

## Teachers and Social Media in the BC Context

Presently, in British Columbia, there is a great deal of discussion around the use of social media and networking within educational settings. Social media is a collection of sites and applications that provide platforms, which allow individuals to create and share information, and take part in social networking. Social networking occurs when groups of contributors with common interests and goals communicate with each other and form relationships through sharing, interacting, supporting, and connecting. (Hartshorn, 2010)

"By understanding how students may be positively using these networking technologies in their daily lives and where the as-yet-unrecognized educational opportunities are, we can help make schools even more relevant, connected, and meaningful to kids." (Greenhow as cited in "Teacher's Comprehensive Guide", n.d. para. 2)

With the words above, American educator Christine Greenhow (n.d.), describes her impression of the impact that social networking is having on education. British Columbia's teachers are also pondering the positives and negatives of social media and social networking as they strive to improve the learning experiences of their students. As part of the discussion of social media use within BC classrooms, Hengstler (2015a) outlines how there are several 'boundaries' that need to be considered and understood including digital footprints and professionalism, privacy, safety, and social justice. (Hengstler, 2015a, para.8)

As professionals, BC educators need to be aware, not only of their personal digital footprints, but also the digital footprints being left by their students. A footprint is an impression that is left upon a surface. Digital footprints are the trails that people leave behind, online. Author, speaker, and entrepreneur, Amy Jo Martin (n.d.), is quoted with the following. "Social Media is changing the way we are perceived both positively and negatively. Every time you post a photo or update your status, you are contributing to your own digital footprint." (Martin, n.d. p.1) Social media may not be the first time that people are made aware that others are observing what they do. When people have a child, they are suddenly conscious that they need to set a good example for this small human and, children often hold their parents to a higher standard. Similarly, as professionals, teachers' moral standards are also closely

watched, whether they like it or not. As more and more of our private affairs have the potential to be exposed in a permanent and public manner online, it is imperative that everyone, and teachers in particular, are aware of the impressions they are leaving online. Julia Hengstler (2011) describes how some educators are like 'ostriches' who take the passive path, disadvantaging and exposing themselves, by pretending that social media doesn't exist; while 'eagles', in contrast, choose to embrace social media opportunities by pro-actively educating themselves and their students to manage the risks and the benefits (Hengstler, 2011, p. 91). Hengstler (2011) goes on to describe how writing is the "Architecture of Participation", which credits both the online contributor and the social media platforms that make individual contributions possible (Hengstler, 2011, p.92). Personal information can find its way online through many venues including information that is collected often without consent (passive), information that is voluntarily shared (active), and information that is published (Hengstler, 2011, p.2). It is easy to be scared by the amount of digital sharing that seems totally out of an individual's control, but that is why it is so important for educators to see past the fear and learn how to protect themselves and educate their students to safeguard their digital footprints and stay in control of the impressions that they are leaving as they manoeuvre through the online world.

In addition to being aware of the professional responsibilities teachers have, in regards to their digital footprints, teachers also need to be aware of the issues surrounding student privacy online. Many BC teachers have very little prior knowledge of FIPPA aside from perhaps knowing that it is an acronym for 'Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act' (Hengstler, 2014, para. 3). However, most BC teachers are aware that many schools have privacy concerns when it came to educational uses of social media. As outlined by Hengstler (2014), BC schools find themselves in varying states of accordance with FIPPA, in regards to using cloud tools and social media, ranging from "Avoidance, Ignorance, Knowledgeable Non-Compliance, Approaching Compliance, Establishing Compliance, & Full Compliances (Hengstler, 2014, p.1). Hengstler's states (2014) are summarized as follows: Avoidance - afraid to use social media; Ignorance - use social media but aren't aware of FIPPA; Knowledgeable Non-Compliance - are aware of FIPPA but choose to ignore it; Approaching Compliance - working to meet FIPPA requirements; Establishing Compliance - clear understanding of FIPPA requirements; Full Compliance - no school is there yet due to lack of common vision (Hengstler, 2014, pp. 3-6). It is up to individual teachers to educate themselves on issues surrounding privacy online, by investigating material such as

Hengstler's (2013) primer for posting students' work online, which includes useful waiver and letter examples (Hengstler, 2013, 17-26). In this way, teachers will have the reassurance and confidence to share their knowledge with others so they are not one of those that just ignores the issue due to fear of social media, or to ignorance of student copyright, ownership, identifiability, and consent (Hengstler, 2013, pp. 4-11).

When discussing the issues of safety in social media and networking, it is pertinent to start with a standard definition of safety, "freedom from the occurrence of risk or injury, danger or loss" (Dictionary.com, 2015). To follow, as Hengstler (2015) points out, our conception of what constitutes a risk varies according to our knowledge, our practice and experience, our skills and training, our guidelines and policy, and our confidence. (Hengstler, 2015b, p.2) When considering the risks of social media and networking, it is a good idea to keep in mind the words of Dana Boyd (2012), who speaks of a "Culture of Fear" and explains how various groups of people, from marketers to politicians, use fear to perpetuate their own agendas (Boyd, 2012). Adam Thierer (2012) supports Boyd's view when he writes about how things like generational differences, nostalgia, and the attractiveness of bad news, are leading to 'technopanics' where people actually start fearing technology itself. It is also possible to find numerous examples of "Fear Based Internet Safety Messages", that have been found to be highly ineffective, and include such strategies as misleading statistics and simplistic rules (Willard, 2012). However, there are some legitimate risks involved with social media and one that has been highly publicized is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is intimidation that uses electronic technology as a medium. This electronic technology can include cell phones, computers, and social media sites such as Facebook, Snapchat, Vine, and Tinder. Sexting is another social-media activity that is high-risk for all people, not just youth. Sending explicit, sexual images, videos or texts leaves individuals vulnerable and exposed, in a permanent manner and can lead to cyberbullying, revenge-porn, and scandal (Hengstler, 2015c). Predation and Grooming is a third online risk and it can occur when an predator preys on a victim by connecting with her through her social networks, and then befriends her, grooming her to perform inappropriate activities (Hengstler, 2015d). Grooming can take the form of "flattery, sometimes sympathy, other times offers of gifts, money, or modeling jobs". (Collier, n.d. para.3) Researchers Wolak & Finkelhor (2008) point out that even though fear-mongers would like us to believe otherwise, "sex crimes against youth have not increased with the proliferation of the Internet, and posting personal

information online does not, by itself, appear to be a particularly risky behaviour" (as cited in Hengstler, 2015d, "Predation and Grooming", OLTD 506). However, it is important to note that further research by Finkelhor & Douglas (n.d.) has supported that "being female, being from a lower-income family, and being a previous victim" are demographic indicators for more at-risk youth (as cited in Hengstler, 2015d, "Predation and Grooming", OLTD 506). When it comes to safety online, BC teachers have a responsibility to educate themselves and their students so that everyone can learn to tell the difference between a manufactured risk and one that can do real harm and subsequently, everyone can protect themselves from high-risk activities.

Digital divide is "a gap in terms of access to and usage of information and communication technology" ("Digital Divide", n.d. para. 1), and this divide is the final boundary that needs to be considered when using social media in BC classrooms. During the BC Teacher's strike of 2014, there were a percentage of students who looked to alternate educational options, including online schools. This move prompted some people to question why we have traditional schools anyways, since everyone can learn online. Aside from the negative pedagogical implications of this theory, there are also the practical problems and the implications of digital divide. Digital divide encompasses a large proportion of BC students in general, and First Nations students in particular, even with efforts such as the Pathways to Technology project, which "is helping to establish reliable, high-speed Internet access for all 203 First Nations communities in BC" (Pathways to Technology, 2013, p.1). Large portions of adult learners in remote communities are First Nations learners and, as discussed by Hengstler (2015e), and backed up by the research of Anne Taylor (2011), in 2011, about half of Canadian First Nations communities did not have access to reliable residential broadband (as cited in Hengstler, 2015e, "Aboriginal Context", OLTD 506 para. 3). Lack of Internet service broadens the divide between the technology haves and have-nots. It is interesting to note that further research by Taylor (2011) as discussed in Hengstler's reading (2015e), notes that "First Nations and Inuit peoples have embraced social media, using tools such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to keep in touch with home communities, fight addiction, showcase Aboriginal arts and crafts, preserve cultural identity and support political advocacy" (as cited in Hengstler, 2015e, "Aboriginal Context", OLTD 506 para. 6). The mobile phone has also become a powerful tool in social media applications because mobile does not require fast broadband speeds and it can function during electrical shortages and, as a result, "mobile phones are increasingly playing a vital role in shaping

activism, raising awareness, and ultimately giving citizens a voice"(Radovanovic, 2014, para.4). However, on a final note, access to technology does not bridge all levels of the digital divide, and BC teacher's need to be aware that just because all students have access to the same technology, they will probably still not be walking side by side as they move through the online world.

Today the digital divide resides in differential ability to use new media to critically evaluate information, analyze, and interpret data, attack complex problems, test innovative solutions, manage multifaceted projects, collaborate with others in knowledge production, and communicate effectively to diverse audiences—in essence, to carry out the kinds of expert thinking and complex communication that are at the heart of the new economy - Levy & Murnane (as cited in "Project Pals", n.d. para. 3).

There doesn't seem to be any dispute that social media and social networking have many benefits for both teachers and students. The article, "A Teachers' Comprehensive Guide to the use of Social Networking in Education", describes some of these reasons including the benefits of collaboration, engagement, and how "social networking can be a vehicle for world peace and inter-cultural understanding through the promotion of cross-cultural dialogue" (Teacher's Guide, n.d. para. 3). In his blog, "Life of an Educator", Dr. Justin Tarte (2013) further supports the positives of social media by outlining several reasons why education needs social media including social media's relevance, usefulness, and the compelling idea that "social media lets you connect with your students, their parents, and your community where they already are" (Tarte, 2013, para. 5). Exploring the role(s) of social media in education is a complex journey, but one well worth taking, and teachers must boldly venture forth and see where the paths of digital footprints, privacy, safety, and social justice will take them.

## References

- Boyd, D. (2012). The power of fear in networked publics. Retrieved from <http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/2012/SXSW2012.html>
- Collier, A. (n.d.) . How to recognize grooming. Safekids.com  
<http://www.safekids.com/how-to-recognize-grooming-2/>
- Digital divide. n.d. In *Wikipedia*, Retrieved September 18, 2015 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_divide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_divide)
- Hartshorn, S. (2010) 5 Differences between social media and social networking. Retrieved from <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/5-differences-between-social-media-and-social-networking>
- Hengstler, J. (2011). Managing your digital footprint: Ostriches v. Eagles. In S. Hirtz & K. Kelly (Eds.), *Education for a Digital World 2.0 (2nd ed.)* (Vol. 1, Part One: Emerging technologies and practices). Open School/Crown Publications: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, Canada.  
[http://www.viu.ca/education/faculty\\_publications/hengstler/EducationforDigitalWorld2.0\\_1\\_jh9.pdf](http://www.viu.ca/education/faculty_publications/hengstler/EducationforDigitalWorld2.0_1_jh9.pdf)
- Hengstler, J. (2012). "Digital professionalism and digital footprints". Document prepared for training session with Vancouver Island University's Administrative Assistants, April 2012. Social Media Digital Footprints 2003\_v3.pdf
- Hengstler, J. (2013a). A K-12 primer for British Columbia teachers posting students' work online. Primer on Posting Minor Students Final.pdf
- Hengstler, J. (2013b). What parents should know part 1: basic understanding of social media & digital communications. <http://jhengstler.wordpress.com/2013/05027what-parents-should-know-part-1-basic-understanding-of-social-media-digital-communications/>
- Hengstler, J. (2014). "The Compliance Continuum: FIPPA & BC Educators"  
[https://www.dropbox.com/s/ridcqq14a7k9543/Compliance\\_Continuum\\_5\\_06\\_14-1.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/s/ridcqq14a7k9543/Compliance_Continuum_5_06_14-1.pdf)
- Hengstler, J. (2015a). Foundations and Boundaries Introduction. OLTD 506 (D2L).  
<https://d2l.viu.ca/d2l/le/content/76009/viewContent/767504/View>
- Hengstler, J. (2015b). Safety Boundaries. OLTD 506 (D2L).  
<https://d2l.viu.ca/d2l/le/content/76009/viewContent/767532/View>
- Hengstler, J. (2015c). Sexting, Cyberbullying and Revenge Porn. OLTD 506 (D2L).  
<https://d2l.viu.ca/d2l/le/content/76009/viewContent/767536/View>

Hengstler, J. (2015d). Predation and Grooming. OLTD 506 (D2L).

<https://d2l.viu.ca/d2l/le/content/76009/viewContent/767538/View>

Hengstler, J. (2015e). Aboriginal Contexts. OLTD 506 (D2L).

<https://d2l.viu.ca/d2l/le/content/76009/viewContent/767527/View>

Martin, Amy Jo quotes. (n.d.). Retrieved September 20, 2015, from Brainy Quote website:

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/social\\_media.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/social_media.html)

Pathways to Technology: Connecting First Nations to the World, (2013)

<http://www.pathwaystotechnology.ca/interactive-map>

Project Pals. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.projectpals.com/main/research.html>

Radovanovic, D. (2014). Bridging the digital divide: mobile and social media. Retrieved from

<https://rising.globalvoices.org/blog/2014/01/17/bridging-the-digital-divide-mobile-and-social-media>

Safety. n.d. In *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved September 20, 2015, from

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/safety>

Social media. n.d. In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 18, 2015, from

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_media](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media)

Social Networking in Schools: Educators Debate the Merits of Technology in Classrooms. (2011).

Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/27/social-networking-schools\\_n\\_840911.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/27/social-networking-schools_n_840911.html)

Social networking service. n.d. In *Wikipedia*, Retrieved September 18, 2015, from

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_networking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking)

Tarte, J. (2013). 10 Reasons we need social media in education. Retrieved from

<http://www.justintarte.com/2013/07/10-reasons-we-need-social-media-in.html>

Teachers' Comprehensive Guide to the Use of Social Networking in Education. (n.d.) Retrieved from

<http://www.educatorstechnology.com/2012/05/teachers-comprehensive-guide-to-use-of.html>

Thierer, A. (2012) The six things that drive 'technopanics'. Forbes.com

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/adamthierer/2012/03/04/the-six-things-that-drive-technopanics/>

Willard, N. (2012). Examples of fear-based internet safety messaging".

<http://www.embracecivility.org/wp-content/uploadsnew/2011/10/fear.pdf>