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Social Networking – “are social networking relationships part of the learning process?”
“Communication has great power...” “Social Networking isn’t the future in education, it is the present”.

Panel: Anthony Marco – VP of OSSTF in Hamilton and Secondary School English Teacher
Chris Coculuzzi - TDSB Secondary school teacher in english, drama and social science.

Nicole Daniels – Grade 11 student in York Catholic DSB and an active member of the YCDSB Student Senate.

Anthony:

- No 100% privacy/safety on the internet
- Strongly against teacher-student connections in social networking because of the privacy and safety concerns not only for teachers but for students as well.
- Feels social networking can have a place in education but not publicly organized social networking (ie Facebook). A board created social network model is less scary/risk for all involved. More controlled social network = more positive interaction and exchange.
- Feels educators have the right to be a “content creator” in online media sources, and values that opportunity, but questions whether facebook and twitter etc are the proper ethical solutions for those online teacher-student connections.
- Don't fear technology – fear how it's used!
- [→ Listen to teacher Anthony Marco on CBC](#)

Chris:

- [→ Listen to teacher Chris Coculuzzi on CBC](#)
- Feels teachers have a moral responsibility to get involved
- Teachers have a public persona which they must maintain when using a public social networking site, and can not ignore the obligation that they are a role model for these students.
- Does not seek connections between students and himself on social networks but accepts connections if requested. He sees it similar to a student knocking on his classroom door wanting to talk about something unrelated to school. They need that role model connection.
- Because of the increase in cyber bullying, online addictions, critical discussions/judgments, he feels teachers have an obligation to be aware of their students and help guide them through the age of social networking as responsible citizens. If no one is going to do it, who will?
- When engaged in social networking/media recommends teachers post as a teacher

always. Being a teacher is a 24/7 job to continue the role model connection for our students.

Nicole: feels there are both pros and cons to Facebook and social media sites and connections with teachers for students.

Pros:

- A way to reach out to engage students that wouldn't otherwise be engaged
- Immediate help for projects/homework
- Increase communication opportunity between teachers and students i.e. "Report is now due Tuesday" "test on Monday – study hard"...
- One stop shopping for students. If they are already using Facebook, creating another online "stop" for them won't work as well as taking advantage of the networking they already associate with.

Cons:

- Wonders where to draw the line on ethical issues – who decides it's an ethical concern?
- Can teachers really be sure what they are reading is a concern or is it a student using social media to express themselves?
- Who will monitor the connection for protection of student and teacher?
- Is there too much focus on Facebook?; other media networks that would be more appropriate with less personal aspect (ie twitter, Edmodo, other online blogging sites with a more controlled and less public environment.

Workshop attendees have their say too:

- Kids do not understand the Public persona and their digital footprint; despite privacy settings, there is nothing that is 100%.
- People need to use technology responsibly; consider and RESPECT the rights and privacy of others.
- Teach, don't protect – this came up again and again. We can't be there beside our kids all the time, but we can help them learn how to use these communication tools (what to look out for, best practices etc). Talk about it with them, learn with them.
- Facebook has evolved greatly from original intent. There are new ways to connect that don't have to be personal connections. Ie groups, fan pages. Should schools consider creating groups which are more controlled connections in the online network kids already know?
- *Digital Citizenship* is important! Students want to communicate digitally but don't have the tools to use safely and parents often don't have the knowledge/understanding of internet to teach them. Schools/Boards/teachers need to teach it! Social Media should have a greater place in curriculum in teaching kids how to be responsible *digital citizens*.
- Social media safety should be added to curriculum in grades 3 or 4, before they become more involved and peer trained.
- Cyber bullying isn't even a term in our curriculum – why not? Kids are so desensitized because of social media connections that they don't even see their actions online as bullying and it has become more accepted among kids. We need to educate our kids that it is NOT ok. Who will do this?
- Don't fear technology – it's a reality of today's world. We need to accept that it's here and

- find ways to teach our students to use it responsibly and respectfully.
- Teach our kids to be GOOD DIGITAL CITIZENS
 - Q for Chris: does the connection with students blurr the line of personal and professional; do students abuse the ability to contact you after school hours? Where do you draw the line? A: it is a personal choice whether to answer emails etc during personal time – there is no obligation to respond and if he chooses to do so, he accepts that he is using personal time to do so. Boundaries are defined by needs vs risk.
 - Comment from Anthony: two points regarding student connections – 1) legal concerns for teachers as anyone can contact College of Teachers. It is the reputation that carries forward, not the facts. 2) teachers have a responsibility to ensure they have not facilitated the invasion of privacy of students because of “friend of friend” connections.
 - The fact that parent education of social media is far less than student knowledge is scary; solution? Increase parent education opportunity so parents have that knowledge and can guide their children effectively in their online connections.
 - Both teachers and parents in the room expressed the urgent need for more information. Teachers need more professional development opportunities in this area and parents want workshops too. Perhaps even ones they could attend together.

Additional Resources:

- [→ A Parents' Guide to Facebook](#)
- [→ Connect Safely - a website for parents](#)
- <http://www.common sense media.org/facebook-parents>
- [→ My Privacy, My Choice, My Life](#) - a great website for **YOUTH** and parents + teachers too! (Created by Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada)

You may also want to read and/or join in some of the discussions going on now in p4e’s online community:

<http://schools-at-the-centre.ning.com/forum/topics/staffstudents-facebook>

<http://schools-at-the-centre.ning.com/forum/topics/formspring-since-its-bullying>