---

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

  a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation

  b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project

  c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions

5. Digital Citizenship

  a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology

  b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity

  c. demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning

  d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship