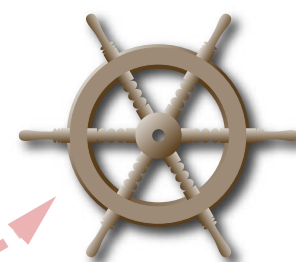


# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## Appropriate on-line behaviour and responsible access to internet and communication technology

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In Brandon, Manitoba in 2008 a teacher was charged with misconduct after a fake Facebook profile was posted by a 15-year-old student.

Again in 2008, Facebook bullying was cited as the number one reason for student suspensions.

National *Kick a Ginger Day* campaign was launched on social media by students to promote attacking people with red hair.

A teacher in the Annapolis Valley had a fake Facebook profile posted showing the teacher engaged in unprofessional conduct.

Students organize the harassment of a teacher so he loses his temper and the result is captured with cell phone cameras and posted on MySpace.

A teacher posts pictures of an end-of-year staff party on Facebook showing teachers drinking and engaged in “party” antics.

All of these examples, along with more you can cite, are clear examples of the inappropriate use of the Internet and of communications technologies. Some examples are merely embarrassing or inappropriate where others are malicious. What is also clear is that something must be done to address this inappropriate behaviour. The real question is “What?”

There is an immediate visceral reaction—get rid of the offending behaviour and the things that enable that behaviour. Ban the stuff. We should keep cell phones out of schools. We should prevent the school community from accessing Internet sites like Facebook. There are provocative videos with no educational value posted on YouTube that clearly have no place in schools or Community College campuses and therefore we should block access to YouTube as well. We know there are numerous pornographic and hate-filled websites and the best way to prevent students accessing them is to block access to all but specifically approved sites. Searching Google for articles on breast cancer or recipes for cooking chicken breasts must be blocked because we all know other sites will turn up because of the word “breast” in the search.

Unfortunately, this is a strategy doomed to failure. This does not mean, however, we should take no action.

The implementation of this policy might not be so bad if students, teachers, faculty and parents already knew how to use the technology in constructive ways that facilitated learning. But this is not the case.

In an effort to address these issues, the NSTU established a policy at Council 2008 that governs our approach to appropriate Internet and communications technology behaviour. That policy has two main themes. The first theme is education; that it is our responsibility to demonstrate and teach how these technologies should be used responsibly and how they can be used to promote learning and constructive communication. The second theme is that all partners in the use of these technologies have a responsibility to define what constitutes acceptable use within their specific context and establish clear consequences for misuse and misbehaviour. The partners are broadly defined and include students, parents, teachers, school and campus administration, school boards and the Nova Scotia Community College, the Nova Scotia Department of Education, the Nova Scotia government and the Internet and cellular service providers.

One of the major flaws in the argument to simply ban or block the use of these technologies is that they are going to be used and accessed outside our schools and campuses. Any bans or blocks we put in place become irrelevant the moment the student returns home or chooses to use personal technologies capable of accessing the Internet.

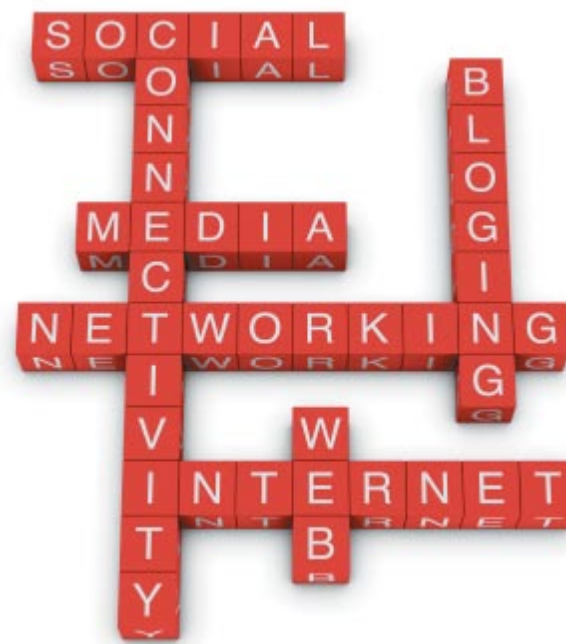
We must also ask how parents, teachers and students will learn the appropriate uses of communications technology and social networking sites? Where will they learn how to use Facebook and YouTube to enhance their own learning and the learning of others? It is difficult to justify penalties for inappropriate behaviour on the part of students, teachers or faculty if they have not been provided an educational framework that defines appropriate behaviour in theory and in practice.

The era of *chalk and talk* instruction has passed and we facilitate learning best when we can serve as coaches and guides to student learning. This applies equally to our own professional learning.

A second major problem with blocking or banning cell phones from schools or access to Facebook and YouTube, as examples, is that new technologies are emerging at a rate that makes strategies based on prohibition obsolete in many cases as soon as they are implemented.

While consequences for misuse must be clear and significant, the primary means by which we can promote and establish appropriate cyberconduct is through education. This education should be through explicit instruction and clear modelling. It is impossible to effectively teach how to use Facebook in a respectful manner if access to Facebook is blocked from schools. Similarly, there are many videos posted on YouTube that teachers can use to illustrate concepts that would otherwise be impossible to show. Cell phones are often important means of emergency communication for teachers, administrators and students alike. Their integrated cameras are also open to creative use capturing the important things students discover on trips or as a means to record course content in new and innovative ways.

Teachers and faculty are encouraged, and in many contexts required, to integrate *technology* into the fabric of their courses rather than creating technology-specific courses such as *How to Use Word Processing*. However, this mandate is not limited to word processing, spreadsheets and web searches. Teachers and faculty cannot fulfill this mandate to show their students how to use all technologies to enable and encourage



them to be in control of their own learning if some of the major tools available to students are denied to both themselves and their teachers in the very places dedicated to promoting life-long learning.

We must move away from policies and procedures that ban and block. We need to advocate for boards and the College to implement effective professional learning opportunities for teachers, faculty and professional support so they can learn about the wide range of communication technologies, what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, and so they can explore ways to use these technologies to maximize their educational potential and facilitate student learning. We need to integrate as many new technologies into our courses as possible to demonstrate to students how to use them effectively. We also need to be open to students’ suggestions on the same theme. They are the digital natives while most of us will only ever be digital immigrants.

From the Department of Education to boards and the College to school and campus administrators to those in the classroom, we need to ask “Where are we now as educators in relation to technology literacy and access?”, “Where do we need to be?”, and “How do we close the gap?”

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