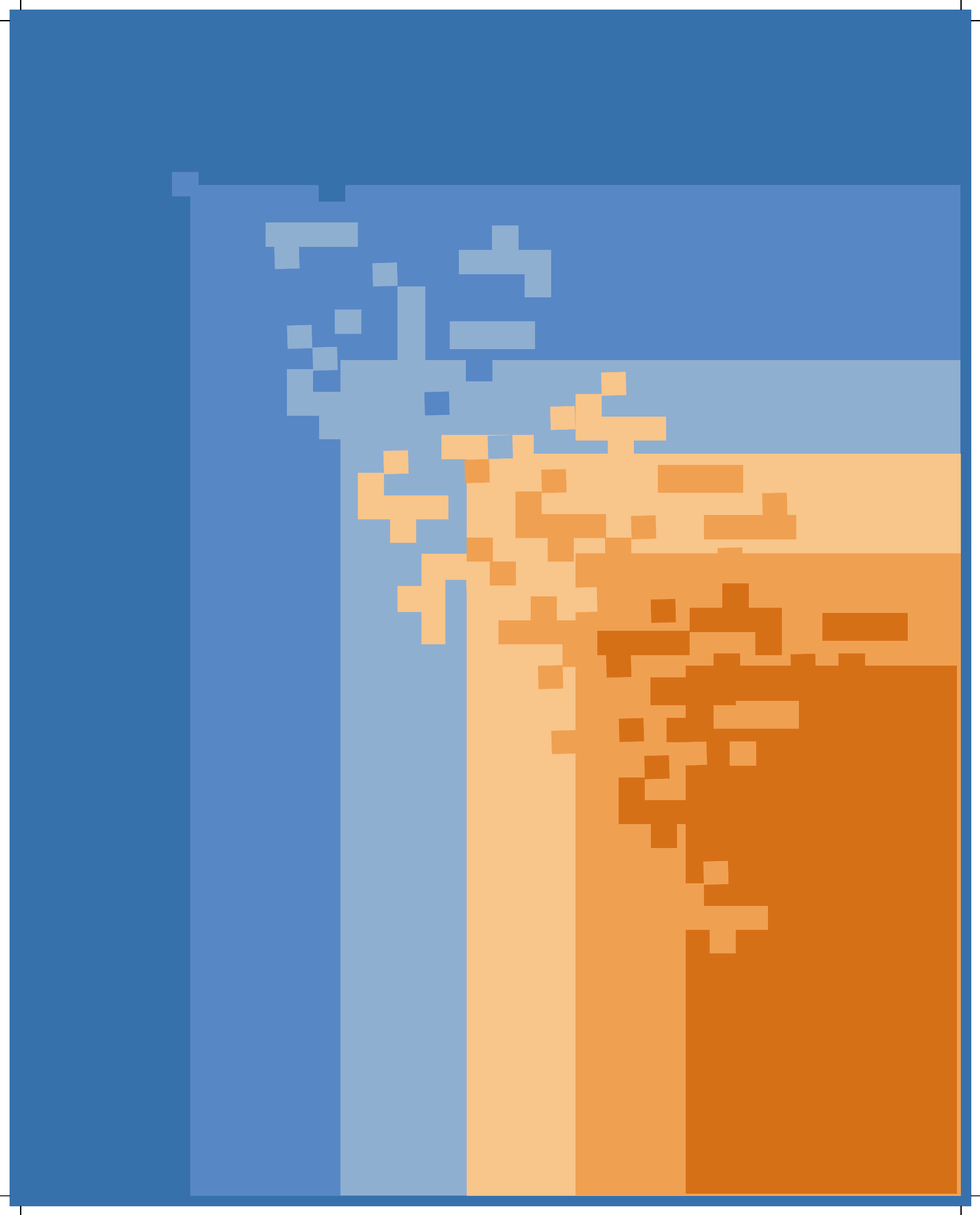


# Power-Up: Values at the Heart of Digital Citizenship





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**Acknowledgements**

# Executive Summary

The Power-Up project emerged from a shared recognition of a significant gap: while digital education and digital citizenship education increasingly feature in curricula worldwide, it remains focused primarily on technical skills and risk prevention, often neglecting the ethical, civic, and relational dimensions of digital life. Simultaneously, character education rarely addresses the unique dynamics of digital environments.

*Digital skills alone are not enough; young people also need ethical awareness, relational understanding, and the capacity to act with purpose online.*

To address this dual gap, Brilliant Stars International School and Dexterity Club launched the “Power-Up: values at the heart of digital citizenship” project. The initiative seeks to:

Integrate values-based education into digital citizenship frameworks;

Foster young people’s capacity for ethical, responsible, and purposeful engagement in digital spaces;

Equip educators, families, and communities with practical resources;

*Power-Up redefines digital citizenship as a values-driven, relational, and civic practice, not merely a checklist of technical competencies.*

Power-Up fundamentally challenges dominant narratives of digital citizenship education that frame digital spaces primarily in terms of risks, compliance, and protective measures. While recognising the importance of online safety, Power-Up moves beyond a purely risk-based model to adopt a **capabilities approach**, focused on empowering individuals to engage with curiosity, creativity, and ethical purpose.

*Digital citizenship education should move beyond fear and compliance, toward fostering agency, curiosity, and ethical purpose.*

Equally, Power-Up departs from rigid age-based assumptions, embracing a **capacity-based perspective**. It recognises that readiness for responsible and ethical digital engagement depends not only on chronological age but also on personal development, life experience, and contextual factors. This flexible approach allows educators and families to tailor learning to each individual's stage of growth and capability.

*Readiness for ethical digital engagement depends not only on age, but on personal development, life experience, and context.*

Through a co-creative process involving students, educators, parents, and researchers, Power-Up developed a conceptual framework accompanied by a broad range of materials for schools and parents.

### **Framework:**

- A conceptual framework defining digital citizenship as a values-driven, relational, and civic practice.

### **Educational Materials for Schools:**

- A living collection of lesson plans for teaching digital citizenship that provide an initial translation of the framework into digestible and interactive lessons, assisting educators on how to approach the concepts and themes in digital citizenship education through dialogue, applied scenarios, and interactive activities;
- Thinking Cards as a practical learning tool to use in the classroom to explore digital citizenship concepts through meaningful dialogue, applied scenarios, and activities that invite reflection;
- Supplementary materials such as a dialogue guide that provides additional ideas on how to cultivate meaningful dialogue in the classroom; posters that define the key concepts and virtues;

## Resources for Parents/Care Givers:

- Storybooks designed to familiarise young children in early education with the core principles of the Power-Up framework, such as understanding the interdependence of our world and considering the well-being of others;
- Consultation Cards that help facilitate deep dialogue and consultation around digital citizenship;
- Dialogue guide that provides ideas about ways to foster meaningful dialogue when using the consultation cards;

## Creative Outputs:

- Digital creations in the form of animations exploring digital citizenship themes, co-created by students and teachers at Brilliant Stars International School;
- Musical creations exploring digital citizenship themes, co-created by students and teachers at Brilliant Stars International School; the creative outputs act as both artistic contributions and learning resources

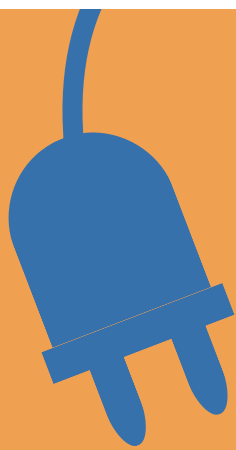
*By connecting values, relationships, and digital skills, we can empower young people to become proactive and responsible digital citizens shaping digital spaces for justice, inclusion, and collective well-being.*

The project contributes a new paradigm for digital citizenship education: digital competencies are not merely technical skills, but pathways for individuals to contribute to justice, inclusion, and collective well-being in an interconnected world. By shifting the conversation from fear and compliance to values, agency, and relational responsibility, Power-Up empowers young people, and the adults who support them, to navigate digital spaces proactively, with integrity, responsibility, and purpose.

# Glossary

- Digital citizenship skills: enable citizens to find, access, use and create information effectively, engage with other users and with content in an active, critical, sensitive and ethical manner, as well navigate the online environment safely and responsibly, being aware of one's rights' (UNESCO, 2024, p.14).
- Character education: The intentional education of character, grounded in the recognition that every child possesses inherent potential, likened to gems to be polished, that can be developed through practice. It nurtures qualities for personal flourishing and virtues for the well-being of others.
- Virtues: Innate qualities of character, such as honesty, kindness, courage, and fairness, that, when recognised and practised, guide personal growth and conduct towards others' well-being. They are both inner resources for realising potential and a shared moral language for building unity, justice, and constructive relationships.
- Global Citizenship: An awareness of the oneness of humanity and the recognition that each individual has both the responsibility to cultivate their own capacities and the responsibility to contribute to the well-being of others. Global citizenship calls for action at multiple levels—individual, community, institutional, and systemic—so that values and capacities are applied in building more just, sustainable, and peaceful societies locally and globally.
- Capabilities Approach: An educational perspective that focuses on expanding individuals' abilities and freedoms to pursue lives they value. In digital citizenship, it means developing not just technical skills but the ethical reasoning, agency, and values to participate meaningfully and responsibly online.
- Capacity-based Approach: A model of education that organises learning not by rigid age bands, but by individuals' developmental readiness, skills, and ability to engage with complex ideas. It recognises that children of the same age may have different capabilities and learning needs.





# 1. Introduction

Understanding the factors that shape how young people navigate the digital world has become an urgent priority. Across the globe, educators, families, and communities grapple with how to raise principled, thoughtful individuals in an era where the boundaries between physical and digital life are increasingly blurred.

Studies show that while educators recognise the importance of character and values, they often feel underprepared to address these in digital contexts (OECD, 2021). Meanwhile, digital citizenship education has largely focused on safety and technical skills, overlooking the deeper ethical and relational dimensions that define how young people live, connect, and act online.

Brilliant Stars International School and Dexterity Club launched the Power-Up project to bridge this gap. The project is built on decades of experience in character education and digital learning innovation. Its goal is to create a framework and practical tools that empower young people to act as ethical, responsible, and globally aware digital citizens.

## Core questions

1. What competencies are needed for individuals and societies to flourish in a digitally connected world?

2. What practical resources can support cultivating these competencies?



## 2. The Gaps and the Opportunity



### 2.1 The Character Gap

Although character education is recognised as essential, it is often peripheral in education systems, lacking practical tools, consistent integration, and a connection to digital realities. The result is a gap between aspiration and the lived experiences of young people, particularly in navigating ethical dilemmas online.

## 2.2 The Digital Gap

Digital citizenship education has grown in prominence but often remains focused on technical proficiency and risk prevention. It rarely addresses:

- How values translate into digital contexts;
- How digital tools shape relationships and community participation;
- How young people can act purposefully for social good online.

Research indicates that young people frequently behave differently online, with decreased empathy and increased impulsivity (James, 2014; O'Reilly et al., 2024).<sup>\*</sup> Existing frameworks often fail to integrate ethics and values into digital learning in a practical, relatable way.

Furthermore, much digital education remains tied to age-based assumptions, prescribing certain topics or competencies only for specific age brackets. While age can be a useful guide, Power-Up recognises that digital competence and moral reasoning develop differently for each individual. A purely age-based model risks leaving some children unprepared or under-challenged. Power-Up instead focuses on capacities and developmental readiness, ensuring that resources can be adapted to each learner's needs, maturity, and lived experiences.



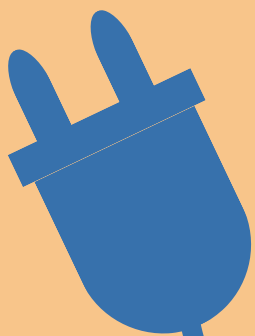
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James, C. (2014). *Disconnected: Youth, new media, and the ethics gap*. MIT Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262027381.001.0001>

O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N., & Whiteman, N. (2024). *Children and young people's digital lives: Ethical and wellbeing implications*. Palgrave Macmillan.

## 2.3 Justice and Equity in Digital Citizenship

Power-Up approaches digital citizenship education through an equity lens, with a focus on both access and awareness. We recognise that not all learners currently have equal opportunities, and so we work to make resources available while also cultivating awareness of the inequities that persist and the need for justice. This dual commitment is essential for fostering inclusion and meaningful participation in a digitally connected world.

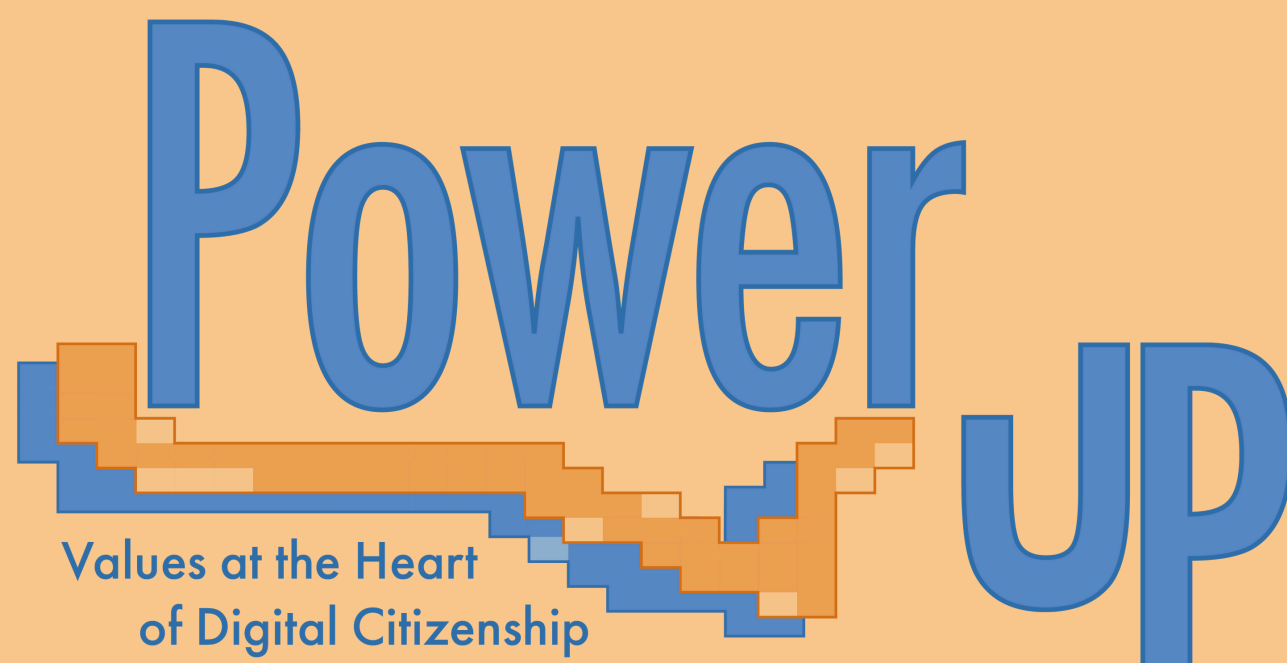


### 3. Project Background

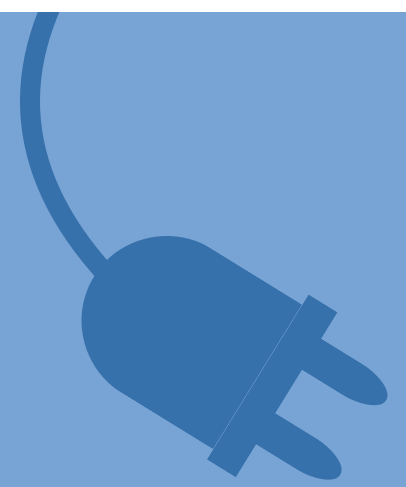
The Power-Up project emerged from conversations between Brilliant Stars International School, with its extensive experience in character and values education, and Dexterity Club, with expertise in digital skills development and innovative learning methods.

Supported by Erasmus+ funding, Power-Up was designed as a co-creative initiative, involving:

- Educators, students, parents, and researchers;
- Iterative cycles of consultation, reflection, and resource development;
- Alignment with global frameworks such as UNESCO's digital citizenship education, the European Digital Competence Framework (Vuorikari et al., 2022),\* DQ Institute's Digital Intelligence framework, and the OECD Learning Compass 2030.



# 4. Core Underpinnings



## 4.1 Philosophical Foundations

Power-Up's approach is rooted in a relational worldview, which recognises the oneness of humanity and understands that individual and collective flourishing are inseparable, each is bound up with our relationships to one another and to the wider world. This draws inspiration from concepts like Ubuntu, a moral philosophy emphasising community, harmonious relationships, and collective wellbeing. While similar values exist in Western traditions, Ubuntu uniquely positions the community as central to individual responsibility.

Equally important is the understanding that adolescence is an "age of opportunity," a time when young people develop a deep sense of justice, personal identity, and social responsibility. However, Power-Up emphasises that digital citizenship education is not strictly age-bound but rather capability-driven. Young people vary widely in their readiness to grapple with ethical questions and digital dilemmas. Power-Up's holistic, adaptable approach allows educators and families to tailor discussions and resources to each learner's unique developmental stage, capabilities, experiences, and interests.

## 4.2 Values at the Heart of Digital Citizenship

Power-Up proposes a shift in digital citizenship education:

- Digital skills are not merely technical tools but pathways for ethical participation and social good.
- Digital citizenship is fundamentally relational and civic, rooted in values such as justice, integrity, empathy, and collective responsibility.
- Digital engagement should nurture character, reflection, and global awareness.



Power-Up adopts a *praxis-based model*, emphasising that values are cultivated through action, not merely theoretical knowledge. The project deliberately avoids fear-based narratives. Instead, it embraces a playful, dynamic approach that shifts the conversation from control and compliance toward character, connection, and meaningful contribution. This ethos fosters curiosity, creativity, and internal motivation, rather than relying on external rules or fear of consequences.

Power-Up fundamentally rejects rigid age-based prescriptions. Instead, it promotes a *capacity-based approach*, encouraging educators and parents to assess learners' readiness, maturity, life experiences, and contextual factors when deciding when and how to introduce different themes. For younger children, storytelling and indirect discussions about core values can provide a strong foundation for responsible digital engagement, regardless of exact age.

## 5. The Power-Up Framework

In response to our first guiding question: What competencies are needed for individuals and societies to flourish in a digitally connected world? We undertook the process described in 5.2. and developed a framework describing the global digital citizenship. This framework places values at its core, offering a way to define and understand digital citizenship not only in terms of skills and knowledge, but also through the attitudes and principles that shape ethical and meaningful participation in the digital world.

It is noteworthy that while Power-Up's concepts are universally relevant, the framework was refined through testing with learners aged 11–15, who may already be active users of digital technologies and navigating complex social contexts. However, as mentioned before, we believe in a capacity-based approach highlighting that the framework can be used depending on the maturity, experience, and contextual factors the learners are experimenting.

## 5.1 The Framework

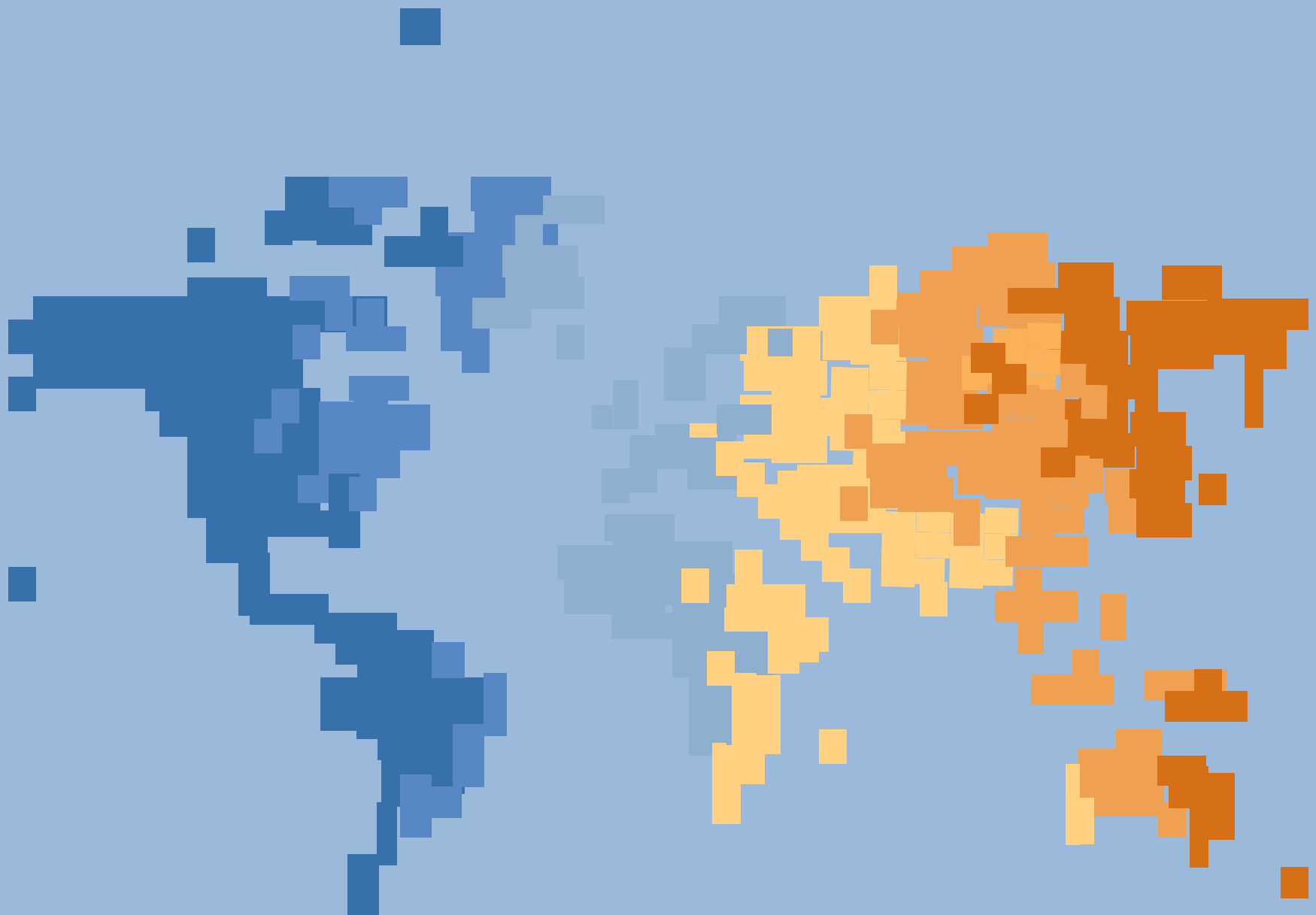
As shown in the image, Power-Up defines digital citizenship competencies across four interconnected key areas. Each key area addresses personal, relational, and civic dimensions operationalised as three themes per area.

1. Cultivating discernment in the digital world

2. Strengthening responsible engagement with digital technology

3. Building meaningful connections: nurturing relationships and communities

4. Shaping our digital presence with integrity







### Key Area 1:

**Cultivating Discernment in the digital world:** focuses on cultivating an appreciation for the virtue of discernment in the digital world, specifically when encountering new information and content, which helps us strive toward a more accurate understanding of reality and curiosity for knowledge.

### Key Area 2:

**Strengthening responsible engagement with digital technology:** focuses on using digital technologies responsibly to support both individual and collective well-being. It encourages reflection on the intentions behind our digital habits, promotes ethical behaviour that considers its impact on others, and highlights the potential of digital tools for driving positive social change.




### Key Area 3:

**Building meaningful connections: nurturing relationships and communities:** encourages reflection on how communication and connection occur in the digital world. It aims to equip individuals with the ability to navigate digital interactions with understanding, responsibility, and purpose, ensuring they contribute positively to personal relationships, community building, and societal unity and well-being.

### Key Area 4:

**Shaping our digital presence with integrity:** explores how our everyday actions online shape our individual digital presence and contribute to a shared, global digital environment. It encourages learners to reflect on how their digital identity is formed, how it evolves over time, and how it connects to a broader digital community. By understanding this, students recognise their role as both digital and global citizens, capable of influencing and participating in an interconnected world with responsibility and awareness.



Power-Up positions values at the heart of digital competencies, viewing them not as secondary supports but as central to the very practice of responsible and meaningful digital citizenship.

For more about the framework, please refer to the report: **Introducing the Power-Up Framework.**



## 5.2 How the Framework was Developed

Power-Up was developed through a multi-phase, participatory process informed by action research:




### Literature Review

Examined global frameworks including DigComp 2.2, UNESCO Digital Citizenship, DQ Institute's Digital Intelligence Framework, ISTE standards, and global citizenship education research.

### Stakeholder Engagement

Engaged educators, students, parents, and researchers through:

- Interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Workshops
  - Arts-based methods (e.g. student-created animations and songs)
- 




### Iterative Design

Insights were continuously integrated into framework drafts and resource prototypes, tested in real educational contexts

### Public Testing and Pilots

Pilot studies evaluated the framework and materials in classrooms, gathering feedback to refine language, relevance, and usability.



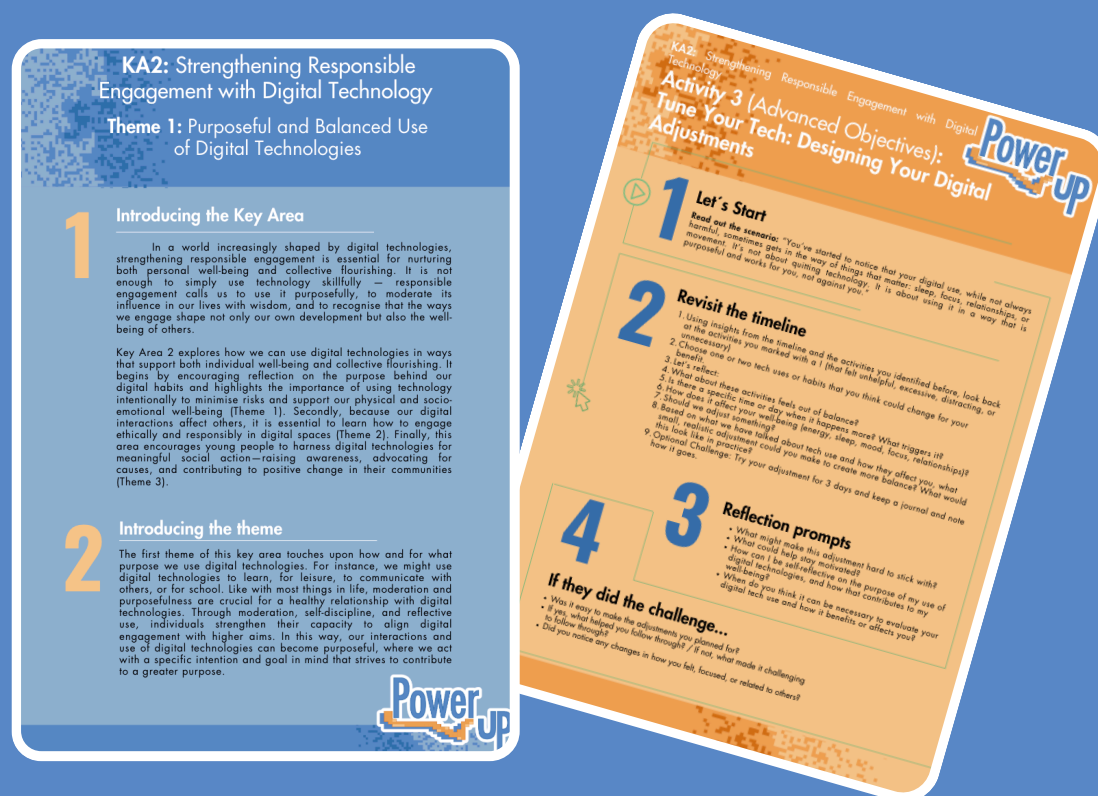
The result is a practical, context-sensitive, and flexible model rooted in both research and lived experience.

# 6. Project Outputs and Materials

Drawing on the framework, resources were developed for schools, educators, and families/carers to support exploration of each of the key areas of digital citizenship it identifies.

All of these materials and resources can be accessed either through visiting our website ([www.brilliantstars.sk/powerup](http://www.brilliantstars.sk/powerup)) or contacting the Power-Up team.

## 6.1. Thinking Cards for classroom use



Thinking Cards for classroom use are a set of resources that educators can use to address each of the themes included in the Power UP framework with their students. These cards include both physical materials for students to engage with and lesson plans that guide teachers in prompting meaningful dialogue.

The goal of the Thinking Cards is to support thinking and learning together, not through memorization or right/wrong answers, but through reflection, conversation, and connection. Each card focuses on a specific theme, and offers:

- Student-facing prompts or tasks that invite curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking
- Teacher-facing guidance that includes warm-up questions, activity steps, and facilitation tips
- A progressive structure aligned to basic, intermediate, and advanced learning objectives
- Opportunities to engage in dialogic learning, where students listen to one another, build ideas together, and explore multiple perspectives
- These cards can be used flexibly, as stand-alone activities, warm-up discussions, or as a structured programme exploring the cards sequentially. This will depend on the needs and rhythm of the class. Ultimately, they are designed to make the values and practices of digital citizenship visible, relevant, and discussable.

## 6.2. Flashcards for family dialogue

To support the learning environment and engagement with the Thinking Cards, a short guide was created that explores some essential qualities for dialogue and thinking together. The premise is, that having a meaningful dialogue requires cultivating a space where children can build understanding together, share perspectives, and practise their critical thinking. Dialogue is more than exchanging ideas, but opening up new ways of thinking and being through listening, questioning, and reflection.

The guide offers:

- An overview of the four key qualities (4Cs) for dialogue and thinking together by Phillipson and Wegerif (2017), namely: caring, collaborative, critical, and creative thinking;
- An emphasis on the importance of cultivating safe spaces where children can share and grow together;
- Examples of how to apply the 4Cs in the context of the Power-Up program.

The guide is both useful for educators but also parents and carers who are likely having similar conversations around digital citizenship at home.

### 6.3. Storybooks for younger children;

The capabilities and virtues emphasised in the Power-Up framework are life-long, which means children can begin exploring and developing them before primary school and prior to any introduction to the digital world. Recognising this, a set of storybooks were co-created that aim to familiarise young children between 3-5 years old with the core principles of the framework, such as the importance of considering the well-being of others and recognising the interdependence of our world.

### 6.4. Consultation Cards for family dialogue

Created for families, the Consultation Cards include prompts to encourage open dialogue about digital technologies and their role, purpose, and impact at home, helping to extend the discussions about the Power-Up framework beyond the classroom. They give parents a window into their children's digital world. Additionally, with inspiration from the 6.2 dialogue guide, the cards can create shared learning moments and help families take thoughtful, practical steps toward meaningful digital engagement.

## 6.5. Animations and musical creations by students to reflect the child's perspectives;

[PIC or EXAMPLE and LINK]

In collaboration with students from Brilliant Stars International Schools, a series of animations and musical works was developed to explore digital citizenship. The animations focus on virtues essential for navigating the complexities of the online world. The musical creations were created as part of a music workshop where students learnt to write lyrics, compose, and perform. The songs are accompanied by lyrics and chords for anyone to learn.

Therefore, these creative outputs offer:

- Inspiration for schools exploring artistic expression as a mode of learning, offering students hands-on opportunities to deepen their understanding of digital spaces, build technical abilities, and strengthen research skills
- A learning resource for students to sing-along with and learn about a digital citizenship themes
- Artistic contributions that convey insights and experiences of children in the digital world

# 7. Positioning within Global Contexts

Power-Up complements, rather than replaces, existing frameworks:

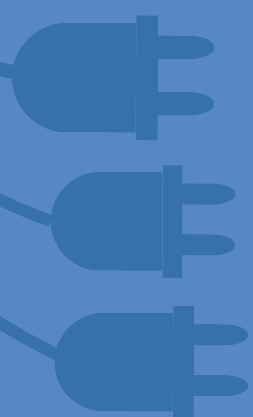
- Like the DQ Institute, Power-Up recognises global citizenship as an outcome of ethical digital participation.
- UNESCO sees digital citizenship as a vehicle for global citizenship. Power-Up operationalises this through practical, values-based tools.
- The OECD Learning Compass connects digital literacy with global responsibility and student agency, which Power-Up builds upon.

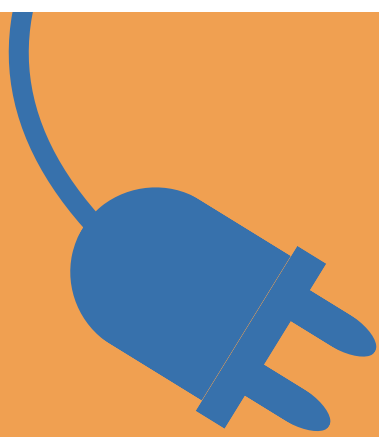
However, Power-Up distinguishes itself by:

- Placing values education as the primary goal, rather than a secondary layer;
- Viewing digital tools as a means to contribute to unity, justice, and social well-being;
- Rooting digital learning in relational ethics, drawing inspiration from concepts such as Ubuntu.

Power-Up complements global frameworks by adding a critical dimension: it recognises that the ability to engage ethically and purposefully in digital life cannot be neatly confined to age brackets. Instead, it promotes a capacity-based model that equips all learners, regardless of age, to navigate digital spaces with values and agency.

Power-Up explicitly connects digital citizenship to global citizenship. It emphasises values such as justice, sustainability, empathy, and collective action. Digital spaces increasingly host civic participation, intercultural dialogue, and global problem-solving. Power-Up equips young people not only with technical skills but with the ethical grounding to contribute to a more united and just world.





## 8. Key lessons learned

Major insights emerged from Power-Up:

### **1. Collaborative Innovation is Powerful**

The collaboration between a school with deep expertise in global citizenship and values education, and a specialised organisation focused on digital literacy and citizenship, proved to be a powerful driver of innovation. While this partnership required time and intentional co-working spaces to bridge disciplinary languages and perspectives, it was precisely this exchange that enriched both the process and the outcomes.

### **2. Co-Creation Yields Relevant Tools**

Actively involving students, educators, and parents ensures the framework and resources are grounded in lived experience and real concerns and priorities of the stakeholders. Moreover classroom realities and needs were also considered when developing our resources, trying to create education material that is truly relevant and useful.

### **3. Digital Citizenship Requires Community**

The project underscored the value of building a community around digital citizenship education, creating spaces where shared learning, mutual support, and collective responsibility can flourish. In a digitally connected world, it is not enough to equip individuals with skills; we must also foster the relationships and ecosystems that help young people thrive.

### **4. From Age to Capacity-Based Learning**

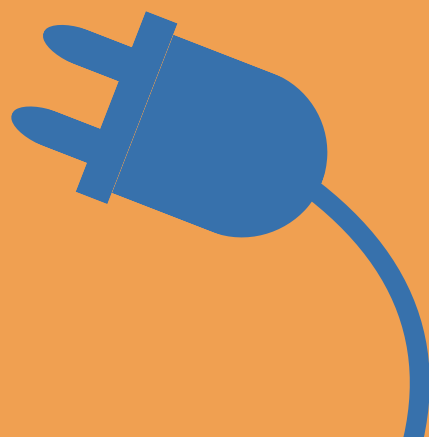
Another key insight from Power-Up is that digital citizenship readiness varies significantly between individuals. Rather than assuming competencies based solely on age, Power-Up promotes a capacity-based approach, ensuring discussions and resources are matched to learners' developmental stages, curiosity, and life experiences.



## **5. We need to see digital citizenship education as a process of reciprocal learning.**

This generation of children and adolescents is the first one to grow with the increasing access to technology. While learners have to develop their digital citizenship, teachers and parents also have to learn about young people's digital realities. Hence, conversations, creative activities, and shared exploration is key. Schools serve as community hubs, providing knowledge and support not only to students but also to families navigating the challenges of raising ethical digital citizens. Ultimately, digital citizenship is fundamentally a communal endeavour, requiring collective understanding, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

Fundamentally, power-Up shows that digital citizenship education can, and must, centre values, relationships, and collective well-being.





## 9. Next Steps

Power-Up is designed for adaptation and expansion. Future plans include:

- Wider dissemination of materials through open-source channels;
- Training workshops for educators and parents;
- Further development of resources tailored to different developmental stages and capacities.
- Collaboration with additional schools and organisations internationally.

By continuing to iterate, Power-Up will help shape a generation of digital citizens who engage ethically, creatively, and with a sense of shared responsibility. Please reach out if you would like to join this effort!



# Acknowledgements

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Brilliant Stars International School  
Vavilovova 18, 851 01 Bratislava, Slovakia  
[www.brilliantstars.sk](http://www.brilliantstars.sk)

Dexterity Club  
The Hague, Netherlands  
[www.dexterity.club](http://www.dexterity.club)

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