

Facebook: The Pros and Cons of use in Education

by

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## Introduction

Information and Communication Technology is the field of study that involves all technical means of processing and communicating information. ICT is based on the convergence of Information Technology and Telecommunication Systems. Within ICT, there are many different ways to disseminate information. Multiple types of technology pave the way for communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because of the rapid pace of technology, there are bound to be gaps in many sectors of business and education. For the purpose of this research, the author is going to focus on ICT in education.

All across the world, education faces major challenges. In the United States and throughout Europe, schools are faced with three major problems in the system: truancy, dropouts and apathy. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, over a million students in America who enter their freshman year of high school do not graduate with their peers four years later. There are countless reasons why students drop out of school, including difficult transitions to high school, deficient basic skills and a lack of engagement. The costs of dropping out of high school are enormous. Dropouts from just the Class of 2008 will cost the US more than \$319 billion in lost wages during their lifetimes. The Alliance for Excellent Education stated, "If the United States' likely dropouts from the Class of 2006 had graduated, the nation could have saved more than \$17 billion in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured health care over the course of those young people's lifetimes" (costs section, para. 4). (Fact Sheets and Statistical Analysis, 2009)

If educators in the United States increased the graduation rate and college matriculation of male students by just 5 percent, the country could save almost \$8 billion each year by reducing crime-related costs. These numbers are not just staggering, they are appalling. (Fact Sheets and Statistical Analysis, 2009)

According to Coughlan (2009), truancy rates in schools in England have reached an all-time high. The statistics from the last two terms during 2008 show that 1.03 percent of school days were missed by students. That number is up from 0.97 percent. While illness and family vacations are the top two reasons why students miss school, persistent truants (students who miss more than a fifth of school sessions) made up 46 percent of unauthorized absences. While the article goes on to talk about some of the efforts being made to keep students in school, one thing is clear, something needs to change.

Widespread student apathy, particularly with minority students, is yet another hurdle educators are faced with today. Many teachers and administrators think that when students are not doing well in school, it is because they are lazy, they do not value education and their parents do not care. The quality of student's relationships with their teachers can influence their behavior and their opinions of school. Many factors contribute to a student's lack of commitment, or a teacher's perceived sense of apathy. Expectations, instructional practices, curriculum, testing, discipline, and racial tension are just a few. Changing mindsets, working

with parents and other educators, and insisting on a high quality education for all students are things the educational system needs to work hard on. (Thompson, 2008)

As a county and a world we have a duty to provide all children with high quality education. There is a great opportunity right now to bring students back to caring, to help them learn and make them want to learn using technology. Many schools today are stuck in the 1950's. No cell phones allowed in classrooms, limited computer access, restricted web-page browsing, all these restrictions are hurting students and the educational system. The fear of the unfamiliar, equal access and loss of control are the three main reasons why technology has been restricted. (Farr, 2009)

After looking at this information, one thing is clear; students are suffering. Because of this, the nation and the world will suffer as well. It is our job to educate children now because they are the future. In this paper, the author will explore the Social Media Technology, Facebook. By looking at this growing technology, delving into the pros and cons associated with using Facebook in education, the author will make recommendations for the use of Facebook in education with the hope that it will bring teachers and students together and bring back student's desire to learn.

## **Technology**

Facebook was started in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. The web site initially began as a way to connect Harvard students to each other. By late 2004, nearly half of the student population at Harvard was using Facebook. Facebook was then opened to other Ivy League schools and eventually most colleges across the United States and Canada. In September 2005, Facebook launched a version for high school students. Today, the site is open to anyone age 13 and older with a valid e-mail address. The site no longer requires users to have a school affiliation to register. (Wikipedia)

When a user first registers with Facebook, they need to set up and create a profile page. The page is based on a basic template where users fill in various personal identifiers. This is customizable so a user can include as much or as little information as they want. After they set up their profile they can begin adding friends, join groups and become fans of pages. Facebook offers a search tool that allows users to search for specific information like people and groups. Users can join networks (based on city, workplace, school and region) and allow others in that network to view their profile. Facebook security settings allow users to make their page as accessible or inaccessible as they desire. (Wikipedia)

Facebook offers numerous features that allows users to interact in many different ways. Each profile has a Wall, a space that allows friends to post messages, videos, and pictures for the user and others to see. The Pokes feature allows users to send a virtual "poke" to each other; a notification is then sent to the user that is poked. A user can create a Photo Album where they can upload pictures. Users can also update their Status, which allows them to inform their friends about what they are doing or thinking. The Notes Application allows users to write a mini-blog or post a story for others to read. This application has a specific place on a user's page, and they can "tag" others in the note. Additional features like the News Feed, is present on

the homepage of each user's Facebook. The news feed highlights information like profile changes, upcoming events, birthdays, status updates, photo uploads and more, relating to a user's friend base. Tagging allows users to specify people in notes, photos, videos and status updates. This information is sent to users that are tagged so they can easily access information posted about themselves. Facebook has a Gifts feature that allows users to send virtual gifts to their friends. Gifts do cost money to send and users can link their account to a credit or debit card. The Marketplace feature is a new addition to Facebook; it lets users post free classified ads. Facebook continues to expand adding new features every year. New in the past few months is the ability to create a username attached to Facebook allowing pages to be linked with simpler URL's. In addition, Facebook now offers a real-time chat so users are able to instant message other users that are online at the same time as them. (Wikipedia)

It is hard these days to find someone who is not on Facebook. With more than 300 million active users worldwide, Facebook has surpassed the usage of MySpace and Friendster, other social networking sites. Facebook does not seem to be slowing down either. According to Corbett (2009), the 35-54 year old demographic is growing the fastest. The college crowd (age 18-24) still holds the overall largest percentage of users at 40.8 percent. The combined percentage of users ages 0-24 is 54.3 percent. So that means there are 22,867,140 teenagers and young adults using Facebook. If that many students are already using this website, it is only logical for educators to incorporate learning into a website that students are so familiar with. (Facebook Statistics)

Owyang (2009) gives insight into the future of Facebook in an online blog. In order for Facebook to really expand, it must spread to other locations but always link back to Facebook. This will put Facebook in the center of internet communication. Facebook will have to struggle to keep ahead of sites like Twitter, Hotmail, and Google but perhaps there will be mergers in the future. Although members may resist increasing public content on Facebook, if the platform goes public, members will ultimately have to choose between the site they love and their privacy. Facebook will need to continue with constant innovation and bring in more advertisers if it wants to survive.

An interview (Smith 2009), with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg shed some light into what might be next for the Facebook platform. In regards to a question about how things are going with Facebook and Microsoft, Zuckerberg said, "We work with Microsoft on ads, but we're also working with them on a few things around search that hopefully we'll be ready to roll out at some time in the near future. We have also done integrations with them around different communications products" (How things are going, para. 2) When asked how long he wanted to run Facebook and what his goals are, Zuckerberg replied,

The end is not in sight. I think that one of the most important trends over the next 10 or 20 years is how the world opens up. I think it's almost a given that people will be sharing more and more information, but there's this question of what the world will look like when we get there. Will it be done in such a way that people have complete control of their information, or will it be done in a way where they don't and that information is just out there? Facebook is really invested in making sure that it's the former one, where people can always control what their identity is and what information of theirs is being

shared with different people, and I just think that matters a lot. I think that's one of the key questions for our generation. (Final Paragraph) (Smith)

Facebook has the potential to become a learning network with structure and flexibility; it is a great resource for students and teachers. Towner, VanHorn, & Parker (2007) posted results of a student survey they did on Facebook. Facebook was a good tool for class related activities, said 56 percent of students surveyed. The article stated that students reported using Facebook to contact students about things happening in class, to network, to get class notes, to set up meetings and to create study groups.

Demski (2009), looks at the potential for using social networking in an academic setting; "A secured social networking site allows schools to incorporate the technology into academics while preparing students to the perils of online communities" (p. 1). Demski states that web 2.0 is not just a passing fad; it is an "activity that has embedded itself into the way work gets done" (p. 2). Every business has some sort of social networking like an internal Facebook. The central role of social networking tools, how employees do business, needs to be in student education.

Saywire is an online social networking site for schools and younger students; it is safe, builds web 2.0 skills and teaches students to be smart, civil, online citizens. The site is being used in the very same way that Facebook could be used in education. Younger students need to learn proper use and behavior in web-based applications. On Saywire, things like a log-in screen and password teaches students to protect their information, the password is special and children know not to share it with friends. Students can create a homepage and profile, post photos and videos, keep a blog, list their interests, maintain control of public and private information and use update wires (similar to Facebook's news feed). The update wires help teach good learning practices. Friends can post comments about homework help or edit their wiki. All of this helps students get acclimated to operating in a web-based community. Having teachers maintain an integral part of a student's network connects them to a virtual classroom. They can set up discussion boards, view course content and staff can send e-notes to all students. Demski says that in her school, Saywire is a privilege and any students engaging in bad behavior will be kicked off. In addition, all chats and messages are monitored. This type of site can be seen as Academic Networking. (Demski, 2009)

Saywire can be seen as a precursor to what Facebook could do for higher education. While the tool does not allow for educators to maintain complete control, it still operates much the same. In the next section, exploring the pros and cons of using Facebook in education will provide some in-depth insight into how students are already using the social networking site.

## **Impact Analysis**

Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007) studied the multi-faceted issues surrounding professors and students interacting on Facebook. Mazer et al. (2007) define teacher self-disclosure as "sharing information about themselves, telling personal stories and conveying their personal beliefs" (p. 1). Computer-mediated communication in an educational setting could have

a positive effect on student-teacher relationships which could, in turn, lead to more positive student outcomes. Mazer et al. (2007) sites a study that found that students are “more likely to communicate with teachers online who utilize immediacy behaviors (use of first names, emoticons) in e-mail messages” (as cited in Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax, 2001) In addition, Mazer et al. (2007) noted that, “students who viewed an instructor’s website with high levels of mediated immediacy, including forms of self-disclosure, reported high levels of motivation and effective learning, indicating positive attitudes toward the course and the teacher” (as cited in O’ Sullivan et al., 2004).

Teacher self-disclosure is a great way to connect with students and provide them with richer experiences. Teacher self-disclosure can be seen as an effective instructional tool to advance student learning. Mazer et al. (2007) cited that, “Teachers who personalize teaching through the use of humor, stories, enthusiasm and self-disclosure are perceived by their student to be effective in explaining course content” (as cited in Corham, 1998). In addition, there is a strong correlation between positive relationships and cognitive learning. (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007)

Mazer et al. (2007) studied a group of students based on their reactions to a teacher’s Facebook page. They used three different groups to view a page with high teacher self-disclosure, medium teacher self-disclosure and low teacher self disclosure. They asked the students a series of questions about the page. Their results are as follows; in the group that viewed the high-self disclosure Facebook page, there were higher levels of anticipated motivation and learning than the students who viewed the low teacher self-disclosure page. The study also showed that students who viewed the high self-disclosure page perceived the classroom climate more favorably than those who did not. The students were also asked if they thought that the teacher having a Facebook page was inappropriate. Four percent of students said it was “very inappropriate,” 33 percent said “somewhat inappropriate,” 35 percent said “somewhat appropriate,” 6 percent said “very appropriate,” and 22 percent of students were undecided. It is also important to note that, “the amount of teacher self-disclosure did not appear to affect how participant perceived the appropriateness of the teacher’s use of Facebook” (p. 11). (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007)

According to Towner, VanHorn, and Parker (2007), there are a plethora of positive reasons to integrate Facebook into the classroom. Facebook is a cost-effective teaching resource. The network is already set-up and functioning and most students are already using it. For teachers and some students who are not using Facebook, there are resources available to get help on how to use Facebook. Not to mention the fact that students could just ask their peers for help setting up and using a Facebook account. Not only is Facebook cost effective, but it can be placed in the category of internet based learning. Internet based learning actively involves students in a way that a traditional lecture does not. Studies show that students who participated in a web-enhanced class outperformed students in a traditional lecture style class. The reason for this is that students are active and engaged in learning when they are using web based tools. They have to navigate to different resources throughout the web and post and comment to discussion forums online. Towner et al. (2007) states that, “By increasing student involvement with the material, instructors can tailor courses to a variety of learning styles” (p. 7). Active

learning involves higher levels of cognitive learning and can help maximize student attention span. Towner et al. (2007) conclude that,

The benefits of Facebook's networking and social communication capabilities can greatly enhance the learning experience of both the teacher and the student by tapping into a greater number of learning styles, providing recommended relief from the traditional lecture format, and by building a top the community already established by the students themselves. (p. 13)

While Facebook has benefits of use in the classroom, what about other parts of the educational system? Glazer (2009) delves into an academic library's evaluation of their experience on Facebook. The assessment began at Rutgers University, by a librarian who had been using Facebook for the past two years in order to recruit students and bring about awareness of the Rutgers University's Library services. The Rutgers University (RU) network on Facebook grew from 43,000 users in 2006 to 55,000 in 2008. With that many students using Facebook, it seems only logical to go there to publicize an organization. The RU Library joined Facebook in 2006 by creating a group called "Inside Info @ RU Libraries." They recruited student workers and invited members of like-minded groups to join. By 2007, the group had 120 members. The initial goal was to explore the new-to-use medium, test its usefulness and share news. They gained student feedback, questions and comments, learned what sites students are currently using, surveyed students and sent messages to get feedback.

The impact that Facebook use had on the Rutgers University's Library was not tremendous, but it was noticeable. The Facebook group allowed the RU Library to make connections with the campus newspaper and allowed them to get a few articles about activities and changes within the library system. The author stated that it was hard to measure the values and predict the results of the Facebook group. While it allows that initial conversation about joining the Facebook group, the group still has to learn how to catch student interest. The group's next goal is to target the next batch of incoming freshman and see how many join. Glazer (2009) pointed out that immersing himself in a medium favored by students and becoming more familiar with their styles of engagement has been useful. It also allowed the group to gain press coverage and positive testimonials. Glazer (2009) states that, "Our work on Facebook opens the door for us to the conversations, diversions, attitudes, and social habits of one of our critical audiences. To serve this group well, it helps to understand them the best we can" (p. 19)

Blakeway (2009) details out his use of Facebook; "On Facebook, I have joined a number of virtual groups, including students at Bournemouth University and an RCN members' group" (p.1). Blakeway sees these groups as a source of support, information and learning. He goes on to say, "Networking is a skill that can enhance our understanding of our lives and work in relation to the rest of the world" (p. 1). Facebook has proven to be a great way to stay in touch and network with professionals. Facebook is a place to communicate with everyone that a person knows, but the user has to think carefully about what they want everyone to know about them. (Blakeway, 2009)

Muñoz and Towner (2009) looked into the multi-faceted issues surrounding using Facebook in higher education. The internet is playing a big role in student's social and academic lives. To date, reactions to using social networking sites in education are mixed. There are concerns about privacy and there are always issues when professors and students are able to interact freely online. Two thirds of students surveyed were comfortable with faculty members using Facebook. Another study showed that 39 percent of college students surveyed wanted to have consistent, regular online interactions with faculty. A study also showed that 85 percent of college students that have a college network on Facebook have adopted it. Facebook registration for people ages 12-17 grew 149 percent between May 2006 and May 2007. "Not only are many teen registered on social networking sites, but they are also very active users" (p. 4). (Muñoz & Towner, 2009)

With all the information and social networking going on, it can be hard to see how or why Facebook would have any part in education. But, Facebook has bulletin boards, instant messaging, e-mail and the ability to post videos and pictures. Any user can post information and collaborate with others in the Facebook system. In addition, there are downloadable applications that can help educators. The ease of use with uploading videos and photos on Facebook makes it one of the best sites of its kind. The 1024 MB limit on videos and the compatibility with a variety of browsers makes Facebook the best choice out of many courseware options. (Muñoz & Towner, 2009)

Facebook is a network that connects students, therefore indirectly creating the perfect learning community. Facebook could be used to help students build their courses on top of the community already established by students themselves. Muñoz and Towner (2009) stated that, "Students who participated in a web-enhanced class outperformed those in the traditional lecture format," (as cited by Hamann and Wilson, 2002). This fact alone should make all educators at least a little curious in the benefits of Facebook. Internet learning modules engage students in ways that traditional lectures do not. Facebook increases teacher /student interaction in the form of web-based communication. Facebook can help instructors connect with students about assignments, upcoming events, post useful links, and samples of work, all outside the classroom. Students are able to contact other students about questions on assignments or exams and work together in an online group. The social networking aspect of Facebook would let students check out their teachers profiles with personal information, interests, background and friends which, according to studies, can enhance student motivation, affective learning and classroom climate. (Muñoz & Towner, 2009)

Muñoz and Towner (2009) conclude that,

It is our conjecture that the benefits of Facebook's networking and social communication capabilities can benefit both the instructor and the student by tapping into a greater number of learning styles, providing an alternative to the traditional lecture format, creating an online classroom community and increasing teacher-student and student-student interaction. (p. 9)

The educational potential of Facebook is great. Facebook can be a useful tool for promoting effective academic practice. Peer feedback and collaborative models of learning and

the ease of education related interactions between students makes Facebook an ideal tool for educational online communication. However, despite its obvious benefits, a study by Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley (2009) showed that the main reason students use Facebook is for social purposes. The second reason students use Facebook is for informal learning (student-to-student) and most students responded that they never used Facebook for formal teaching (with staff and part of formal assessment). Ten percent of students who responded to the survey said that they used Facebook for discussing academics with other students, and only one percent said they used it to contact university staff. (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009)

So it seems as though Facebook has the potential to be a great educational tool, but students are resisting its use in education. Selwyn (2009) noted that students use social networks to hang out, waste time, learn about people or get directory information, micromanage their social lives, explore socially and build networking skills. Social networking shares qualities of good education technologies; peer feedback, social context of learning, school/university community, conversational, collaborative, and communal. Selwyn (2009) cites that social networks “mirror much of what we know to be good models of learning, in that they are collaborative and encourage active participatory roles for users” (as cited in Maloney, 2007, p 26).

However, some of the effects of social networking could be heightened disengagement, alienation and a disconnection with the real world. Selwyn (2009) cites that “SNS [social networking sites] could contribute to the intellectual and scholarly de-powering of a ‘Google generation’ of learners incapable of independent thought, and generally hasten the onset of what Ziegler (2007, 69) has termed ‘the mis-education of Generation M.’” Facebook could distract students from their studies and disconnect them from the real world. (Selwyn, 2009)

Selwyn (2009) investigated student’s Facebook posts at Coalsville University School of Social Sciences in the UK. The data collection took place mid-semester after students had already taken some exams and turned in assignments. The study resulted in five main themes in the context of “educational” Facebook Wall Posts: recounting and reflecting on the university experience, exchange of practical information, exchange of academic information, displays of supplication and/or disengagement, banter/exchanges of humor and nonsense. (Selwyn, 2009)

While the study by Selwyn (2009) focused on the Wall Posts that were related to education, the posts were still not totally academic in nature. The following information details the results of the study and how students are currently using Facebook in education. The wall posts that dealt with “recounting and reflecting on the university experience,” were based on student’s posts of describing and looking back on university experiences like lectures, seminars, library visits and encounters with staff. There were reflections and information gathering from absences and justifications to rationalize reasons why a student missed class or did not understand material. These reflections were not always positive and sometimes emphasized the inadequacy of a particular teacher or department. (Selwyn, 2009)

When the study categorized the posts into the “exchange of practical information” category, they were looking at information that related to the “job” of being an undergraduate student. These posts had to deal with logistics, scheduling, due dates and last minute information

that was often partial and not relayed from official sources. Some of the posts had to do with information presented in a syllabus, notes, blackboard, word count for essays and the format of exams. Some students also passed on information that they obtained from contact with professors. (Selwyn, 2009)

The “exchange of academic information” was information that had to do with academic and intellectual requirements. Information about the nature of required readings and the speculated content of exams, required essay content, and assignment details were all things that students posted about. In some cases, potentially privileged information was spread, but for the most part they were peer-guided posts. There were some inaccuracies with information that was relayed through Facebook, and these posts showed student’s efforts to steer through the college system. The study noticed some inventive ways that students helped other students like posting links to journal articles and creating a Facebook group in order to gain participants in a research study. (Selwyn, 2009)

The “displays of supplication and/or disengagement” centered on Facebook posts seeking moral support with regards to studies. The researcher noticed that some students acted helpless to get support and comfort. Many of the posts were constructed in a self-deprecating and humorous fashion. Most posts dealt with self pity or a defiant presentation of themselves as unable, incompetent but disengaged. (Selwyn, 2009)

The last theme of “banter/exchanges of humor and nonsense” were humorous posts that used a lot of irony and sarcasm. They posted negative comments about students that they perceived to be overly engaged, and many students pretended to not understand things for comic effect. There were a lot of posts that had information relating to professors, rumors and gossip of things outside of the college environment. (Selwyn, 2009)

Madge et al. (2009) studied how British university students used Facebook and the potential for it in education. Madge et al. (2009) stated that 95 percent of British undergrads use social networking sites, and they joined to make new friends and keep in touch with old ones. Most of the students surveyed said they used Facebook socially, not for educational purposes. The online survey conducted by the researchers asked students a variety of questions about how they use Facebook in an academic setting and what motivates them to use the social networking site. The study found that more than half of the students surveyed were on Facebook before they started college. Twenty-five percent joined right before starting college and 13 percent joined right after they began college. Students were asked why they joined Facebook, and most said they joined to keep in contact with new people they were meeting at school and to keep in touch with current friends and family. One interesting find stated, 55 percent of respondents used Facebook to make virtual friends. Madge et al. (2009) states, “Thus a complex picture in emerging whereby many students are not simply transferring offline relationships to an online mode, or moving from online to offline relationships, rather many students are doing both simultaneously” (p. 144).

While Facebook is not being used for direct teaching, it is becoming more of an informal education network. Madge et al. (2009) said that 46 percent of students used Facebook to informally discuss academic work with other students on a daily or weekly basis; another 22

percent said they did on a monthly basis. As one student reported in the Madge et al. (2009) survey, “However, I do use it to keep in contact with people in presentation groups, for example, and so do feel that that part of it is very useful to me, especially during breaks” (p. 149). Professors and universities should use caution when moving into Social Networking Sites, and aggressive marketing and teaching are not recommended. However, since Facebook is used as an informal teaching experience for many students, skill building in Facebook seems like a logical idea. Madge et al. (2009) suggest that more research be done to find out which students are using Facebook and why, the demographics behind Facebook users, and “how do digital inequalities then impact on educational achievement and development of Social Networking in everyday lives?” (p. 153) (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009)

The article “Networking It”, states that “If you believe the critics, they’re [social networking sites] destroyers of friendships, relationships and personal privacy...” (p. 1) Others argue that Facebook can help people improve job prospects, share ideas, chase contacts and improve image. The debate rages on but “Networking it” poses the question, “Should teachers be embracing them [social networking sites] rather than reacting with mistrust?” (p. 1) (Networking it, 2008)

Facebook is a highly interactive website that serves as a great alternative for teachers to improve upon their interactions with students. Students could perceive professors use of Facebook as a good thing or a bad thing. Teachers have to be careful not to violate etiquette; they do not want to ruin their credibility. What the teacher discloses and how much information and pictures they disclose may positively or negatively alter student perceptions. Mazer et al. (2007) use The Communication Privacy Management Theory to give some guidelines to using sites like Facebook. The theory emphasizes using boundaries to “distinguish between public relationships and private information” (p. 4). “In the classroom context, teachers will establish public relationships with their students and manage their disclosure of private information” (p. 4). Teachers must determine what to conceal in order to avoid negative ramifications. (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007)

The article, “Networking it” states that, out of a poll of 4,000 teachers, 42 percent said they were too busy to meet colleagues, 90 percent said their lesson planning was compromised due to time pressure and 84 percent said that online professional networking would probably help. Although using an online professional network has its benefits for professors and older students, what about younger children in the educational system? Many children have reported getting unwanted sexual e-mails and requests for explicit photos. How can children be protected from this? When teachers befriend students on social networking sites, the student is less likely to post unfavorable material because they know who is looking. While some unions advise teachers against teacher/student online relationships, the links between colleagues and educators on social networking sites has not been explored. Teachers need to take caution at all levels of education but it is clear that more restriction will need to be in place if using social networking sites in middle or elementary school classrooms. (Networking it, 2008)

Read and Young (2006) discuss some of the problems that can arise with Facebook use and what steps schools administrators should take to ensure the privacy and safety of students. There are many Universities out there that have enacted certain policies regarding Facebook use.

Read and Young cite that, “officials of Northwestern University advised student athletes to stay off the site in the wake of a hazing scandal that erupted after a student posted incriminating photos online” (p. 37). Other Universities started to require student athletes to not have Facebook or to keep their profiles private. Facebook is being used by employers to scan potential employees before they schedule interviews. Incoming college freshman are using the site to look up their roommates before they even get to college. One school noticed an increase in phone calls asking for a new roommate based on what the student had seen on their new roommates Facebook page. This kind of use requires students to think about how they are “self-branding” themselves. Read and Young (2006) cited a university official who remarked, “We have an obligation to inform them [students] about all the laws, policies, and social norms that attach to new technologies” (p. 37). It is noted that there need to be regulations and teachers need to make students aware of what others can see by looking at their Facebook profile. Some schools have even created brochures teaching students about “cybercivility.” (Read & Young, 2006)

Mitrano (2008) details out challenges with using Facebook in higher education and what parents and educators need to do. Mitrano (2008) points out just a few of the challenges when working with Facebook. First, there is no user education, and there needs to be some in place for both adolescents and parents. “Learning more about those spaces- how they operate, who is on them, and most important, how to talk about their social dynamics- is recommended” (para. 3). Second, new features are connecting higher education’s mission to Facebook. While this seems like a good thing, there is still a lot educators have to understand before they can integrate their classroom teaching with the popular social networking site. Finally, there are legal and policy issues on a global scale. While Facebook has beefed up its security settings since its inception, there is still a ways to go in educating users about how to protect themselves in the online universe. “Social networking continues to be a ‘cool new tool’ and we should stay connected to its emerging technologies, its social norms and psychological meanings, its advertising and market models, and its legal and policy queries on a global scale” (para. 7). (Mitrano, 2008)

## **Recommendation**

After looking at the literature presented on Facebook, Facebook is a tool that could and should be used in classrooms today. While the negative aspects of using Facebook in education such as, online predators, rebelling students, too much teacher disclosure, and unwilling students are real issues, with time and the right technique, Facebook could become a valuable tool for the educational system.

Here is a simple example to see how a professor can use Facebook in their classroom. A professor at UW-Stout is teaching three sections of a Research Methods Course- TCS 300, in this example. The professor can set up a Facebook group or page representing that course. The professor can use that page independently of their own personal page and can communicate with students through that page. The professor can post content, videos, pictures, and messages all relating to course work. A professor could create “Facebook Office Hours,” or times when they would be on Facebook chat and allow students to ask them questions or get additional

clarification on assignments. The professor could create events that would notify students of exams, quizzes, assignments or general campus events that the professor would like their student to know about. This site would be a central hub for students to connect with other students, learn material presented in the course and keep track of their exams and assignments. Since most students are already using and familiar with the technology, it would be a simple transition for them to keep up with their class work on a social network they already use.

Mazer et al. (2007) gave some suggestions to teachers who plan on using Facebook in their curriculum. Facebook should be used as a teaching tool and appropriate material should be posted on the page. Additionally, there should be similarities between a teacher's Facebook page and the way they present themselves in person. If the teacher has a relaxed Facebook page, their style of teaching must be the same. Students want teachers to be themselves on Facebook. Facebook can be a great tool but teachers must proceed with caution. (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007)

Professors should create a Facebook profile that is different from their personal page. It is important to include photos and links and some background information but it should be kept strictly professional. Professors should make sure not to talk about students and staff via Facebook. Professors should set their profile to "open" and tell students that they can add as a friend but teachers should not add students. Professors should make sure to tell students that they will not be viewing their profile page, and setting their page to "limited" insures that they will not see anything the student does not want them to see. It is important to make sure that students know joining Facebook is an option; they should not be forced into it. (Muñoz & Towner, 2009)

Muñoz and Towner (2009) discuss four "Levels of Integration" for Facebook in education; profile page (the teacher uses for communication with students), group page for a class (students can find classmates, communicate with each other and the teacher, post discussions and the professor can send announcements and remind students about events), replacing/duplicating webcourse functions on Facebook (discussions and instant messaging, posting information about websites and additional links), and integration of Facebook applications (applications can expand the functionality of Facebook for a class but both the teacher and students must download these). (Muñoz & Towner, 2009)

The main educational uses for social networks are the support they provide for interaction between learners with similar problems and the student benefits by entering new networks of learning based on interests. As cited by Selwyn (2009), "Social Networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook have shown, among other things, that students will invest time and energy in building relationships around shared interests and knowledge communities" (as cited in Maloney, 2007, 26). There is potential for teachers and students to communicate via Facebook; it is easy and creates positive networking with students. This idea can clash with pedagogical paradigms, but educators need to re-think the way students are being taught. "For example, it has been suggested that social networking offers the opportunity to re-engage individuals with learning and education, promoting a 'critical thinking in learners' about their learning, which is one of the 'traditional objectives' of education." (p. 158). (Selwyn, 2009)

As Selwyn pointed out, Facebook could be education's opportunity to re-engage students. The question has always been, how do we bring back the students that are dropping out, are apathetic and do not want to learn? By using a technology they know and understand, by making a professor seem more approachable and real and by linking classmates via the web, educators can help fight the downhill slide of the educational system. It will not be easy but by following some recommendations and using Facebook and other technologies, teachers and students can learn and collaborate together.

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