OLTD 506 Boundaries Paper

September 12, 2013

What are our boundaries as teachers? More specifically, what are our boundaries as teachers in the realm of social media in and outside of the classroom? This is something that we have looked at in depth over the last week and I am starting to realize that it might not be as scary as I originally thought. I have always been very hesitant about using social media with my students, I have never attempted it before and although I have had requests, I have never added a student of mine on Facebook as a ‘friend’. All too often I have heard of teachers from all over getting in trouble for this or that in relation to social media so I found myself becoming, as Julia would call me, an ‘ostrich’.

I had never thought of myself as an ostrich but when I read Julia’s report (Ostriches and Eagles) I soon realized that her statement “[ignoring] any educational applications of these technologies due to fear.” fit me perfectly! I believe this is when a fire started under my butt. I thought to myself, I have social media profiles and use them regularly, but am I ready to use them in a professional manner? I have signed myself up for this program so that I can be on the leading edge of online learning, not to consider myself an ostrich. It is my hope that over the time I am in this course I become an eagle, spreading my ‘social media in education’ wings and flying – but there is a lot of learning to done before that can happen.

There is no doubt in my mind that Julia is correct when she states: “Posting student content on the internet (whether in a ‘secure’ school district site or more open locations like Wordpress or Twitter) provides many learning opportunities for students” (A K-12 Primer for British Columbia Teachers on Posting Students’ Work Online) but I am still struggling with how to do so securely. I am having my students share their essays with each other for peer editing and this is done over the internet as they are all living in various places around the province but I assign the partners in our secure classroom and they have each other’s email to send their work securely. I am not sure if they would feel comfortable or if their parents would be okay with them sharing it with the world via twitter (sometimes I was a little leery of sharing my work on twitter for courses in this program).

If you were to look at my twitter account, you would see that I have tweeted things that have been interesting to me and I think others might be interested in, mostly educational resources but at times a funny picture or video. I first starting this account because I was at WestCast and Alec Couros was the keynote speaker. He asked people to sign up (or sign in) to twitter and tweet something. He was showing us the educational benefits of this but at the same time, it was the educational benefits at the post secondary and professional development levels. I have thought to myself many times that twitter would be a great resource for my students as they are all living in different parts of the province. They could tweet about different things and have twitter chats but the thought of how ‘open’ those chats would be is what really turned me off of the idea. That is when I thought about all the different social media outlets, I would be okay with my students ‘following’ me on twitter but I wouldn’t allow them to be my friend on Facebook?

For me, even though I’m understanding a lot more of the boundaries that surround this profession, there is something about keeping my Facebook personal and removed from my professional life that I don’t know if I will ever give up. I will not allow friends of mine to post pictures of me in my swim suit because I am not sure what their privacy settings are or who can see the picture of me. Although, at the same time, if I am at the beach with my daughters and I want to share a picture of us playing in the sand, I feel a lot more comfortable doing so on my account because I know who I am friends with and I know what my privacy settings are. I think this is still one of my biggest worries with any form of social media, I am unaware of the settings (how public or private things may become) of others so sharing or connecting with them still scares me.

Julia states: “In the case of data posted on the internet, a student’s first name, combined with class or teacher information can be sufficient to uniquely identify an individual. While all this data may not be on one page on a site or service, if it is distributed across a site or sites (service or services) that information can be easily brought together to identify the specific student.” Yes, information on a variety of sites can be brought together to figure it out but for the three teachers I know, all you have to do is look in one of their photo albums and everything someone would need is in one place, this really scares me the more I think about it. Second, a friend of mine is teaching overseas has been posting pictures of their school, their classroom and more recently their students (faces are clear as day) and I have wondered on more than one occasion if they have received the parent’s permission to do so. I have contacted this teacher to inquire about this and although I know she has seen my email, she has yet to reply which makes me think that no permissions were given.

I would hope that my friends (especially the ones who are teachers) would be aware of the expectations given to us by the ministry of education but not all of my friends are teachers so not all of my friends have to follow the same guidelines as me. One of our expectations as a teacher is to “understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development.” If you look at the explanation, it says: “Educators are knowledgeable about how children develop as learners and as social beings, and demonstrate an understanding of individual learning differences and special needs.” If students are social beings then it is my understanding that I should be looking into using material from this course as much as possible and giving my students the opportunity to use social media since they are social beings. I think this is especially important in my case as my students are all over the province and would not have the chance to meet were it not for social media.

I have a somewhat private job as it is distance learning and I can teach from home but at the same time, anything that I do in public has the potential to be seen by past, present or future students and employers and that is something that stays in the front of my mind always. I have been using Blackboard Collaborate with my students for them to be able to connect in real time and get to know each other but this is a somewhat structured setting where I am present and they have a scheduled time. I know from experience over the past little while having young kids at home, it is very hard to plan scheduled learning time slots some time. The use of something such as twitter would allow my students to connect with each other in an asynchronous way on their own time, at their own pace. First it is my job to teach them how to properly use the tool though.

With everything that I have said, I would be very interested in trying to use social media with my students. I am starting to come around to the idea (as I learn more about the protocols) that it would not be a horrible idea. I am becoming more confident in my knowledge of my boundaries and what it would require from the parent’s end to get started with this. Since I have a closed, password protected classroom, sharing work is easy with my students to another one of my students but twitter would open up the possibility of connecting with classrooms overseas which I have always wanted to do. I realize that having parent support is something that will need to be present for this to work, and my best chance for parent support is informing them, and their children about how to use social media in a safe way.

If you haven’t realized yet, I am very hesitant about this whole topic. I am really trying hard to let go, relax and allow myself to experiment a little bit. I am aware of learning opportunities with social media outside of twitter (not what they are exactly, but that they exist) but it is all baby steps and part of the learning that will happen with this course. It is my hope that I can sincerely do this through the course. I know that I need to forget the ‘be careful, be careful, be careful” and turn it into “be aware, be informed, be safe”. If I am able to do this then not only will I, but my students, will benefit from it.

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<https://www.dropbox.com/s/qq03qytnj9k0fbg/Primer%20on%20Posting%20Minor%20Students%20Final.pdf>