

Chapter 22

Social Networks: Education beyond the Classroom?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mr. Taylor, a new and techno savvy teacher, stays connected by maintaining his own social network pages. However, after seeing that other students were using his social network page as a medium for negativity, gossip, inappropriate conversations, and unsuitable remarks, he questioned its continued use as a helpful teaching tool for those utilizing it appropriately.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This generation of teenagers is growing up in the technology age. Many students have personal web pages and an account with a social network due to peer incentives to stay connected or even due to peer pressure. These networks enable subscribers to find friends, interest groups, and affiliations to which they can belong. Even many businesses are using this free service of social network applications as promotion to targeted groups of customers.

Hence, even though there are some negative concerns regarding privacy and predators, there are many positive attributes offered by these social networks. Within social networks, students are more motivated to read and write posts, record status updates, and socialize as an alternative to just playing video games or watching television. Some schools are taking advantage of these social network services to

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connect with students and incorporate their use into curriculum standards. However, with this new, uncensored territory, what is the teacher's role on social networking outside of the traditional school setting? There are several differing perspectives on this social networking revolution; all of them changing the way this generation stays connected.

According to Wikipedia, a social network is a group of people tied together by sharing something in common. For generations there have been social group gatherings to discuss interests, occupations, relationships, and all things shared in common. Throughout human history, social groups of all sizes have formed ranging from those as small as a partnership, to those as big as a country or large organization. They communicated through personal meetings, phone calls, letters, or notes and memos in order to stay connected. Today's technology generation has evolved, thanks to the Internet's social networking ability to share information at incredible speeds. Though today's Internet-based social networking groups are still relatively small, there are a few social groups and services dominating today's society. With the rising popularity of social network groups, some educators are utilizing this tool in an educative way and stay connected to students and other peers. Even advertisers are turning toward the popularity of these social networks.

THE CASE

Mr. Taylor is a new teacher at Harrison Woods High School teaching geometry. He believes technology is the key to reaching and engaging students of this generation. Mr. Taylor is extremely techno savvy and up to date with all the new technologies introduced to education as well as stays connected by having his own social network pages.

Mr. Taylor was an engaging and popular teacher. His students quickly located his social networking pages and added him as a friend. Despite the warnings of his peers, Mr. Taylor expected no harm staying connected with his students via this popular new electronic platform. He had nothing to hide nor any personal things posted on his social network page. As he began befriending more students, his network began to grow and more students began adding him, even students who were not in his class. Mr. Taylor viewed this trend as a great opportunity to reach out to his students. He began to post school review sheets on his social network page and even used his page to converse with any students who had homework questions.

Mr. Taylor continued on with all this technology both in class and after work. He felt that social networking really helped connect him and his students and strengthened the student-teacher relationship. Mr. Taylor was very cautious and kept his page very professional.

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