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Introduction

I was teaching my English students in the library and I noticed they weren't going to finish their essays by the end of the hour. So I asked them to work on the essays at home, attach them in an email, and send them to me when they had finished. I was met with blank stares. Who knew I would have to teach students how to send an attachment? I was shocked at how many students did know how to do this simple technological task. Wasn't this the generation growing up with technology? Aren't they considered "technology natives"? So why didn't they know how to something that my 60 year old mother knows how to do? If they don't know how to send an email, what else are they unaware of concerning online communications and social media?

The development of this project is a curriculum that has grown out of my research, experience, and passion. One of the goals for this social media class is to introduce students to the variety of types of online communications and new media. There is a different responsibility and writing style to go with online publication and communication through social media. Principal of Chanhassen High School in Minnesota, Tim Dorway said, "It is our responsibility as public educators to teach social media because they (students) will need it when they leave high school" (personal communication, March 2, 2012). Dorway has been modeling the use of Twitter for his students. His school unblocked all social media sites, and is finding positive results. Dorway said, "They were getting on it anyway, so we need to show them proper use of it" (personal communication, March 2, 2012).

Since I have been using social media, I have learned what a valuable tool it is. Twitter has proved to be an invaluable resource to me in terms of professional development. I am connected to other teachers and journalism teachers all over the country. I have connected with business and journalism professionals all over as well. I have conversations with these people, share with them and mooch ideas from them. It is more than updating what I ate for lunch. It is a community. A sharing community. The more I dove into the Twitterverse and other social media sites, I realized the significance of these tools to me and what it could potentially mean for students. But were students getting the significance of the world at their fingertips? I wasn't sure.

My school district, along with a lot of school districts across the country, blocks these sites because students have the potential to hear and see inappropriate material. To me, this doesn't seem current. Students need to be prepared for the world and job force they will enter. We should be inviting social media into the classroom to show its potential. My passion to make a change had been ignited.

My first step in the research process was to show that social media has an important role in classrooms, and to show other teachers across the country were incorporating social media into their classrooms. In my research I found a study by Dunlap, J. C. and Lowenthal, P. R (2009) called "Tweeting the Night Away: Using Twitter to Enhance Social Presence," and they found that Twitter allowed students to continue in class conversations after they had left the classroom. Students can dig deeper and expand on classroom knowledge through social media venues. Junco, R., Heiberger, G., and Loken, E. (2010) found in "The effect of twitter on college student engagement and grades" that the experimental Twitter group had significantly higher GPAs by the

end of the semester. If students are engaged, it creates positive benefits for all involved. Students retain the knowledge better, and a teacher has more insight to what is interesting the students and what questions student may still have.

Students need to be active learners and take ownership over their education and future. It is our responsibility as educators to help them find and use the tools they need. If I don't teach them, who will? Right now they are learning from what their friends are doing. Most only know one way to use social media, and that is to communicate with friends and see what people are doing. In my survey (2012) to students, I asked students to explain why they use social media. There was a common theme in a majority of the answers. For example a 15-year-old male said, "To chat and see what is going on in my friends lives." Keeping in touch with friends is great, but as students grow older and enter the work force, they are going to be expected to know how to use these social media sites beyond the surface level.

There are great possibilities and consequences that come with social media just as Mat Rasgorshek, a teacher in Nebraska, said during a JEA live chat session (2012), "They need to see how far reaching social media goes, both the positive and the negative." Right now students do not understand the impact social media can have on their future, and students have the choice to make that impact positive or negative. Of the 125 student responders, 75% said they would be interested in taking a class revolving around social media. I asked students what they would want to learn in a social media class a typical response was: "I would want to learn about how to efficiently use social media to network and create new opportunities. I would want to learn about new social medias as they are developed and how to use them in the best way possible," a 16-year-old female

said. Students use these sites everyday, and a majority of them want to learn more about these tools but most do not know where to start. "I'd like to learn about the way to use social media other than just reading my friends pointless statuses/tweets. I feel like I'm barely scratching the surface of these sites. I'm sure they have more things to it than the dumb updates from peers," a 17-year-old female said. During a live chat between JEA members Jesse McLean (2012) had this to say, "I think a huge part of it [how to successfully open social media to schools], Beth, is educating both our students and our administration on how using social media can be the most effective way of informing our students."

The key is education. When students understand how to use social media for educational purposes and building an online presence for themselves, a whole new world will be opened to them. Executive director of National Scholastic Press Association, Logan Animone, "I know our teachers and admins are always looking for ways to get the kids more engaged with what's going on at our school, and to me...if you can't beat 'em...you have to join 'em." There is more to just joining them though; we have to help guide them and those around us. "But, that also requires them understanding their web identity and their online presence," McLean said. McLean and Dorway (personal communication 2012) both acknowledge that students are going to be on social media either way.

It is up to educators to show students how to build their web presence and identity is a positive and productive way. Aaron Manfull, teacher at Francis Howell North High School and DOW Jones journalism teacher of the year, summed it up best during the JEA social media live chat session (2012), "If all they [students] have to go off of is what their

friends are posting, that's what they are going to mirror. And, from what I've seen, no one else is really having that 'social best practice' talk with them.” This class is set up to have that social media “best practices” discussion with students, and to show students positive and professional use of social media that students will be able to put to use long after high school.

With this class students will be able to focus on writing, reading, interpreting, viewing, finding information and engaging in conversations. They will also be expected to combine their knowledge and experience by reflecting, exploring and generating ideas to solve problems and make decisions. Students will also practice sharing their ideas through speaking, writing, listening, and information gathering in order to build an audience and their web presence online while keeping in mind ethics and responsibilities that come with publishing thoughts and writing online. This class will provide students with a social media learning environment, responsibility, and skills that will prepare them for school and careers beyond high school.

Course Description:

This social media course will revolve around different aspects of social media and how it is used in our society today. There are six different strands to the curriculum:

- **Historical perspective:** This strand of the curriculum includes exploring and researching the development of social media and how social media has changed the way our society communicates and receives information.
- **Social media writing process:** Students will be expected to evaluate different users and their credibility. Student will also develop and implement a plan in their own social media use to increase their credibility and audience.
- **Engagement:** In this strand the focus is on students learning how to engage with other users. They will focus on using social media as an outlet to expand their voice and reach beyond their initial group of friends. They will also analyze their own use of social media and how their influence on social media grows over the course of the semester.
- **Social media writing structure:** In this strand students are expected to evaluate how punctuation and grammar affect credibility, and how to write for different social media site parameters, like writing concisely for the 140 character limit on Twitter. Students will also learn how to write for and build an audience in social media.
- **Media Analysis:** Through media analysis students will evaluate and research how companies and advertisers are using social media to promote their business and product. They will analyze campaigns and how social

media influences a person's decision making. They will learn to think critically about information presented to them through social media.

- **Law and Ethics:** This portion of the curriculum focuses on the question: What is responsible use of social media? Students will research law cases that are centered on social media, and determine the difference between what is their legal right as a citizen. We will discuss The First Amendment and how social media has affected those rights.

These topics are relevant through the changing times of social media. The technology is moving fast, but these basic concepts will still play a role in social media. The content of the strand and examples used in class will and should be ever changing. Students will learn skills and how to research, how to think critically, and how to communicate effectively with social media, they will be able to adapt those skills to the ever evolving social media technologies. Students will learn skills they will be able to apply in real life and future careers as well as how to make themselves more marketable online.