

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

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Social Networking in Schools

Social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace, which let users connect with friends and acquaintances, are an increasingly popular online destination for teachers, administrators and students. The increased importance of social networking and its impact on personal privacy were recently highlighted by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (2009) in its report on Facebook:

Social networking sites are a cultural phenomenon. In the last five years, the popularity of these sites has exploded, with millions of people around the world joining them to keep in touch with their friends and family and to meet new people. They represent a dramatic shift in the way people communicate, and their use raises interesting questions about long-held views on what it means to have a private life or a sense of “privacy.”

In an age where it appears almost everyone is leaving their digital footprints everywhere, including their views, pictures, beliefs and sometimes romantic foibles, our notions of controlling one's personal information ... are being significantly challenged.

Many workplaces have felt the impact of the increased popularity of these websites. Because of concerns about productivity or concerns that social networking activities may breach workplace policies, many employers have blocked access to such sites in order to keep employees on task while at work.

Further, more extreme examples abound of workplace difficulties ensuing after material has been posted on social networking websites or other online locations:

- An eastern Ontario grocery chain disciplined several employees after learning of their postings on a work-related Facebook group, including postings that led to accusations of theft from the store (Cavoukian 2007).
- Employees of a well-known pizza chain posted a “humorous” video about how pizzas are made, which included unhygienic and rude behaviour, as well as employees mocking customers. This video was widely viewed and generated a great deal of negative publicity (Wood 2009).
- In British Columbia, a principal was suspended after the mother of a student at his school was accidentally e-mailed a link to the principal's personal website, which included naked holiday photographs (CTV.ca News Staff 2007).

As this last example makes clear, social networking has the potential for harm in school settings. Consider the following scenarios:

- Teachers or administrators making inappropriate statements online or posting weblogs about school or other educational workplaces
- Teachers or administrators “friending” students online and engaging in inappropriate conversations
- False social networking postings or profiles being posted about teachers or administrators

Any one of these scenarios could play out in a school setting and could lead to damaged relationships with coworkers, students and parents, and could even lead to workplace discipline.

**Character
isn't
something
you were
born with and
can't change,
like your
fingerprints.
It's
something
you weren't
born with and
must take
responsibility
for forming.**

—Jim Rohn



Although social networking has the potential to transform more traditional views of personal privacy, the law will also continue to view social networking sites through the lens of pre-existing principles. For instance, employees have a duty to satisfactorily perform their work duties and cannot spend inordinate amounts of time on personal tasks during the workday.

Further, issues will be raised regarding off-duty conduct of employees where there is the potential to negatively affect the workplace. Off-duty conduct is behaviour occurring outside the scope of an employee's performance of his or her regular duties. While some conduct and communications will truly be personal or unrelated to the workplace, users of social networking websites should nevertheless post information on these websites with their eyes open to the possibility that it will become available to others in the education sector. Where misconduct occurs during off-duty hours and even online, there may be cause for discipline if the conduct has harmed the employer's reputation or workplace, or if the conduct has rendered the employee unable to perform his or her duties. Section 18 of the Code of Professional Conduct states that "the teacher acts in a manner which maintains the honour and dignity of the profession," and section 19 states that "the teacher does not engage in activities which adversely affect the quality of the teacher's professional service."

Teachers and administrators have a responsibility to manage their personal affairs in a way that avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest and that does not harm public confidence in

their schools, workplaces and profession. Teachers and administrators also have a responsibility to ensure that they do not create the impression that their personal comments are the official position of their organization, nor should they be encouraged to vent about the workplace online in a public forum. What users of social networking websites might see as funny or harmless could be interpreted as evidence that a teacher or administrator is reckless or lacking in judgment, or that he or she is engaging in inappropriate conduct.

In particular, where teachers or administrators engage in out-of-school communications with students, extreme caution should be the rule, despite the informality encouraged by social networking websites. Maintaining appropriate boundaries with students and with other teachers and administrators is as important on social networking websites as it is in the traditional school setting.

It is important to heed the following recommendations from the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (Cavoukian 2007):

1. "Think hard before you click" to post text or photos ... in ways or on topics that you would not want to discuss with your current [or future] employer.
2. Review what is out there about you. ... Some of it might be completely fictional. Others may refer to someone with the same name as you, but you need to know about it.
3. Remove, if possible, anything you would not want to discuss with your current [or future] employer. ... But be aware that the effects of some information may continue [if it

remains available or if it has already been viewed].

4. Implement privacy controls over your personal information on social networks.
5. Build up a positive image for yourself on your profile through comments on your own and others' sites, photos and groups.

As social networking evolves, and to some extent the law along with it, these recommendations will likely become better known. Until that time, users must be reminded that discretion and caution are the most important considerations.

If you have questions regarding the use of social networking sites, do not hesitate to contact a staff officer in Member Services at 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta) or 780-447-9400 (in Edmonton).

References

- Cavoukian, A. 2007. *Reference Check: Is Your Boss Watching? Privacy and Your Facebook Profile*. Toronto: Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario. Also available at www.ipc.on.ca/images/Resources/facebook-refcheck-2009-04-web.pdf (accessed January 7, 2010).
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- Office of the Privacy Commissioner (OPC) of Canada. 2009. Report of Findings into the Complaint Filed by the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC) Against Facebook Inc. Under the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*. Ottawa: OPC. Also available at www.priv.gc.ca/cf-dc/2009/2009_008_0716_e.pdf (accessed January 7, 2010).
- Wood, G. 2009. "Charges Expected for Domino's Pizza Employees After YouTube Outrage." *Vancouver Sun*, April 16.



Q & A
GORDON THOMAS,
Executive Secretary

Q: I have had a few requests from teachers regarding teachers' convention and their attendance. Some questions I have fielded are, What should I do if I am sick? Who approves alternative professional development activities? What do I do if I am part-time? Can I bring my teacher's assistant to convention? I have a sporting event scheduled during convention—can I leave early?

A: The *School Act* designates two days of teachers' convention authorized by the ATA as teaching days for the purposes of salary and benefits. ATA bylaws under the *Teaching Profession Act* specify that “unless otherwise approved by a convention association, all active members shall attend” their assigned conventions.

Some helpful reminders for your teaching staff:

- Administrators cannot direct or give permission for a teacher to work at the school or at home during convention.
- Administrators cannot change the procedures normally used under the collective agreement with regard to illness, medical appointments, compassionate leave or any other leave of absence. The collective agreement must be followed.
- Administrators cannot direct or approve an alternative professional development activity during convention. Only the convention attendance committee of your assigned convention association has that authority. Have the teacher check the website for contacts, deadlines and the criteria for alternative PD.
- Teachers who are working part-time are expected to attend teachers' convention based on their FTE assigned time. For example, if a teacher worked 0.5 FTE he or she would be expected to attend 0.5 of teachers' convention.
- Administrators cannot give permission or require a teaching assistant or educational assistant to attend teachers' convention. The convention is open only to certificated teachers who are members of the ATA and have paid their ATA dues, including the convention fee.
- Administrators cannot schedule or approve any school trips that would occur during convention time. Convention attendance committees will not give permission for such trips as they do not qualify as professional development. The exception to this is the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association provincial finals. Have your teachers check the convention website for the form that will allow teacher coaches to be absent from convention on the Friday afternoon to travel with their team to provincials.

For more information and answers to frequently asked questions, go to the ATA website (www.teachers.ab.ca) and click on Teachers' Conventions (under Professional Development).

For specific questions about the collective agreement, call Teacher Welfare Staff at 780-447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta).

2010 Educational Leadership Academy – Notice

About Robert Marzano



Dr Robert Marzano received a bachelor's degree from Iona College in New York, a master's degree from Seattle University and a doctorate from the University of Washington. He is cofounder and chief executive officer of the Marzano Research Laboratory in Englewood, Colorado. Throughout his 40 years in the field of education, Dr Marzano has been a speaker, a trainer and the author of more than 30 books and 150 articles on topics such as instruction, assessment, cognition, effective leadership, school intervention, and writing and implementing standards.

Program overview

Sessions will focus on how administrators can improve the instructional practices of their teachers with the goal of enhancing student achievement. Specific topics will include

- general leadership behaviours that provide the foundation for a culture of excellence,
- what to look for regarding effective instructional practices,
- how to give teachers feedback that is focused, respectful and empowering,
- classroom assessment practices that empower students and teachers, and
- closing the achievement gap by building the background knowledge of students.

What is the format?

This is a five-day, in-residence workshop conducted in a retreat setting.

The extensive program emphasizes the direct involvement of all participants. Opportunities will be provided for personal reflection and informal interaction with colleagues. The main topics will be covered through

- presentations;
- individual consultation;
- intensive, practical, hands-on experience; and
- group discussions.

For registration information, contact Leslie Kaun at 780-447-9410 or go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on Resources for School-Based Administrators.

Mission Statement: The mission of the Academy is to improve the quality of learning through effective leadership, to promote the professional growth of educational leaders and to build successful relationships.