Chapter 10
The Ethical Dilemmas of Social Networking Sites in Classroom Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores five ethical dilemmas associated with using Social Networking Sites (SNS) in classrooms. First, do we have the right to colonize or marginalize students' out of school social networking practices in the classroom? Second, should we access students' out of classroom virtual identities from their SNS in a classroom context? Third, should we be engaging students' social networking in public performances of the curriculum? Fourth, are we prepared for recognising and responding to illicit activity in SNS? Fifth, do teachers understand the implications of exposing their out of school identities to their students who inhabit the same social network? The authors do not dispute that SNS in the classroom can be a rich site for learning, but they argue that the concept of ethics as a process of analyzing and respecting the other is essential if we are to responsibly engage with SNS in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption, adaptation or development of SNS for use in classroom (physical and virtual) contexts has been comparatively slow to that of other digital technologies. This is not surprising because unlike many other technologies such as word processors, SNS were not developed for what we typically understand as production purposes that most easily slot into our curriculum and assessment. In addition, because social networking sites blur the boundaries between professional/school and personal lives, there has been considerable caution on the part of teachers and institutions. Furthermore, the fact that social networking sites have been the subject of considerable media focus

in terms of cyberbullying and predatory behaviour is a concern. Nevertheless, as this book testifies, there is a growing movement in the use of SNS in classroom contexts (Snyder, Henderson, & Beale, 2012; Wong & Hew, 2010); however, little research has been conducted in identifying and addressing ethical dilemmas when working with children or young people and SNS.

Although much has been written about moral panics in relation to Internet safety, privacy, and responsibility when using social media in educational contexts (Green & Hannon, 2007; Merchant, 2011), the ethical dilemmas we are concerned about go beyond these terms. The ethical dilemmas when working with children or young people (aged between 5 and 17) and social networking sites are framed by broader discourses in current educational practice. One of these discourses is the standards based reforms. Comber and Nixon (2009, p. 333) suggested that it 'now seems impossible to discuss high-quality education without the insistence on reporting, standardized curriculum and assessment metrics' and this focus on standards based reform has implications for the use of new media in the classroom. For instance the reforms are closely tied with a resurgent emphasis on the importance of students being exposed to literacy texts that are recognized as having enduring or artistic value does not privilege teachers working with new media. As a consequence, teachers who work in institutions that use standards based reforms often find it difficult to find the time to investigate the possibilities of integrating SNS in the curriculum let alone develop an understanding of the social complexities faced by students in these environments.

The moral panic surrounding new media is particularly evident in the literature on cyberbullying. For example, Rogers (2010, p. 7) articulated cyberbullying as the 'darker side to this shiny new digital world'. Coupled with the increasing negative press coverage surrounding new media and the moral panic associated with cyberbullying, there is a need to closely examine the ethical issues associated with social networking sites so that students and teachers are given more choice about the texts they access in order to meet curriculum and broader educational needs. It is important for us to be clear that the information in this chapter is not meant to scare people from discussing these issues, rather we are hoping to construct a space in which teachers are empowered to engage with the dialogue and implications surrounding the ethical dilemmas they encounter in their changing professional practice.

Another discourse that is worth considering in the context of ethical dilemmas with social networking in the classroom is the culture of care. From an ethical perspective classrooms are synonymous with the culture of care the teacher brings to the classroom. Nias (1999) identifies six aspects of the culture of care in a primary classroom. These aspects of care are; affectivity, responsibility for learners, responsibility for the relationships in the school, self-sacrifice, over-conscientiousness and identity (Nias, 1999). Although these aspects are taken from a primary classroom we would argue they provide a strong foundation for the exploration of responsible and ethical relations across secondary and tertiary learning contexts. In coming to understand the ethics of SNS in classrooms we also draw on Lévinas (1979) who argued that all people depend on more than just themselves for life, sustenance, and education and we are continuously in an ethical relationship with the 'other'. Although we will use this construct of the other to reinforce the ideas of duty of care in the teaching profession, we will also outline that SNS such as Facebook would not be functional without a sense of the other in jointly authored and consumed textual practices. For example, the texts the students access or bring to class might be a montage of authors that include different people in different places who have not provided permission for their texts to be unpacked in a classroom environment. Since the teacher has a responsibility for how the students relate to each other and other people in a classroom environment, teachers need

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