

Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Cultivating Digital Well-Being as a Social Practice with the PERMA Framework

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In this seventh post in the [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox blog series](#), Gwen Nguyen discusses the dimensions of digital well-being and suggests how educators should cultivate it into teaching as a social practice with the PERMA framework to support students' positive agency and global digital citizenship skills.

What's the first thing you do when you open your eyes in the morning? Check your phone for new notifications or messages from friends? How many Zoom meetings did you have today? Whatever field you're in, you're likely immersed in technology for most of your social, personal, learning, and working needs. Nevertheless, despite the increasing demands of virtual engagement and clear evidence of negative aspects of technology use on students, there is a lack of research about how digital learning technologies and digital pedagogies impact their well-being (Nageswaran et al., 2023). Even though general well-being has received attention across higher education due to its inseparable connection to learning, many educators still struggle to have a comprehensive digital wellness curriculum to help learners navigate digital spaces safely and ethically (Harward, 2016).

Digital Well-Being

Burr, Taddeo, & Floridi (2020) define digital well-being as "the impact of digital technologies on what it means to live a life that is good for human beings in an information society." In other words, digital well-being refers to the optimum state of health and well-being each individual using technology can achieve (Gui, Fasoli, & Carridore, 2017). In the context of teaching with technology, digital well-being means using technology in a way that promotes learners' and educators' success and holistic health. It is the capacity to use technologies to support personal health, safety, and relationships. It is the conscious use of technology as well as strategies to manage technology when it negatively impacts your health and to establish a work-life balance in digital spaces ([JISC](#), 2015).

From "Digitally Aware" to "Digitally Healthy" in Flourishing Digital Spaces

As mentioned by Cecchinato et al. (2019), digital well-being can be framed from multiple points of view, including medical-oriented, user-oriented, and design-oriented perspectives. In recent years, from a design-oriented perspective, even tech giants like [Google](#) or [Apple](#) launched digital self-control tools that aim to support self-control over lock-out mechanisms on devices and online services. Many educators and students use these tools to improve their behaviours with technology. However, this is still an emerging research area as the real effectiveness of these tools, especially in the long term, is yet to be examined (Roffarello & De Russis, 2022)

I would like to discuss the call for cultivating digital wellness among students daily so students will be able to not only survive but also thrive in their digital life and beyond. Educators need to establish a comprehensive program ([as a lifelong journey, not a one-and-done talk](#)) that supports learners with digital well-being by becoming more digitally aware and digitally healthy.

Imagine you're at an intersection. The light is yellow, so you automatically slow down and press the brake so you can stop behind another vehicle when the light is red. You're listening to music, and good driving has long been part of you and your consciousness. But before driving became part of you and your consciousness, you *learned with others* how to drive, obey road rules, and navigate the road ethically and safely with others.

If you think about how you navigate in digital spaces, it's the same. The word *well-being* might make you think more about your physical or even mental health, which seems to refer to personal experience. However, digital well-being is a social practice at its origin. Being healthy in digital spaces does not mean you give up your digital devices and become healthier. It does not mean you are digitally healthy if you engage in only offline activities. Just as you share the road with others, educators, students, and the wider community need to work and learn together to build understanding around digital rights and responsibilities as global citizens. Only through a continuous learning process with others can learners become more *digitally aware* and *digitally healthy*. How can you use technology effectively, safely, and ethically? How can you use it in a way that doesn't harm yourself or others? When technology negatively impacts your health, environment, and society at large, how can you manage it? How can you set healthy boundaries with technology when working in digital spaces?

Digitally Aware—Digitally Mindful

While the debate continues about how to regulate the online space, it is convincing that organizations and educators play an integral role to play in preparing students for being more digitally aware or digitally mindful of their privacy, security, safety, identity, and health. [The four aspects of digital well-being for individuals model from Joint Information Systems Committee \(JISC, 2015\)](#) educates learners to develop their awareness and capacity to change their digital practices. It can be something as simple as signing an online agreement that covers aspects such as online bullying, privacy, and etiquette so learners are clearer about what is expected of them and mindful of their roles and how to fulfill them. It can also be a short activity such as reviewing websites together when you introduce them so students can reflect on privacy settings, privacy policies, and how to brainstorm healthy routines when entering apps or websites on their own ([Kolb, 2022](#)). If you are still looking for some questions to initiate sustained conversations among educators and students, please take the following into your consideration:

- Can you create and manage online identity effectively? How can you protect your online identity and the identity of others when sharing information?
- Are you aware that search engines, websites, and platforms can track your online activity and create your digital footprint?
- Are you aware that digital platforms contain spaces that exhibit toxicity, racism, sexism, violence, etc.? How do you react to others in digital spaces so you contribute to safe, just, inclusive, and accessible environments?
- Are you able to access remote healthcare services? Can you store digital health records?
- Are you aware of digital burnout? And do you take breaks from social media?

And if you are looking for some open educational resources on how to teach students about digital awareness, consider those [open learning modules](#).

Digitally Healthy with the PERMA Framework

Apart from some core lessons to build learners' full awareness around ethical and legal principles of online spaces, to promote students' long-term digital wellness, I suggest integrating PERMA, a framework for practicing positive psychology to flourish in life by Seligman (2012). Following is the discussion of five facets (building blocks or routes for well-being) of the PERMA framework and some potential ways to enact them in the classroom, inspired by Natasha Kenny and Patti Dyjur's blog [Supporting Educator and Student Well-being in the Classroom \(ucalgaryblogs.ca\)](#)

Positive Emotion

Positive emotion is a feeling of joy, hope, and contentment (Seligman, 2012). Positive emotion refers to what makes you feel good. It doesn't mean you engage only in positive, smiley aspects of teaching and learning with technology. You also need to acknowledge the negatives of digital life and practice, reducing stressors and promoting positive coping and resilience when working in digital spaces.

Reflective Questions

When you think about your relationship with digital technologies, is it positive or negative? Are you experiencing any stress and anxiety? If so, what can you do to reduce negative emotions?

To support students' well-being in digital learning spaces, encourage them to share personal journals or create spaces to talk about their relationship with digital technologies and share their stressors out loud. You can also design activities that support a growth learning mindset and provide students with voices and choices. Instead of one traditional high-stakes exam, create several low-stakes and small projects that focus on the process and invite students' opinions in setting deadlines and choosing submission formats. Provide continuous constructive feedback to help them with their learning. Moreover, encourage students to take screen breaks or social media breaks when necessary.

Engagement

Engagement is feeling attached and involved and the ability to concentrate on activities (Seligman, 2012). Think of the engagement facet as “flow” (Csikszentmihayi, 2002), which occurs when you can use your strengths to face challenges presented in an activity. The engagement facet leads you toward creating meaningful opportunities to draw on students’ strengths and interests so they can become one with activities they do online.

Reflective Questions

By engaging when using digital technologies, are you getting into the flow?

Are learning technologies giving you the chance to collaborate with others, share stories, relax, or find quality time to live in the present moment?

To support students’ well-being in the classroom, explore how to give more choices and voices in activities that excite students to find out what they’re good at. That also means your learning designs need to allow students to approach topics in multiple ways, increase interactivity in the process, and apply interests (e.g., making videos, using music, etc.). Explore how to create a space for students to teach and learn from each other and what learning technologies support their collaboration, sharing advice so they can learn to fully live in the present moment.

Relationships

Relationships mean feeling connected, supported, and cared about (Seligman, 2012). As humans are inherently social, it is very important to promote opportunities for collaboration and interaction within and among teams.

Reflective Questions

Are you able to use technologies to make new connections or strengthen relationships?

Are you able to avoid negative relationships and interactions via these technologies?

To support students’ well-being through the relationship-building block, facilitate peer learning, problem-solving, and discussion activities both in and outside the classroom. When you organize group projects, remember to incorporate, and provide ongoing support (e.g., illustrate how to do well in online group projects). What tools can students use to collaborate, brainstorm, share files, etc.? Design some online mini-conferences so students can share their projects and provide feedback. Bring in spotlights regarding how they engage in the study group, identify learning spaces to work through a project, etc.

Meaning

Meaning refers to feeling valued and connected to something greater than the self (Seligman, 2012). As Seligman discussed, one of the intrinsic human qualities is the search for meaning and the need to have a sense of value and worth. The meaning pathway suggests promoting regular reflection and finding ways to connect learning activities to the values and holistic purposes of the course.

Reflective Question

Does your use of digital technologies help you achieve greater meaning?

What you can do in the classroom to promote the meaning facet is engage students in reflective practices (e.g., a positionality statement at the beginning of the course, metacognitive activities such as exam wrap-ups, and end-of-course exit interviews). In addition, think of providing rich context when you request that students engage in an activity so they can see the big picture and how the learning is meaningful to their long-term academic, personal, and professional development.

Accomplishment

Accomplishment means feeling capable or having a sense of achievement and mastery of work. Accomplishment is a result of working and progressing toward goals. Through the accomplishment block, think of teaching practices that help students build their intrinsic self-motivation in setting goals and having a strong determination to finish what they set out to do. This contributes to well-being because students learn to look at their learning process with a sense of pride as they drive their learning with full autonomy and know how to celebrate success.

Reflective Questions

Does using technology help you aim higher?

Does using technology allow time to celebrate little things?

In the classroom, think of teaching students to share positive, balanced feedback through activities. Encourage them to recognize their successes through activities such as mini virtual poster conferences or final reflections where they share their learning spotlights with others. Provide tutorials online to allow students to propose their learning needs, build their self-regulation, and aim higher in learning. Also, consider encouraging students to develop an eportfolio/CV to build a list of successes from day one.

I would like to borrow some words from Dickens (1895) to finish this last Digital Pedagogy Toolbox Blog post series:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

We do seem to go through a time of chaos, conflicts, despair, as well as happiness with technology transformation every second. My suggestion for cultivating digital well-being as a daily practice with the PERMA framework might not be “the spring of hope” or the answer to all concerns or negative aspects of teaching and learning online. However, when you create or design learning spaces, start incorporating digital well-being in all programs and lessons alongside other learning goals because only through comprehensive daily practice do students learn to be more digitally aware and healthy, allowing them to flourish in their work and study successfully.

FLO Friday: Digital Well-Being: PERMA 2.0 and More

Early in March, we hosted a one-hour workshop to

- Explore the topic of digital well-being in higher education and what it means to become more digitally aware and digitally healthy.
- Reflect on some digital tools and the PERMA framework to promote well-being in remote teaching.
- Discuss ways to integrate digital wellness into teaching and learning.

The resources are now available: [FLO Friday: Digital Well-Being: PERMA 2.0 and More](#)

Learn more

- [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Ethics as Design](#)
- [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Designing for Care with Personas](#)
- [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Creating Engaging, Interactive Learning Resources](#)
- [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Early Considerations for ePortfolios in WordPress](#)
- [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Use Games, But Use the Fun Parts!](#)
- [Digital Pedagogy Toolbox: Let's Make Friends with ChatGPT](#)

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