

Let's Face It!

Rod Jamieson, Teacher, Parkview Adventist Academy, Lacombe, AB

As I write this article, the last of my welding students are walking out of the welding lab and I am wondering how I ever was talked into writing an article on technology. It must be the money, I tell myself as I try and focus on the task at hand. Like many teachers, necessity has ensured that I have a working knowledge of technology. I learn what I need to and get by just hoping to avoid total chaos while depending on the school's techno geeks to get me out of trouble when I get in too deep. Teachers today have front row seats to a seemingly endless amount of technology. In just the last few years we have watched our students show up for school carrying cell phones, mp3 players, laptop computers and now combinations of all three. Stories of students sending 3000 text messages a month are all too common and, frankly, quite baffling to many of us. Do not get me wrong, technology is great, but as educators we know we will only use what we understand and can afford. We are all creatures of habit and it can be hard to get comfortable with something that is always changing (overhead projector, anyone?). Just a few years ago we were trying to figure out how to get internet access in our schools and now it is something we take for granted. Yet how many of us use the internet for anything other than a place to send our students to do "research"?

Sometimes we need to put ourselves outside our comfort zone and here is one option that you may want to try. Facebook! I know most of you have heard of it, and many of you may have secretly uttered bad things about it, but believe it or not, it offers applications for us as teachers. Facebook (www.facebook.com) started out as a college campus social networking site in the US and has since seen huge growth in Canada, particularly among those under the age of 30. Facebook allows for public or private groups to be created with the user having complete control of who has or does not have access. This is what has set it apart from many other social networks such as Nexopia or Myspace. Pictures can be posted and messages can be sent between two people or shared with the whole group. Online discussions can occur within the group or opened to include others interested in joining the group. Events may also be scheduled allowing everyone who is part of a group to be reminded of the date and time of an event. Connecting with others can be done by searching for common group names such as "SDA" with over 300 groups being located at last check. Many schools have "unofficial" alumni groups already set up with many of these groups catering to just an individual class or graduation year.

Teachers can also use Facebook as part of their classes. In my Digital Photography class, for example, I wanted a place for my students to display their pictures and still have control over who viewed them and how much information was displayed. Most of my students already had a Facebook site but I gave them the option to create another one just for this class. A group was created that allowed only my students access. All their work is graded based on what they have displayed in this group area. This allows me to grade from anywhere and allows them to complete assignments from anywhere. Most classes will not use Facebook for the majority of the course, as I can in Digital Photography, but the possibility of posting written material such as surveys or opinion questions makes this site flexible enough to work for a variety of classes. Assignments can be posted for others, including students from other school, to see and comment on, depending on the parameters set by the teacher. Perhaps the best part about Facebook is the fact that it is very simple to use, even for beginners. With minimal time, a teacher can quickly learn the basics and get started.

I would like to hear from other teachers using Facebook in a class! rjamieso@cauc.ca