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Encouraging Responsible Student Use of Social Media

Students and school employees increasingly use social media and other forms of technology for communication, instruction and increased productivity. While these media provide helpful tools and have dramatically changed the way people communicate, they also come with the potential for negative behaviour. In Chapter 3 we discussed two of the most prevalent student disciplinary issues involving social media – cyberbullying and sexting.

School personnel and families are rightfully concerned about the safety of their students and children. The concern is complicated by the fact that the technology changes faster than policy can be developed or procedures implemented. While many schools and parents try to limit access and use, the fact is that social media is such a part of the everyday fabric of our society that to restrict use limits children's potential both educationally and socially.

Digital Footprints

Every time we access the Internet or post something online we are leaving a digital footprint. When you 'google' something, the search engine stores that information. It knows if the computer you're using has already accessed the topic and it aggregates the information so that future searches will hit on the most interesting links.

These online footprints are much like a portfolio. William Ferriter's (2011) students described a digital footprint this way: 'Digital footprints are the trails people leave behind when they live online' (p. 92). These footprints describe who we are, what we do and often what we know (Richardson, 2008). Things we post online can be easily 'googled' by others so that they

Social Media in Action

The Chilling Case of Chelsea Brown

Chelsea Brown is a bright, vivacious eight-year-old who adores horses and is saving money for riding lessons. She is 124 centimetres tall, very slender and has naturally curly hair, just like her Mum. She has a big, bossy cat named Rags and a sleepy basset hound named Otto.

Both of her parents have meetings this afternoon, so Chelsea will walk the five blocks from her school to her home with two older kids who live in the neighbourhood and who will accompany her except for the last block or so. Once she's home, she'll call her Mum, then get started on homework. Her grandmother will call in later in the afternoon after her doctor's appointment.

You might think we know Chelsea pretty well. In fact, we have never seen her, talked with her or had any contact with her family, school or friends. Everything we know about Chelsea we learned in less than fifteen minutes on a social networking site. Once we knew her parents' names and the approximate location of their home (near the primary school), it took about thirty seconds to find out where Chelsea lives by using address look-up software.

Is Chelsea careless about what she posts on the Internet? As far as we know, Chelsea doesn't use the Internet at all. Every bit of information we found came from the people who know her best and love her the most – her parents, grandparents, family friends and even one of her teachers. They have generously provided enough information to put Chelsea in harm's way if it fell into the wrong hands.

We know what she looks like from photos posted on the parents' site. By reading the postings, we know what her schedule is, when she will be alone and where she lives. We even know enough to pose as one of her parents' friends or to start a conversation about her fussy cat or lazy dog.

This chilling scenario is fuelled thousands of times every day by loving, caring adults who haven't learned how to manage the security of their social media presence and have opened their lives, and those of their children, to the world.

(Johnston, Johnston & Wilcox, 2010)

can quickly create a digital file on each of us. For example, both Ron and Howard maintain blogs, they each have a website, they maintain a Facebook account, they write articles and books available electronically, and they have pictures taken of them at work and at play. They work frequently with school leaders and their work, including their speeches, are chronicled on countless websites.

Key Steps for Changing Curriculum

Jukes and Dosaj (2006) propose several crucial steps, summarised here, for moving school curriculum and instruction into the digital age:

1. **Shift instruction to higher-level thinking skills needed for the twenty-first century.** In *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink says that our society is predominantly left-brained: linear, logical, beginning to end, recalled knowledge-based, and analytical. It is also the way most schools function. The problem is that just about anything that requires left-brain thinking can be automated, turned into software, or farmed out to the Third World. The solution is a more balanced kind of mental agility – calling for the use of the whole mind, and demanding creativity as well as analysis, problem *finding* as well as problem solving, and fluency with multiple types of information (p. 42).
2. **Embrace new digital reality of the online, computerised, ‘flat’ world.** Wherever they are, students now have access to information that has been, traditionally, the domain of the adult world. Knowledge and information is no longer doled out in school in measured amounts. Instead, we live in a sea of information. The new essential skills for an educated person require that we teach kids how to effectively find, evaluate and use these resources in a productive and ethical way (p. 43).
3. **Accept the shift in thinking patterns that are happening in twentieth-century students.** Contemporary students live in a ‘multimedia, online, multi-task, random access, colour graphics, video, audio, visual literacy world’ (p. 44). These literacies (note the plural form) are generally not valued in school because they do not fit our conventional, familiar definition of literacy. In fact, they are often seen as distractions from the ‘real curriculum’ of the school. Broaden evaluation to get a complete picture of student learning (p. 44).
4. **Increase connection between school-based instruction and the outside world.** The quest is no longer just for relevance, but for reality. How can students use information and new skills to solve actual problems that exist ‘out there’ in the world (p. 46)?