Developing Children’s Digital Resilience: A Brief Educational Intervention Increases Digital Skills, Self-Efficacy, and Help-Seeking for Online Challenges in Elementary School Students

Angela Y. Lee (Stanford University, Department of Communication)  
Jeffrey T. Hancock (Stanford University, Department of Communication)

The central role of technologies like social media and smartphones in children’s lives means that learning to navigate the promises and pitfalls of the digital world is now a core developmental task for elementary school students. While access to the Internet affords the potential to support others and find connection at scale, it also introduces interpersonal threats such as the experience of cyberbullying. In this paper, we argue that preparing students to thrive in an increasingly digital society requires the cultivation of their digital resilience - equipping students with the skills, self-efficacy, and support structures needed to harness the benefits of technologies while being informed and resilient to its dangers. We report on the results of a brief, educational intervention targeting students’ digital resilience that was administered to elementary school students in a classroom setting (n = 566). Guided by community-engaged practices, the intervention was developed in partnership with community stakeholders including a local non-profit and target school staff. Using a pre-post evaluation, we found that after participating in the intervention, students reported having increased digital skills regarding how to safely navigate the Internet; an increased sense of self-efficacy to stand up for themselves and speak up for others online; and an increased willingness to seek help from trusted adults and educators when encountering cyberbullying and difficult online situations. Our results demonstrate the potential for the efficacy of researcher-educator partnerships in creating developmentally appropriate interventions that address the need for educational programming that supports safe, healthy youth engagement with technology.