

Do Social Networking Applications Have a Place in the Classroom?

Yes

Social networking sites are great tools for the growth of education. I think too many people are clouded by e-mail stories and Dateline specials detailing how online predators use sites such as MySpace, Friendster, and Facebook to quickly gather personal information and access to their prey. Supervised correctly, online social networking helps users build strong ties with a global audience. When teachers and students are exposed to these virtual acquaintances, they have the opportunity to learn from the greatly differing perspectives of others.

History repeats itself. In the early years of education, one-room schoolhouses forced one teacher to share his or her knowledge with students from five to sixteen years of age. Departmentalized education revolutionized teachers' abilities to specialize and teach more specific content. Students began to take separate classes. As the education system evolved, institutions created tracks that helped prepare students



By Michael Baker

No

Can you remember back to the days of Marlboro and Pall Mall? No, those are not misspellings but the names used on candy cigarette boxes. Parents no longer purchase these products for their children out of concern that this may lead them to a life of smoking—basically, giving acceptability to smoking by having them emulate adults, as they so often do. Introduce students to social networking sites and you are headed down the same path.

It's an unfortunate reality: With each new form of technology that emerges come people who wish to exploit it. Although social networking can be made to seem safe and anonymous, it is anything but that for unsuspecting young people.



By Chuck Favata

As educators, we have the responsibility to provide students with the latest in learning techniques, but social networking sites and the practice of posting information online does not meet this responsibility; it borders on negligence. Seemingly

for certain careers. This formula has worked for as long as any current teacher can remember. During this shift, one thing has always been true. Each year more students are being better educated. Inclusion has been the penultimate change. Special education students are now a part of most classes instead of the hidden occupants of resource rooms. Technology now allows us to extend our educational networks past the brick-and-mortar walls and into a global learning community.

Monster is a great place to go to post a resume or to find an employee, but it is also an example of a practical social networking site. Stickam offers free online flash-based live video streaming. Should we turn our backs on sites because they include social networking? If we are to build an educational system that students buy into, we need

to make students a part of the process. We need to sit down with our young leaders, ask for their opinions, and share ideas. When culture meets curriculum, the learning community gains ownership, a sense of pride, and greater communication.

Differentiated instruction is based on developing individualized learning plans and providing one-to-one instruction. Digital libraries finally offer the combination of easy access and storage capacity needed to make this concept work. The problem is that many individuals are reinventing the wheel. We can all be working together to make this happen on a national and international scale. Social networking can help build a global learning community.

Try this. Ask 10 high school students about social networking. Unless the digital divide has engulfed your district, you will learn a lot. Ask the

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students with Facebook or MySpace accounts about their favorites. If you're not sure what a favorite is, the kids will teach you. Our 16-year-olds live in a flatter world than we do.

Here's a thought. Someone create a Wikipedia entry titled "Social Networking in Education" and let's see how others make this concept work. This just might give birth to an international Eduwiki.

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benign listings on the Internet can be anything but benign. By their very nature, social networking sites are used to exchange personal information; teachers, students, and parents must realize a simple phrase can give a predator all the information he or she needs to trace a victim. The forms filled out by students on these sites are by nature revealing; a predator knows this, and therein lays the danger. Social networking sites simply serve as the White Pages for pedophiles. Every youngster knows not to give personal information to strangers. This message must not be lost when it comes to instruction in the classroom.

By using these sites in a school setting, regardless of the guise, we do nothing more than serve to desensitize the student to the dangers involved with online postings whether it is through a social networking site or by simple blogging. When either is done in the school environment they

carry with them an inherent value of acceptable practice and upon arrival at home the experimentation by the student will begin. Given this acceptability, why not try MySpace, Friendster, Xanga, or any of a myriad of social networking sites. Do we really want to send the message that these places are safe? No matter how well protected or thought-out, the student member usually posts information that is not safe—school name, sports played, and so on. Even with the argument of anonymity in making their listing private, most youngsters fail to realize that the URL listing contains their name or the screen name they used when they registered. This name can be searched and more often than not leads to other sites such as Friendster and Xanga, where information is not blocked. In addition, even when a search leads to a blocked site, the cached information to be found there is not blocked.

Although social networking can be made to seem safe and anonymous, it is anything but that for unsuspecting young people.

When a youngster posts on social networking sites it's not just his or her friends who are looking, the whole world is watching. Teach students to be safe—keep them out of the social networking sites.

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