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The Importance of an Appropriate Social Media Policy for K-12 Education

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The Importance of an Appropriate Social Media Policy for K-12 Education

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore creating appropriate social media policies to ensure these tools are used properly for positive uses and control the negative impacts of social media in the school environment. Although social media can be used as a great tool for modern classrooms, there are a variety of problems.

The literature used for the study addresses legal issues and bullying, enhancing 21st century skills and improving communication. Statistics from the Pew Organization and qualitative information from other academic studies were also used.

The literature had more concerns about inappropriate behavior than suggestions practicing professionals. The day-to-day issues caused by social media were less than the literature suggested. They all agreed schools need to adapt and effectively use this media to stay relevant. The research indicated that it is still common to just block social media sites, more educators are seeing a real need to implement and use them as tools. The negative aspects are less damaging than the potential is for improving student's engagement.

The research is qualitative in design, using interview protocols. The purposive sample included administrators from district, secondary and primary school level. Results indicated that school leaders are aware of the need to adapt to modern ways to communicate, but remain concerned about difficulties that arise.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Disruption and defiance caused by students is nothing new to the educational experience. It is part of growing up, but with the popularity of social media the dynamics have changed and blurred the lines between the personal and the school realm. The interactions can be much more intense and long lasting than they were before social media. Rumors and threats are not whispers and private conversations. They are broadcast and permanent. Sometimes students post their own personal information that haunts them and sometimes others post damaging information.

The attacks and information is not just between students. Students have attacked school staff with online hits and the schools are often left with the question; where does the schools responsibility start and end? What is free speech and if the incident is not posted at school, what can the school do? Social media can also be a powerful and positive tool teachers can use to communicate and have classroom discussions beyond the brick and mortar walls.

I am a teacher that tries to bring in tools that the students already use in their lives. I started a Facebook page for my Advanced Placement Economics and Government class. It was not my personal page. It was purely for my students. “Friending” the page was voluntary, and I instructed the students that I would be able to see the other posts they make so they need to act accordingly. It is a great tool. I can post news articles. Students can post questions that either their peers or I can answer. Problems arose when

a student posted how drunk he likes to get and how he likes to fight when he is drunk. I mentioned to the student that I could see his post, and so can everyone else. I reminded him that and I am a teacher and would take some kind of action. He said he did not care. The next Monday there were posts about how drunk he was, how he hated everyone, and how he does not remember a thing.

I was compelled to bring it to the attention of the administration. The assistant principal called him in to talk to him. He was incensed that I would, in his words, “break our trust.” We talked and I informed him that kind of trust does not exist between us. He is a student and I am a teacher. It was a great example of flattening a relationship (Bynum, 2011). The student did not understand there was still a students/teacher line.

He posted on Facebook inappropriate names for me and that the other students should come after me and let me know how wrong I was. A different student came to me right away and showed me a screen shot of the post. Immediately, I informed the administration.

The problem was that I was unsure how much we could do. What was beyond our control and what is our responsibility about what they do at home? It was not posted during school hours, but it was a threat and disrupted the school day. This is a problem in a variety of ways. It is a disruption to the school environment and can have very negative impacts on the students they cannot envision yet. Jobs, college admission, relationships can be affected negatively by what the students post. What role should a school have in

what is posted, how social media is used, and how do the schools educate students on protecting their privacy, without infringing upon their rights?

Statement of Problem

Social media has positive and negative effects on education and the question of creating a policy to control the negative aspects while protecting the students freedoms of speech and privacy is an important while difficult task. Social media, for the purpose of this paper, is defined as all online tools that allow a person to communicate with a variety of others and interact with them. Google docs, Facebook, Twitter, Snap Chat and all other tools are included. These tools encompass all areas that people are interacting on the Internet or smart cell phones.

Social media has recently become an important part of every aspect of life including education. It gives students and teachers access to one another in a common form. This is an exciting new concept. Colleges are already regularly using social media and the work world also uses social media to communicate with workers and real and potential clients. It is very important for K-12 school leaders to successfully integrate these tools into the modern curriculum.

The new rules of privacy are not fully understood. Teachers interact with students on social media as instructors and sometimes in more informal ways. District personnel are starting to interact with students and parents in modern ways to advance communication where the students and parents are actually seeing the information. Students are interacting with other students as friends and classmates. The problem

arises when the interactions become inappropriate, too personal, cruel, or dangerous.

These negative interactions can cause conflict between students and students, or students and teachers that can disrupt the educational experience of a group of students or a whole school.

If the school personnel act to protect students from these negative interactions, they may be overstepping their authority. Students have a great deal of freedom of speech and they have a certain expectation of privacy. If the action did not occur at school or impact directly the school day its difficult in some cases to know what steps to take. If school leaders do not take action, they are allowing these behaviors to individually or collectively disrupt the educational environment and may not be appropriately protecting students and staff.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the balance between the proper and useful application of social media with the negative impacts of social media. It is difficult to walk the line between student free speech and curbing negative impacts in schools, such as threats, bullying, and a wide variety of other problems. This can be the new frontier for bridging the gap between student education and student interests. It is also difficult to encourage staff to use social media to enhance curriculum design and have a proper policy that limits inappropriate interaction between staff and students.

Research Question

How do school leaders develop guidelines that ensure the students and teachers are using social media in a positive way that enhances student learning while curbing negative issues? School leaders are always trying to find more effective ways to communicate with the community and inspire the students to learn, but we stop disruptions, threats, bullying, and inappropriate behavior in ways that always surprise. This is the great question and its not really new, but the landscape of the issue is ever evolving.

Theoretical Rationale

The theory of constructivism (Byrnes, 2008) states that students are active learners. Students arrive at school with their experiences, and education adds to the sum of their experiences. Vygotsky's social development theory articulates the need for teachers to collaborate with their students in the learning process. The teacher needs to use and understand the student's language and way of communicating. According to Yrjo Engestrom (Daniels, 1996) a *Community of Practice* increases participation in learning. When the expectations of all of the participants in the education process are communicating clearly, using familiar tools, the learner is engaged, and ready for problem solving. The majority of people of all ages are communicating through the use of technology and social media. Deciding how the tools are used can enhance learning. Using technology and social media allows students to feel that the way they learn is the way they communicate with their friends, family, do business, and find information. If

the school leaders restrict the use of these familiar ways of communicating, they limit the education process, and alienate the learner.

Assumptions

Currently social media in education is limited. District leaders are interested in order and safety. Completely unforeseen and unintended consequences may arise using social media to communicate with parents and students. Educators are worried about what can happen if they allow its use.

Although using this new communication as a teaching tool can also have drawbacks, we cannot stop students from using social media at school any more than we can stop them from talking. Conflicts arise from all forms of communication. If school leaders can develop guidelines that can define and direct the use of the current tools and create the policy as a living document that will change with the new devices for communication evolve, negative impacts can be limited. The purpose of education is to allow students the opportunity to learn and function in the world they live in, not the one the teachers and administration used to live in.

Background and Need

The Social Media Dilemma by Schachter (2011), describes the inconsistent adaptation of the variety of social media tools from outright banning to embracing them and the school leaders “Facebooking” from the prom, shows the need for standard answers for successful integration. Today’s students are digital natives (Myers, 2012) and think differently than digital immigrants. Multitasking digitally and interacting with others to

find answers is common for them and expected from them. This is a 21st century skill and needs to be addressed and included in the modern classroom.

Summary

Social media is evolving daily, and not slowing down. School leaders are always looking for ways to improve communication with the parents and the community. School leaders are tasked with teaching students critical thinking skills, communication skills, collaboration skills and interacting digitally are the ways that all of these 21st century learning skills will be used in their social lives and work places. School leaders must teach responsible and professional use.

School leaders are concerned with student's safety and keeping an environment conducive to learning. Educators are realizing these new tools must be integrated into the educational setting. Educators must do that in a way that enhances student learning and uses teaching strategies that implement their understanding of communication.

Collaboration and communication enhance learning, and these tools are at the student's fingertips. The negative aspects are not really a new problem. The problems are just arriving in a new form, and by banning social media the school leaders are not stopping the activities.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Historical Context

The current interpretation of the free speech rights of students, and how the schools control their negative interaction date back to the Tinker Supreme Court case that decided students have free speech at the school site and symbolic speech also falls under the umbrella. Tinker vs. Des Moines decided that schools could only control speech if it produced substantive disruption to the school. This has evolved as social media has evolved, but the lines remain unclear on what the substantive disruption may be (Conn, 2010). Electronic social interaction became popular in the 1990s. Using pagers and then cell phones was popular among teens, and since has proliferated into multiple options for social media tools. Currently 93% of teens 12-17 use the Internet (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & MacGill, 2007). Before Facebook became the dominant site used it was MySpace and before that AOL instant messenger was the pioneer. Facebook is now giving way to Instagram and SnapChat.

Bullying is a concern among students, parents, teachers and school leaders. Because of the perceived distance between the victim and the bully, bullying, which is not exclusive to social media, has become impersonal and sometimes anonymous. Bullying is the most common difficulty with social media and many states have passed laws addressing the issue. Although not clearly stated, there are some guidelines from the courts on how to apply the Tinker rule to modern age of communication (Donegan, 2012). These guidelines suggest that the school leaders can discipline a student when

there is threat, or a call for action at the school. Regardless of where the threat is produced, it falls under the disciplinary action of the school leaders.

Students were accustomed to blackboards, pencils and books. Students' lives and learning styles have changed. Students learn by using a variety of information and interacting with others, applying what they have learned (Bynum, 2011). Learning is ever evolving and it is important that schools use the existing knowledge and skills of the students to remain relevant.

Review of Academic Research

Discovering how to properly apply social media tools to the classroom requires researching the implications of its use, the laws that apply and how social media benefits student learning. There are three main categories of literature that address the topic. The area of concern is the misuse of social media. This includes cyberbullying, cyberharrassment and cyberstalking. How can school districts to effectively prevent or diminish these instances of abuse is the second category. Implementing social media in teaching forms the third area.

Cyberbullying, Cyberharrassment and Cyberstalking

There is a dark side to this current technology and abuses are many. Much of the misuse is minor, but some is damaging to students and others. Some students have posted inappropriate photos of themselves and others have taken those photos and shared them (Conn, 2010). Mean and hateful comments online, spreading rumors, and threats were among the most common and concerning abuses (Donegan, 2012). Other concerns were

teachers being harassed and threatened by students. There are stories everyday in the media about these occurrences on school campuses. Where the school can step in, whether it involves student to student, or student to teacher issues, this is where the lines remain blurred (Schachter, 2011).

School Controls

As previously stated the Tinker rule is the first and foremost decision in how schools handle disruptive speech. There have been new cases, however, that directly address social media. These decisions can give a vague structure to needed policies for school leaders to understand.

Although the courts have left much of the direction muddy there is a trail. Morse vs. Frederick is the most recent case and although it does not give a clear guideline for schools, the Supreme Court did not address what it called the “outer boundaries” of student’s outside of school speech. The court purposefully left these boundaries unclear. This gives schools more leeway in deciding when discipline is warranted. Lower courts have upheld Tinker in some areas, but are inconsistent and that's worrisome to schools that would like clear direction (Conn, 2010).

Wisniewski vs. Board of Education of Weedsport Central School District is a case where a student created and disseminated an animation of a bullet going through a teacher’s head on the student’s home computer with AOL instant messenger. The courts decided the schools could act because this was a clear threat. Deniger vs. Niehoff was a case in which a student called a principal names and “encouraged the students to

communicate with the principal more in order to ‘piss her off’” The courts decided that the school could discipline the student. The activity did not warrant a suspension from school, but they could bar her from participation in student government, a privilege that may have behavior standards attached as part of the agreement to participate. The Tinker standard was applied in both cases. The court found the student’s actions would pose a considerable disruption to the school, and this was the student’s intent (Conn, 2010). However, if it does not appear that the student would expect actions to get back to the school, the courts decided it was within the rights of the student.

Teacher-Student Issues

The last area of concern is inappropriate activity between students and teachers. Should a teacher friend a student on the teachers personal social media account is often an issue. Proactive school leaders established guidelines that teachers use in deciding to “friend” students on social media. Many teachers and administrators see this interaction as a liability, but have no policy in place. It can be benign interaction, but still too personal. Teachers have to be careful not to cross the line beyond the proper relationship between teacher and student. This may flatten the relationship (Bynum, 2011). There are many stories in the news where inappropriate relationships between school staff and students have been initiated and carried further on social media. The recommendations differ from district to district. Whatever the guidelines may be, the guidelines must be clear that no interaction that could be determined as private occurs. This protects the student and the teacher (Schachter, 2011).

How and Why Should Social Media be applied to Curriculum?

Students are already engaged in social media. The Pew Research center found that 64% of teens 12-18 participated in one or more content creating activities online (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). These statistics remain constant among teens of different races or socio-economic backgrounds. Student learning and communicating styles have changed.

As already documented in the literature, students' decision-making can be poor, but they gather information and interact with others for learning purposes as much as social purposes. A survey of college students revealed that they feel connected with the content, their peers and instructors using online class interactions (Veletsianos & Navarrette, 2012). Technology is apart of student life and daily experience. School leaders can effectively engage the students by utilizing tools that are already in use (Bynum, 2011). Students need to know how to integrate these tools and use them efficiently and properly in their current lives and in their futures to compete for jobs in the global economy.

Statistical Information

According to Social Networking Statistics from the Pew research on Teens and Technology of the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Madden et al., 2013): Not only do 93% of teens have access to the Internet at home and 37% of all teens have smart phones, nearly 90% of U.S. Teens on Facebook, 89.5% of teens use Facebook, 48.7% use

Twitter, 41.5% use Google+ (Lenhart et al., 2007), and they use a variety of other social networking sites. Although Facebook is still the most popular, teens are starting to look elsewhere. Education attainment, race, household income and urbanity did not seem to change the statistic significantly. The usage remains between 65%-72%. Age and Gender changed the usage most (Lenhart et al., 2007).

Summary

Students are using and quickly adapting to new social media. This can be difficult for educational leaders to sift through and decide how to use, control or adapt the new tools. Parents and school leaders are concerned about the risks. The majority of teens and adults alike are now using digital social media. The school leaders have not kept up and, out of fear, have tried to stop and bar these ways of communicating from their campuses.

Although these are real fears, the behaviors are not new. Bullying, inappropriate behaviors and other abuses occurred before social media. Social media is a new forum for these activities, and now there is record and tangible evidence. How and when can the schools get involved in online activity is debated. The lines are blurred. The most accurate information is if the online activity happens during school hours, to or from school, or calls on negative activity to occur at school.

Chapter 3 Method

Introduction

This study employs a qualitative approach and focuses on school issues regarding the proper and potential use of social media by staff and students in the public education system K-12. My research relies on interviews with administrators from elementary schools, high schools and a district office. The use, misuse, and the potential were evaluated by the concerns and benefits experienced by the participants.

Sample and Site

My target participants were administrators at the school and district level. Multiple school districts in an agricultural county in northern California were conducted to identify different needs and populations. The focus was the administration level because this is where all policies are developed and approved, and problems ultimately addressed. I was careful to conduct interviews in different districts that would represent populations that have different needs.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 10129.

Access and Permissions

As a component of teacher research, interviews were conducted with all necessary permissions. Each participant in the interview process was informed of his or her rights as a participant. The questions were standard among all interviewees and the questions were based on their personal experiences and observations.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The research for this study relied upon interviews with experts in school leadership. All participants were in school districts in an agricultural county in northern California.

Three districts were represented. A superintendent (Anonymous, March 12, 2013) from a unified school district and an elementary district (Anonymous, March 11, 2013) as well as one principal (Anonymous, March 18, 2013), and an assistant principal (March 19, 2013) from the secondary level were included. The majority of the interviewees were in leadership positions at the secondary level, although one participant was a Superintendent/Principal of a K-5 elementary school. Questions ranged from how social media is currently used, what potential does it have in curriculum and communication, and what difficulties exist.

Findings from the interviews varied with each participant. The farther the interviewees were from day-to-day student contact the less they were concerned with misuse. The interviewees that had day-to-day contact and were responsible for discipline were greatly concerned with cyber-bullying, sexting, and with informal contact with staff. They all, at varying levels were using, or wanted to use, the tools to communicate with the students, parents and staff more efficiently. They recognized the necessity of incorporating these new ways of communicating into the curriculum, and interactions with students and community. It was acknowledged that until 4th or 5th grade these tools are only useful in communicating with parents.

Themes

The Interview is divided into 5 categories for the purpose of organizing the major issues surround the topic.

Current Experiences Using Social Media

Currently, using social media to communicate with parents and the community varied greatly and using social media in the classroom was, mostly, a policy of teacher choice. From the interviews garnered, only the interviewee of an elementary charter school was actively using social media tools in the classroom and communicating with the community. The superintendent and principal of the charter school only lead one school with less than 200 students. The charter school was using it to communicate with the parents and market their school to the community. The principal used autodialing, email blasts, a daily Facebook post and a weekly principal rap-up. He likes to tell a quick story and let the parents feel as if they are “in the know.” This principal acknowledged since he now posts information in a variety of area, the parents “will not seek it out” and feel the school is not informing them of important events.

He markets the school on Facebook to use his marketing dollars in direct and inexpensive ways. His advertising only costs \$10 to \$20 a week and he can target age groups, zip code and the web of friends from existing parents. “In the age of school choice its very important to market the school.” This charter school also uses a teacher based free social media tool in their curriculum. Fifth and 6th graders connect with each

other and the teacher. Parents have access to the discussion threads, so all stakeholders are aware.

At the high school and unified district level it was used less. The unified district has approximately 10 schools and the secondary schools have over 1,000 students. All interviewees at the secondary level were exploring Facebook pages, but they primarily relied upon email, call systems and school and district websites. Use in the classroom was at the teacher's discretion. Most did not know which teachers were currently using social media tools. The school leaders were aware of a few teachers, but it was not widespread and there were no formal or directed guidelines or requirements. The high school interviewees seemed to be wary of using social media from their personal experiences in dealing with discipline. All high school level interviews expressed concerns, but also realized they must move in the direction of social media, because these tools are what parents and students use.

At one high school the athletic director was using Facebook to communicate with current athletes, former athletes, parents and other community supporters. He has actively monitored the site, taken down negative comments and takes the time to send a message to the one posting the message, describing why the comment was removed.

One high school principal used social media in a prior school to offer online tutoring skills. There were short exercises students could access on their smart phones. The principal noted an increase in student test scores that he attributed to this strategy.

At the district level the website was still the primary tool for disseminating information. Specific guidelines for school use have not been revisited for many years at all the secondary levels, and likely out of date. They were developing a Facebook page, were active in reading the Facebook page developed by parents.

The district expressed the need and desire to use social media more often. There was no apprehension in its use. They desired to use the proper tool with the proper safety measures to mitigate misunderstandings or purposeful destructive two-way communication.

The most comprehensive and active policy was at the elementary level. It defined social media, spelled out clearly what they were and were not responsible for, stated freedom of speech is protected and important infractions of school rules on school sponsored sites and other sites that fall within California Education Code will be disciplined.

All levels use tools for parents to see grades and progress. This has helped everyone be aware of the student's progress. Parents had to wait up to 4 weeks or more to find out the progress of their students. They often felt in the dark. The grade tools allow the student and parent see the progress much sooner. Now it is difficult, because parents want to know daily. Teachers need a week or two to grade larger assignments and parents want to know now. One school posts on the top of each page that grades may be up to two weeks late to allow teachers the time to properly assess student work.

Troubling Experiences with Social Media

When I started exploring troubling experiences with social media, it became apparent why the secondary level is much more wary about using any social media tools in the schools. When interviewing an assistant principal about his experience with social media in the classroom he starts with, ‘cyberbullying is the bulk of my social media experience.’ All of the secondary interviewees expressed a history of difficulties in social media dating back to the early 2000s. Difficulties were easier to control at that time. The schools filtered and blocked any use of these sites at school. School leaders did not need to deal with discipline, because it could only be used at home. With the rise of smart phones the entire situation changed. The school filters could not control the phones and it became an issue they dealt with regularly. The Issues range from sexting each other, cyberbullying, cyber-threatening, and cyber-harassment of both other students and staff. Dealing with inappropriate staff/student interaction, misunderstanding, or lack of privacy controls with staff was more infrequent than student-to-student encounters. Difficulties with staff using social media is an issue, but rare. The biggest concern is the staff not “building a firewall around their privacy” and the relationship becoming too casual and the staff losing the respect and authority from students.

The primary school interviewee shared issues of bullying over Skype. The school leader brought in the local police for a program on cyberbullying and it calmed the situation down and he plans on using this program again in the future. The primary school had few troubling experiences beyond this one event.

As the use of smart phones is more and more common the assistant principal, the one closest to the students, and the principal of a small secondary school, who is accustomed to handling disciplinary matters, says the problems with misuse of social media are daily occurrences. The laws are blurry and it is necessary for schools to discipline and set an example of how they will deal with it, because of the damage it can do to the learning environment. “Now its within our jurisdiction 24/365 . . . Cyberbullying can happen anywhere and it now falls within our jurisdiction.” The state has added language to California Education Code that helps schools. If cyberbullying happens anywhere, but disrupts the school’s safe learning environment, schools can discipline. It falls under category 4900 subsection R. If a student in California engages in activity on the way to school, during school, or on the way home from school it falls they can be disciplined, also.

Three of the 5 people interviewed expressed concern over freedom of speech and over policing cyberspace. One interviewee described social media as “their playground”. It is important to allow the students room to express themselves in the way their generation does. It is too much to ask school leaders to police these sites all day, everyday. As we catch on to which social media tools they use, the students find new tools.

All participants believed parents also need guidelines and need to take an active, but careful role in their children’s online activities. It is not realistic to expect the schools to take on all of the responsibility. Much of the use and misuse of social media happens

at home. The schools often find that when they advise the parent to monitor their student's activities online and suspend their accounts for a time, the parents do not consistently follow up. This is not to indict parents on their oversight, but they are part of the greater picture.

None of the schools had a specific policy that addressed social media use for the students. One school does have a plan and schedule for an outside organization to come to the school and deliver a program for the students. The goal is helping them become aware of responsible social media use and how to protect themselves.

Troubling Activities: How the School Leaders Should Act

During the discussion on the difficulties of dealing with the negative impacts, all levels of interviewees expressed the negative behaviors are not new. The student is just using a new "vehicle." Bullying, threats, harassment and inappropriate engagement of other students was not invented by social media. Now there is evidence of their negative behavior. What we could not hear in the conversations we can see in the posts on social media.

In the event of sexting, the problems arise with dissemination of underage pictures, which has current and future implications that both and all students are not yet aware. Educating them about the real legal and social issues is necessary. If the student is looking at pornography on their smart device, its not really different that the student who snuck a Playboy to school. It may be harder to find them, but it is the same behavior.

In the case of bullying, threatening and harassing adding cyber availability can make the remarks crueler because when they are not speaking face-to-face, student feel they can say whatever they want. Today it is not just rumor or just allegations of what happened in a private conversation, as it would have been in the past. Now it strays from the confines of the one on one conversation. The comments are broadcast. “When students do engage in bullying and other behaviors, we now have tangible evidence of the act, so bullying may not be occurring more than before, but now there is evidence.” Students can bring in the actual online conversation and there is no question of the facts. All parties agreed that discipline of the negative behavior is important, it doesn’t matter in what form it happened.

Positive Experiences and Expectations of Social Media Use

All interviewees expressed there is potential power in using social media. The small high school interviewee expressed that when he could step away from discipline and more into the development of curriculum, he “experienced the potential power of social media and the information age.” Actual experience coaching students scoring far below basic in their math assessments and improving their skills inspired him. When they deployed tools the students could access on their smart phones he reported their scores had a dramatic shift. He felt the “information age is exponentially limitless in its possibilities, yet full of hazards”.

At the primary level the positive experiences far outweighed the negative. Teachers were using social media platforms to have threaded discussions; students are

using the school platform and others, like Skype, to interact about assignments. This school and the small high school are in the process of rolling out Chromebooks the students can use for research on campus. They will use interactive Google Docs to compose and create assignments they can share and edit, collaborating with their partners remotely. These activities mirror university and job skills much more closely than traditional methods.

All levels stressed this generation are “Digital Natives” (Myers, 2012). One interviewee went as far as stating a student of 13 has not experienced a world without social media. It is important to communicate with them the way the students communicate.

All levels also agreed it is important to integrate these tools into the curriculum, How to integrate these tools was still unclear. As stated before, the primary school has already started. At the secondary level it was a patchwork of teacher by teacher and most administration was unaware of which teachers were using it and which were not. With the emphasis on 21st century skills and the implementation of The Common Core curriculum adapted by many states including California, all saw the need for implementation of these tools. Both 21st century skills and Common Core stress critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. Social media allows for all of these skills to be used and shared among the student body.

Importance in Using Social Media

Regardless of the level of students taught, all interviewees agreed that in the age of school choice it is important for schools to adapt to technology faster. They acknowledged that the common school reaction to new technology is to just say no and try to block it. When the schools realize they cannot block the new technology they adapt the technology into the classroom. In the era of school choice, schools cannot afford to continue that practice. Looking to the future and how to best educate the students in the current and potential future world requires schools to adapt quickly. “We need to adapt or we will be alienated and left behind.” The interviewees acknowledged it was important to educate the students on proper use and appropriateness of how and when to use which tools. Teachers need guidelines so they do not flatten the relationship with students and become too familiar, cross the line, or allow the students to invade their personal lives and cause problems. “If the students are texting or emailing you and a sense that it is private, all parties need to remember the conversation doesn’t go away.”

One interviewee was very aware that students do not need to learn the same way anymore. Memorizing and regurgitating information is not used the way it was before. It is more important to teach students how to find information and digest its relevance and accuracy, than to memorize the facts. That does not mean there is no need for facts and basic knowledge, but the critical thinking component is more important than ever. “Students do not see sharing of information as cheating, and it is easier and easier to share. Educators need to be aware.”

Four of the interviewees discussed the idea of the changing school. “The neighborhood school is going away”, the traditional industrial era model may be changing”, “we need to be in touch with students in a modality that is 65%-70% of what they do”, “I envision a K-16 model with more vocational, Project Based Learning, and real world application of standards while a pathway that demonstrates mastery and skills for a diploma.” are some of the quotes that may lead the way to the new forms and importance of creativity, communication, critical thinking and collaboration in schools. These skills require using social media, as that is the tool that the world uses.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

Teaching has never been as easy task. Students of all ages are messy. They misbehave, they argue, and they act in a variety of inappropriate ways. This is not a new phenomenon. The ways in which they express this behavior changes over time. School leaders are obsessed with mitigating negative aspects of new technology and the ways it allows these negative behaviors to manifest. The behaviors need to be dealt with as negative behaviors, and not a symptom of new technology. Discipline where discipline is needed. Students passed notes, bullied in the playground, brought inappropriate materials, and fought before the technological tools such as social media were introduced. They shifted their behaviors to new ways they communicate. We cannot stop this behavior by stopping technology anymore than we could stop these behaviors by stopping them speaking to one another. School leaders need to have a clear policy that these behaviors will not stand, wherever they are acted upon, and harness the positive power of communications.

After researching the literature and interviewing experts in the field, what I expected to find evolved. My assumption that a strong policy governing school use was needed has changed to a guideline. Students, parents and teachers need a guideline so schools expectations are clear. No one curriculum department should be responsible for teaching appropriate online behavior, but when the tools are introduced in class it is important the teacher takes the time to teach the students how to communicate. It is

essential that teachers inform the students what is expected in a professional environment, and these expectations are upheld in the classroom and the classroom online. An age appropriate general education plan should be introduced at the 5th grade level, repeated in middle school and again in high school. This could be done in the form of an assembly either from an outside source that develops this curriculum or developed by the school site. The lessons must be reinforced in the classroom environment. The students need to be informed of the ongoing issues that can arise from a permanent online image.

School leaders should also develop a guideline for teachers online. It should include not to “friending” or engaging students on their personal accounts. If they create a teacher account, they need to keep the conversations professional. Be more direct and professional than they would be in the classroom. Allow all conversations to be public. Assume at all times anyone can see the conversation. Be careful to phrase comments and discussions to limit misinterpretation. Do not allow the relationship to become too casual. The administration should have a list of all teachers using social media, which ones they are using and access to the site. If issues arise, the administration should have access to the information they need to deal with the situation.

School and district leaders need to develop a texting information system in addition to email and autodialing phone calls. Texting is what the parents and students use to communicate. They should have a website with two way information, and parents appreciate a Facebook, Twitter or other social media page. School leaders need to go

where the community is. The Social Media needs to be actively monitored by all stakeholders.

School leaders should move from a position of no, and into a position of how do we use this technology, or these Social Media tools, to increase the effectiveness of our education process. The culture of no is allowing the students to enter into social media and other technology without any guidance. As adults move into the students tools, the students will move to other social media tools such as Snap Chat, but the guidance we give them may help them make better choices.

Lastly, as school choice has changed the landscape of the traditional local schools, parents are looking for forward thinking schools that are effective in teaching the basics and the new expectations of our culture. Schools must adapt quickly or be run over by those that will. If the world has changed and the school is still teaching the old paradigm, the school has no real purpose. Creative problem solving, communication and critical thinking are the way the students will navigate their ever-changing, faced paced world. We are obligated to help them develop these skills

Comparison of Findings to Previous Literature

The literature ranged from facts about social media, to uses and concerns about social media. My findings reflect much of what the other research revealed. The difference between my research and the literature is that much of the research suggests if school leaders can control social media, the schools leaders can control the negative behaviors. In have found that the negative behaviors must be controlled and social media tools can

be used in a much more valuable way. These behaviors already exist and may be magnified by social media. School leaders should deal the negative actions with in the same manner they were before social media. Anti-bullying programs and legislation need to be enacted and disciplinary action taken regardless of where and how it occurs. The schools can now make an easier link to the inappropriate behavior and the actual nature of how it developed and have real evidence of the actions.

The literature echoes the importance of using social media as an instruction tool. Students feel more connected. They understand this form of communication and may see it as a real tool and not just social media for entertainment.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

The fast paced changes in technology and how people, teens, educators use and adapt to new ways of communicating are difficult. By the time district and school leaders are define how and what to use, there will be new and different social media tools. Educators were once worried about notes from one student to another. Slowly that changed to pagers, cellphones, instant messaging and the number of ways the students can communicate online through their smart phones they carry in their pockets. I purposely did not focus on one avenue of social media. In the process of my research I have been aware there are new ways that have been developed. This research cannot be used for only what is current, but must adapt the research into what is to come.

Implications for Future Research

Future research will need to continue. Technological advances and their use are ever evolving. The students will be bringing these advances into the schools as they are developed, and the school leaders cannot sit on the sidelines and wait. Students, and society in general, will always find a way to abuse these new ways to communicate. Policies must be open ended and flexible to accommodate the flow of communication, and not get bogged down in trying to shut out new developments. In order for schools to stay relevant is to take on the fast paced movement. Social technology will be an integral part of education and studies will have to undertaken to form best practices.

Overall Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the generational gap between students and the educators. Educators are always trying to adapt to what is coming into the world. The new is often viewed as negative and something to be avoided. Throughout this study looking at what is new and developing proper use is beneficial to students and educators alike. The world has changed. It has become smaller, quicker and more personal in positive and negative ways. We as educators must harness the positive and use it to educate the students for the world they live in, and not the world we lived in. To stay relevant education must adapt and teach the students the skills they can use and are expected to know in an environment that reflects the outside environment. If traditional schools do not adapt, the tide of the new technological world will drown them and make them obsolete. Parents and students have choice. Public education must evolve to be the best and most effective choice.

About the Author

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