How Repton School Abu Dhabi Uses Showbie to Teach Students to be Good Digital Citizens

Philippa Wraithmell
HEAD OF IT AND COMPUTING

Philippa is Head of IT & Computing at Repton School Abu Dhabi. Philippa relies on several apps, including Showbie, to round out her digital classroom.

Kathryn Trowbridge
LIBRARY/CODING TEACHER

Kat is a graduate of Rutgers University with a Master of Information, a graduate of Marquette University College of Law with a J.D. and a BA from University of Arizona.

Richard Turley
YEAR 4 TEACHER

Richard has worked in British schools in Oman, Saudi Arabia and Japan, and has held teaching and leadership positions in three key stages.

Since 2013, Repton School Abu Dhabi has been a leader in academic excellence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Part of EKI Schools (which operates two additional schools in the UAE), Repton School Abu Dhabi is proud to offer a demanding curriculum that challenges students and prepares them for future success.

Thinking About Students' Futures

For today's students, this means providing not only an exceptional education but also teaching students how to learn, collaborate, and manage their work through technology.

"It is our responsibility to prepare our students for a future in a rapidly growing digital world," says Philippa Wraithmell, Head of IT and Computing at Repton Abu Dhabi. "We have to consider the future of learning and where our pupils will be in 10 or 20 years, even for jobs that might not yet be created."

Staying current with technology is an important component of preparing students for the future, which is why Repton School Abu Dhabi implemented a 1:1 iPad model for all students when it opened (which included nursery to Year 6) and will expand this model for Year 7-9 students joining the school in fall 2018.

"Using iPads in the classroom has allowed students to connect with each other and the world in meaningful ways," says Philippa. "Digital communications and competency is such a huge part of our daily lives, and I believe it is important to instill this in our students at such a young age."

With a vision for the school to become the leading digital educator in the UAE, leadership at Repton Abu Dhabi strives to ensure that each student is using their digital tools to their greatest potential. When they began their 1:1 iPad program with another workflow app, they discovered its limitations when it came to marking and storing schoolwork, providing differentiation in lessons, and compatibility with other digital apps and tools that could really benefit students.

"We needed to find something that allowed us to store and manage students' digital portfolios year over year," says Philippa. "More importantly, we needed to find a tool that allowed students to have the freedom to use the iPad in innovative ways while allowing students and teachers to be fluid in their communication."

After researching several products, Philippa found Showbie was the only platform that met the needs of her technology-driven school. In December 2017, Philippa began testing the app with approximately 15 teachers.

> "We wanted to be organic with the way that we rolled Showbie out to our teachers to allow them to feel comfortable with the new technology," says Philippa. "We've had some formal training on Showbie, but teachers have generally found the ways that Showbie works best for them. Teachers are excited to have the freedom to explore the app to suit the needs of their particular classrooms – they take pride in finding their own solutions."

Unsure if they should implement Showbie schoolwide in fall 2018, she spoke with Martha McCleary, Head of Digital Literacy at Foremarke School Dubai (another school in the EKI Schools network), about her school's experience with Showbie, as they had been using the app for a few years.

"After speaking with Martha and her team, it was clear that we should dive in and get everyone on board with Showbie," Philippa explains. "The benefits of using Showbie have clearly had a positive impact on Foremarke Dubai's school community, and we are confident the product will have the same positive effects here at Repton Abu Dhabi."

Creating Responsible Digital Learners

Because Repton Abu Dhabi plans to include all grades in its 1:1 model as the school expands to include older students this fall, it is more important than ever to create responsible digital learners in an online collaborative environment. Using technology, the school's goal is to improve students' understanding of what it truly means to be a digital citizen in today's world.

"Students, especially the older students joining in the fall, are immersed in an age of digital living," says Philippa, "and it is our responsibility as educators to prepare our students to use technology in positive ways and become sensible digital users."

In just a few short months, Philippa and her pilot teachers already have seen how students are creating their own safe forums during extracurricular activities such as the student newspaper and student council. Through Showbie, students in these activities created groups connecting students across grade levels and their supervising teachers and are uploading articles for review, arranging meetings, participating in peer assessment, and sharing ideas with each other when it is difficult to meet face-to-face.

"Creating these groups in Showbie encourages students to be in control of how they navigate their digital space and gives them a sense of ownership and accountability that they would not have otherwise," says Philippa. "Students are more inclined to stay involved in the school's culture through this type of digital social gathering because they don't have to sacrifice time for other activities or time at home with their families."

Showbie not only lets students practice responsible online behavior, it also is providing a way for students to see good online behavior from adults. Kathryn Trowbridge, a Library/Coding teacher for Years 3 through 9 (beginning fall 2018), uses a Showbie group to connect parents, teachers, and students (a priority for Repton Abu Dhabi with Showbie) through an online book club.

"The way we use Showbie for our online book club is fairly similar to the way we would use other social media to share ideas," says Kathryn. "The biggest difference is that I can rest assured that Showbie's forum is a safe place for kids to see how parents and teachers use social media, so they can model the same behavior."

Because Repton Abu Dhabi is still new to using Showbie, teachers and staff are still discovering ways the app can enhance learning for their students. Some teachers have found that Showbie is great for providing content enrichment in order to get students more excited about learning. For example, Year 4 teacher Richard Turley uses a weekly inspirational quote to motivate his students and has now started sending the quote and a video link about the quote's author to his students through Showbie. This gives students additional context that they can explore on their own time.

"Showbie helps make our weekly quote come alive because students are inspired to learn more about the context of the quote," Richard says. "This helps to stimulate higher-level discussions in class and on Showbie discussion boards."

Kathryn is also looking forward to seeing how Showbie can further connect the school this fall, when Showbie becomes a required app. As a Library/Coding teacher, Kathryn does not have access to students as regularly as their core classroom teachers do. This can make it difficult to fully support classroom teachers without having transparency into what the students are learning on a daily basis.

"By further integrating specialists into the classroom, we can ensure that we are not duplicating teaching efforts or overloading students with extra classwork," explains Kathryn. "Showbie can provide a seamless communication tool for all teachers, which allows students to utilize every school resource to its full capacity."

Another Showbie feature the school will explore this fall is Showbie's ability to alternate between languages. With Arabic required as a core class at the school, Philippa was encouraged to recently learn that Showbie is available in Arabic as well as 13 other languages with the click of a button.

> "Now that I know there is an Arabic version, I will be getting the Arabic department to begin creating a fantastic digital Arabic world for our students," says Philippa.

In a matter of months, Repton Abu Dhabi has used Showbie to establish a solid foundation upon which responsible digital learners are created. As the school prepares to expand through Year 9 in the fall, current Repton Abu Dhabi students will be able to convey a strong digital message throughout the school and become positive digital role models for new and younger students. Philippa has noticed that students using Showbie grasp what it means to become positive role models for their peers by linking personal identities through a digital space.

"Associating device policies with behavior policies has resonated with our Showbie students," says Philippa. "We encourage students to think like they are on the playground – when they visualize their peers on a digital platform, we want them to remember that these are the same peers they see in school every day."