



PD E-News

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Highlights in This Issue

- Digitalization of Learning1
- iTunes U and You.....2
- Check your coordinates, detour ahead: Professional development in a time of change.....3
- Webinars for Beginning Teachers.....4
- Spring Professional Development Area Conference Update.....5
- Helpful Apps for Busy PD Leaders.....6
- L'impact de l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies sur la vie professionnelle des enseignants.....8
- Global Exploration for Educators9
- The Double-Edged Sword of Technology ...10
- Upcoming PD Events ...14

Editorial

Digitalization of Learning

Andrea Berg



Based on his observations that, over the history of computing hardware, the number of transistors on integrated circuits doubles approximately every two years, Intel's cofounder, Gordon Moore, suggested that technology will continue to double in power and capacity every 18 months and, as a result, will become ever more pervasive in teachers' personal and professional lives. Moore's prediction, in 1965, became "Moore's Law"; its effects have had a dramatic influence on teaching and learning. Harnessing the benefits of technology in a digital world teeming with unlimited possibilities can be daunting. Not only are Alberta's students and teachers required to be digitally literate, they must also be critically reflective when choosing the appropriate time and place to integrate technology into their lives. The use of digital technologies to enhance learning raises a number of significant issues with respect to teachers' conditions of professional practice, including the blurring of boundaries between professional and private time, the increased need for technical support, the need for professional development related to technology, and the structures to find innovative ways of incorporating digital

technologies into their teaching practice (*A Great School for All ... Transforming Education in Alberta*, ATA 2012). To better understand the impact of technology on teacher's professional practice, the Association has completed the following research on the topic: *Using Technology to Support Real Learning First in Alberta Schools* (2010) and *The Impact of Digital Technologies on Teachers Working in Flexible and Digitally Mediated Learning Environments* (2011). These studies can be found on the ATA website at www.teacher.ab.ca/publications/research. The Education Technology Council (www.etcata.ca) is another source of support for teachers and PD leaders looking for ways to capitalize on digital technologies in the classroom.

This issue of *PD E-News* will explore some of the opportunities and tensions created by increased technology use in the classroom. For example, Joni Turville has prepared a selection of practical apps for busy PD leaders (and their students) to help keep them organized and refreshed in their practice. Jeff Johnson lets us in on the secrets of iTunes U, and the cautions and pitfalls of technology in schools are reviewed in articles by Marvin Hackman and by Françoise Ruban and Monique Gravel. When thoughtfully implemented, using teachers' individual professional judgment, digital technologies can present exciting opportunities for professional development in Alberta classrooms.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

iTunes U and You

Jeff Johnson



Imagine attending a workshop or presentation and having the opportunity to dive deeper with your understanding either prior to the event or in the weeks that follow—all in the palm of your hand. The ATA

has recently become an iTunes U affiliate, and the first courses and collections are beginning to make their way to the site. The initial group of courses that will populate the site are being created under the umbrella of the Council for School Leadership. Over 60 principals and assistant principals are already receiving training in how to create courses in iTunes U and in the creation of multi-touch iBooks that will be part of many courses. These colleagues will create a range of courses that will populate the site. The courses they design will connect directly to Alberta's Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders and will offer participating Alberta school leaders the opportunity to share their leadership stories and knowledge with people throughout Alberta, across Canada and around the world.

iTunes U course materials can include

- audio and video,
- presentations,
- documents,
- PDFs,
- iBooks textbooks for iPad,
- ePub books,
- iOS apps and
- Web links.

The ATA on iTunes U site will allow public lectures, events, and digitized collections in

audio, video, and PDF format to be easily shared without cost. The new iTunes U service offers an option for publishing media easily, into the most popular (legal) online content distribution system on the planet. The courses you will see on the site—designed by your colleagues—will join the world's largest online catalogue of free education content on iTunes U. Stanford, Yale, Oxford, UC Berkeley, the U of A, the U of C, and the New York Public Library are among the hundreds of institutions that are sharing courses, lectures, videos, books and other resources with students and lifelong learners all over the world. The site offers a new way to obtain digital lectures, PDF materials, presentations and courses in which Alberta's school leaders can participate at their own pace. It will not replace the access you already enjoy to professional materials on the ATA website, but offers a supplemental method to access professional learning materials. These resources and learning experiences will be searchable and accessible in a very familiar manner—just like obtaining music or apps from iTunes.

Users install free iTunes software on their devices (PC, Mac or a wide array of portable devices) to access content by searching or browsing the iTunes store. An option exists to download the iTunes U app on your iPad, which provides enhanced capabilities such as note-taking. Each course is conveniently divided into Info, Posts, Notes, and Materials sections. Interactive assignments can be made part of courses during their design or even after a course has been launched. Interactivity can be further enhanced because participants can share their notes with one another.



Check your coordinates, detour ahead: Professional development in a time of change

Gaylene R Schreiber



Over the last while, and for the first time in *my* career, broad matters of curriculum and assessment have been the focus of sustained water cooler talk and public debate. It is invigorating to see educational matters in

the forefront for members of the legislature, too. Positive change can occur when both the public and its government are deeply interested in public education. However, the recent spotlight on education has its troubling aspects. In the absence of a clear road map to the metaphorical journey ahead, teachers, students and parents may find themselves lost amid the detours and distractions of competing pedagogy to no good end.

The *Inspiring Education* report forms the foundation for many of the anticipated changes. Since the 2010 release of the report, considerable consultation and decision making about envisioning Alberta's future education system has occurred at the leadership level, both within the ministry and in jurisdictions. While some teachers (and administrators) have participated in consultations, there has yet to be a sustained effort toward supporting the entire profession to achieve understanding of the key shifts, principles and philosophical intentions of the government's curriculum redesign initiative. This leaves some teachers underprepared and anxious as they anticipate the challenges that will inevitably accompany educational change.

Students and parents rely on teachers to be well versed and current in all aspects of

their professional practice. Yet teachers have not *yet* been included in this curriculum renewal process in ways traditionally accepted and understood by the profession: as contributors, validators, and practitioners who pilot draft curricula, resources and assessments in their classrooms to provide concrete and practical feedback. These curriculum renewal processes have contributed to Alberta's success as a high-performing educational system, yielding a program of studies that is well regarded at home and abroad. But these processes also yielded something of great value to teachers: sustained, relevant and practical professional growth.

Teachers of a certain vintage will recall their own and their colleagues' contributions in the past as a time when learning about and shaping new curricula was exciting and rewarding. Interest in draft curricula sparked and ignited at the school level. Alongside our grade and subject/discipline peers we engaged in imagining how our practice might evolve as the implementation cycle progressed. How might teachers engage in curriculum redesign as a catalyst for their own growth when the process is unfathomable and unfamiliar?

Understanding curriculum redesign, as it is currently being implemented, will require teachers to engage quite differently than they did in previous curriculum revisions. Teachers will need to critically read public policy documents such as *Inspiring Education* to gain ground in understanding the goals of curriculum redesign. After the prototyping period, teachers will need to navigate draft curriculum documents through their understanding of both classroom practice and future possibility. Never have collegial conversations about matters of curriculum and assessment been so important or so encompassing.

To be able to assuage the concerns of parents who are bewildered or frustrated by assertions in the media, teachers must be able explain, both to themselves and members of their school community, how various aspects of curriculum redesign initiatives intersect with current practice and provide opportunities to enhance teaching and learning. Teachers will need to



engage in critically constructive questioning of the assumptions underlying the new design.

This is growth that will take time and require learning on the part of teachers. Try to identify the strengths you have to share and be prepared to contribute your skills. I invite you to take advantage of the many upcoming opportunities to engage in deep conversation with your peers on these matters of consequence.

- On May 1, the Alberta Teachers' Association is hosting a public lecture entitled "Connected or Disconnected? Technology and Canadian Youth," with featured speakers Michael Rich and Valerie Steeves. For more information, please contact Karin Champion at karin.champion@ata.ab.ca or visit the ATA website.

- Association professional development leaders are invited to attend the Spring Professional Development Area conference on May 2 and 3. This event will focus on an exploration of competencies, and features international speakers who will share their experiences with competency-based curricula. For more information, contact Barb Bossert at barb.bossert@ata.ab.ca.
- The ATA Summer Conference is an ideal opportunity for PD leaders to explore issues of curriculum redesign in the context of their roles in the Association. Information about ATA Summer Conference will be posted to the ATA website in the next few weeks; contact karin.champion@ata.ab.ca for more information.

Webinars for Beginning Teachers

Accessing professional development can be hard for busy teachers new to the profession. The Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia are sponsoring a project that features webinars designed to support beginning teachers.

These webinars can be accessed from any computer with high-speed Internet and will provide an excellent opportunity for teachers new to the profession to engage in professional dialogue on topics of interest to them throughout the year. Links to information and registration will be posted to this page as they become available.

Three webinars took place in the fall of 2013; two additional events will be held in 2014:

April 8, 2014

[Winning Strategies for Struggling Students](#)

Presented by Gerald Logan

[Click here to register](#)

May 29, 2014

[Working with Immigrant Students and Families](#)

Presented by Andrea Berg and Joni Turville

[Click here to register](#)

Previous recordings can be found at www.tinyurl.com/btwebinars. There is also a [wiki](#) with links to the recordings as well as space for resources and discussions after the webinar date.

For further information, please contact Joni Turville, executive staff officer, Professional Development, at joni.turville@ata.ab.ca, or Brent Allen, executive director, Learning Network, at brent.allen@learning-network.org.



Spring Professional Development Area Conference Update, May 2–3, 2014

The joint Spring Professional Development Area Conference (PDAC) and Curriculum Symposium is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, May 2–3, 2014, at Barnett House. The conference will focus on curriculum redesign and its impacts on the education sector, and is entitled “Off the Charts: Navigating Our Way in a Sea of Change—An International Dialogue on Redesigning Curriculum in Alberta.”

As Alberta undertakes an ambitious effort to redesign its basic education curriculum, other jurisdictions such as Finland, New Zealand and Australia have shared in this journey. Given the global trends shaping curriculum redesign efforts, it is important for education leaders to learn from each other, as we reflect on emerging curriculum development and implementation policies and strategies.

The symposium will focus on the overarching question, What are the key implications of emerging curriculum reforms in Alberta in terms of the working lives of teachers, student learning and public assurance?

Invitations were sent to local PD chairs and presidents, convention associations, specialist council presidents, PD facilitators, regional consortia executive directors and Association representatives, Provincial Executive Council members, and representatives of education partners. Information about the event is posted on the provincial website and the PD collaborative website.

We expect this event to be fully subscribed and therefore regret that late registrations or walk-ins will not be accepted.

Public Lecture—“Connected or Disconnected? Technology and Canadian Youth”

Who: Dr Michael Rich (Harvard University) and Dr Valerie Steeves (University of Ottawa)

When: Thursday evening, May 1, 2014

Where: Barnett House, Alberta Teachers’ Association, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta

- 6:00 PM—Registration and reception (hors d’oeuvre and no-host bar)
- 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM—Public lectures and discussions

Tickets: \$10 each

Order online at www.learningourway.ca

There is limited seating and this event will sell out. Order your tickets soon!

On May 1, 2014 the Alberta Teachers’ Association, in partnership with the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, is pleased to invite Dr Valerie Steeves and Dr Michael Rich to Edmonton for a discussion on how technology is affecting children, youth and society.

This is a continuation of our series of evening public lectures with world-renowned and distinguished speakers, which have included Sir Ken Robinson, Sherry Turkle, Yong Zhao, Jean Twenge and Carl Honoré.

If you have questions, please e-mail karin.champion@ata.ab.ca or call 1-800-232-7208.

Reminder

If you are no longer a PD chair or are a newly assigned PD chair, please send your name, local and preferred contact information to barb.bossert@ata.ab.ca.



Helpful Apps for Busy PD Leaders

Joni Turville

In my never-ending quest to try to keep things organized and life in balance, I have found that apps can be helpful. The list below represents a few favourites, and most would be helpful for students as well.

Organize

	Remember the Milk	Whether you are a convention or specialist council executive member, a PD chair, or simply any busy person, this app is very helpful in keeping multiple projects and jobs organized. It creates lists—not just one long laundry list, but multiple lists that you can customize by classes taught, projects and so on. Lists can be accessed on any connected computer, tablet or smartphone.
Others like it		
		
Wunderlist		My Life Organized

Record

	Genius Scan	This app works like a scanner. Use the camera to scan anything and turn it into a PDF or jpeg, which can then be saved on your device or e-mailed.
Others like it		
		
Evernote		Springpad

Focus

	<p>Brainwave</p>	<p>Using the science of brain waves, or binaural programs, you can use this app to help achieve a desired state (eg, focus, concentration, creativity).</p>
<p>Others like it</p>		
		
<p>Focus@Will</p>	<p>Omvana</p>	

Renew

	<p>Bloom</p>	<p>Bloom turns your device into an inspirational slide show and can add music and timed reminders. You can use blooms that others post or make your own.</p>
<p>Others like it</p>		
		
<p>Juice</p>	<p>Mindfulness</p>	

L'impact de l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies sur la vie professionnelle des enseignants

Françoise Ruban et Monique Gravel



Saviez-vous que:

1. Son usage peut avoir des incidences sur votre emploi

Les employeurs ont le droit de réguler l'usage des services liés aux technologies de l'information et de la communication de leurs employés et de sanctionner tout usage inapproprié.

Lorsque ces services sont mis à la disposition des enseignants pour un usage professionnel, il n'y a aucune assurance de confidentialité.

Les conseils scolaires peuvent accéder :

- la totalité des correspondances électroniques d'individus,
- la liste de tous les sites visités sur Internet,
- des exemplaires de tous les documents téléchargés, et
- les dates et heures précises auxquelles les individus visitaient divers sites web.

Les mêmes règles s'appliquent aux conseils scolaires propriétaires d'ordinateurs portables.

- Les conseils scolaires sont en mesure de fournir les mêmes renseignements à partir d'un ordinateur portable.
- Les informations seront toujours présentes dans le serveur principal.

- Vous n'échapperez pas à la vérification rigoureuse de l'employeur en effaçant les courriels ou supprimant l'historique des sites que vous avez consultés sur le web.
- En général, on parvient à retrouver les traces !

Votre usage est surveillé, par conséquent :

- Ne donnez jamais votre mot de passe à vos élèves ou à toute autre personne.
- Ne laissez jamais votre ordinateur allumé ou sans surveillance en classe.
- Sauvegardez toujours les messages que vous avez envoyés afin de pouvoir en vérifier le contenu.

2. Un courriel est un document légal au même titre qu'une lettre, pourtant la nétiquette est souvent ignorée.

- Utilisez le même langage que vous utiliseriez en classe lorsque vous vous adressez à vos élèves.
- N'oubliez jamais que c'est le professionnel qui communique.
- Si le courriel est urgent ou si vous attendez une réponse immédiate, ne vous fiez pas à ce moyen de communication.
- La confirmation que le message a bien été envoyé ne prouve pas que la personne en question l'a bien reçu ou lu !
- Si vous recevez un message qui vous met en colère. N'y répondez pas tout de suite
- Visitez les sites ou téléchargez les documents que vous pourriez montrer à n'importe qui sans crainte.
- Si vous souhaitez visiter des sites ou télécharger des documents en toute confidentialité, ne le faites pas à l'école.

- De plus en plus, les employeurs disciplinent les employés non seulement sur le contenu des courriels ou des sites internet visités, mais aussi sur la « perte de temps et d'argent » que cela entraîne.

3. Les Enseignants joignables à toute heure du jour et de la nuit.

L'utilisation grandissante des services multimédias entre les écoles et les domiciles amène à croire que les enseignants sont joignables instantanément à toute heure du jour et de la nuit.

Cette perception de disponibilité immédiate est accrue par :

- a standardisation des adresses électroniques des enseignants, par exemple, Nom de l'enseignant@Nom de l'école.ab.ca,
- l'affichage des devoirs en ligne, et la possibilité de prendre connaissance des notes des élèves et de lire leurs travaux en ligne grâce à un simple mot de passe.

4. Les éventuelles difficultés des enseignants à imposer des limites dans leur relation enseignant/élève

De plus en plus d'enseignants, notamment jeunes, communiquent avec les élèves par le biais de nouvelles applications sociales comme :

- les sites de dialogues en ligne,
- les blogues, et
- les messageries électroniques (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

Le problème qui peut arriver dans ce type de communication est le manque d'interactions formelles dû à la disparition des barrières sociales enseignant/élève.

- Le langage formel est moins utilisé.
- Les discussions s'engagent sur des sujets que l'on n'aborde généralement pas en classe.
- Des renseignements personnels sont parfois échangés ou requis.

Pour de plus amples informations, n'hésitez pas de contacter le secteur de services aux membres de l'ATA

Global Exploration for Educators

Global Exploration for Educators Organization (GEEO) is an American nonprofit organization that runs summer professional development travel programs designed for teachers.

GEEO is offering the following travel programs for 2014: Morocco Spring Break, Japan, India/Nepal, Italy, Portugal/Spain, Amalfi Coast, Greece, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Thailand/Laos, Cambodia, China, Turkey, South Africa/Mozambique/Zimbabwe/Botswana, Morocco, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Peru, and the Galapagos Islands. The registration deadline is June 1, but space is limited and many programs will be full well before the deadline.

Educators may be able to earn graduate school credit and professional development credit while seeing the world. The trips are 8 to 24 days in length and are designed and discounted to be interesting and affordable for teachers. GEEO gives teachers educational materials and the structure to help them bring their experiences into the classroom. The trips are open to all nationalities of K-12 and university educators and administrators, as well as retired educators. Educators are also permitted to bring along a noneducator guest.

Detailed information about each trip, including itineraries, costs, travel dates and more can be found at www.geeo.org. GEEO can be reached seven days a week, toll free at 1-877-600-0105 between 9 AM and 9 PM EST.



The Double-Edged Sword of Technology

Marvin Hackman



New technologies are invaluable tools for enhancing the educational experience, but they are indeed a double-edged sword

Increasingly, teachers are experiencing employment and professional-conduct difficulties related to digital technology. Teachers are also being adversely affected by student or parent misuse of technology. Each week, the Association's Member Services staff work with at least half a dozen teachers experiencing problems in this area.

Inappropriate Use of Employers' Technology

Arbitration decisions have repeatedly affirmed employers' rights to monitor the technology they provide to employees and to discipline staff for inappropriate use of technology. This applies to technology provided for work, including stationary computers, laptops, cellphones and Internet.

Teachers need to be aware of the sophistication of monitoring programs

used by employers. These programs track keywords or the number of images downloaded or stored, can retrieve all e-mails sent or received and Internet sites visited, and provide a breakdown of how often each site was visited, the length of each visit, the number of downloads and a sampling of the content.

The Past Can Come Back to Haunt You

A misconception that must be overcome is the notion that e-mails, online histories or content created on a hard drive can be erased. One case that came before the ATA's Professional Conduct Committee involved a teacher who was having an inappropriate relationship with a student; most of the information from the teacher's hard drive was retrieved even though the hard drive had been broken and overwritten several times. The ATA has represented several techies who erroneously believed that information had been removed from their hard drive. Simply put, everything you do online leaves a trace.

Although most people are adept at using technology, they are often less adept at preventing others from accessing embarrassing or personal information. One situation requiring Member Services representation involved a teacher who had videotaped her husband in their bedroom. When the couple were unable to burn a DVD of the video onto a personal laptop, they transferred the content onto the woman's school laptop, burned a DVD and then deleted the content. Or so they thought. At school, the woman docked her school laptop onto the district network. Unbeknownst to her, the system didn't recognize the file as having been deleted; instead, it displayed the content on her screen, where it was viewed by others. This is not an isolated incident—other teachers have had similar experiences.

Teachers need to use prudence with all forms of technology provided to them by the employer. A case in point involved two school administrators who were



having an affair and whose employment was threatened after the school district discovered the relationship through the records of the administrators' district-supplied cellphones. In other cases, Internet viewing of inappropriate sites on district-supplied cellphones has resulted in disciplinary action.

Think Before You Write or Surf

Teachers, often out of frustration, have gone online to voice their discontent or disagreement with school district policies or practices. Doing this is problematic because employees have a "duty of fidelity" to the employer that requires them to raise concerns about district protocols through proper channels, which does not include public commentary. Disciplinary action against teachers as a result of such activity has occurred on numerous occasions.

Teachers must also learn to refrain from responding too quickly to upsetting e-mails. Many teachers have gotten into difficulty by responding to district decisions, such as the decision to restrict out-of-province PD activities or cut school budgets. A classic example is the unintentional use of "reply to all." In one such case, a frustrated principal, upset with a central office decision, replied to an e-mail by dressing down the school superintendent in strong terms and pejorative language without realizing that he had pressed "reply to all," and sent his e-mail to more than 40 other administrators.

Theft of Time

As for surfing the Web, the best approach is to consider whether you would be discomfited by senior central office staff viewing the content of a particular website over your shoulder. If you would, then avoid such sites when using the district's hardware or Internet access.

As part of regular monitoring, school districts can monitor the amount of time teachers spend online and can get breakdowns of the type of activity they engage in. Employers are increasingly looking at issues related to the theft of time and whether teachers are online when they are supposed to be teaching or fulfilling

administrative duties. Spending too much time e-mailing, blogging, posting on social networking sites or surfing the Web can have serious employment ramifications. For example, a teacher was disciplined by her school district when it was established that she was spending more than two hours a day online during the time when she was supposed to be teaching. And a school administrator was disciplined for trading stock several hours a day during the time designated for administrative duties.

Online Learning

Teachers also need to be careful in their online interactions with students for instructional purposes. Although online interactions often enhance the instructional experience, teachers must maintain teacher-student boundaries. Difficulties often arise when students engage in online conversations that they would not participate in during class and raise topics not discussed in the classroom. Many discuss personal matters and share or request personal information; many use less formal language, or post inappropriate links. The teacher's role is to ensure that regular teacher-student boundaries are maintained. Both teachers and students need to be cautious about what they communicate online. A slip of the tongue in the classroom is generally forgotten, because it can't be shared widely, whereas a slip of the finger online can be seen by thousands of people and can be impossible to retract.

Inappropriate Use of Personal Technology

Teachers must be aware of possible employment ramifications related to personal use of their own technology and remember that misconduct online is no different from misconduct in public when it harms the school district's reputation or the teacher's standing within the school community.

Free speech is not absolute. It enters the employment realm when a teacher's posting

- violates confidentiality requirements under law and statute;
- brings into question the teacher's ability to be an appropriate role model;



- violates a teacher's professional obligations to students or colleagues; and/or
- breaches one's duty of fidelity to the employer.

Examples of breaching confidentiality obligations related to students include unauthorized postings on social networking sites of photos of the classroom (including photos of students and student work) or blogs that include discussions about a student's medical condition. The first example breaches privacy legislation; the second breaches a teacher's obligation to keep student information confidential under the *School Act* and the *Teaching Profession Act*. Such postings are inappropriate even if the student is not named, because students own their own images, and an open discussion about a student's medical condition makes the student identifiable and is a significant breach of personal privacy protected under FOIP (Freedom of Information and Personal Privacy).

Social Networking Is a Minefield—Enter at Your Own Risk

Contrary to popular belief, postings on a social networking site like Facebook are not restricted to those listed as friends. People familiar with the technology or those who buy corporate accounts can gain access to a person's page. The same holds true for security settings on sites where photos are stored. Party photos, intended for sharing with friends only, can come back to haunt people. Photos showing a teacher in a state of intoxication, using drugs or wearing skimpy or no clothing can have employment ramifications, especially if students can see them.

A worst-case scenario relating to online photos occurred this past school year, when a student's parent accessed an elementary teacher's photo area on Facebook. The teacher had stored an album of private photos intended to be seen by the teacher and her spouse only. The photos were sent to others, which made employment impossible in the small school jurisdiction where the teacher taught, even though she had engaged in nonculpable behaviour.

Personal blogs, websites and social networking pages often contain candid comments that the writer assumes will be read by an audience of friends only. This is not always true. Therefore, teachers should refrain from making comments critical of colleagues, because doing so can leave the teacher open to charges of unprofessional conduct and/or have employment ramifications. One such example involved a teacher who posted comments on her Facebook page from a discussion that had taken place at a staff meeting about the need for staff to do something about inappropriate student attire. On her site, the teacher wrote that if student attire was going to be monitored, then the "creepy" physical education teacher's attire should be as well. Persons listed as her friends on the site included other teachers on staff and community members whose children attended the school. Such commentary clearly breached the Code of Professional Conduct and undermined the physical education teacher's position in the school community.

What Not to Put on Your Resume

Online postings remain online forever. Comments posted while a person attended high school or university can be observed years later. Corporate employers and, increasingly, education sector employers are using search engines to see what applicants have posted in the past. Employers are under no obligation to reveal why they decided not to hire a person. Your previous online history could prevent you from being considered for future employment. You could also face embarrassment and diminished credibility among your colleagues and your students if past actions and commentaries surface during a simple online search.

Catholic employers' searches of prospective employees have found postings on personal sites referring to people engaged in common-law relationships or alternative lifestyles that are contrary to Church doctrine. The fortunate ones were advised and told to remedy the situation, but we can be sure that some applicants were not so lucky. For this reason, the ATA's Member



Services advises teachers to do a search of their own name on a regular basis to see what material related to them exists on the Internet and to be proactive in addressing potential problems.

Will the Real John Doe Please Stand Up

An Internet name search often turns up a number of people with the same name, some of whom might be doing or saying things that could cause embarrassment or employment difficulty for the other so-named people. In addition to the problem of multiple names is the simple fact that it is easy to set up false websites to discredit others. Several Alberta teachers have found fake social networking profiles in their name set up by students impersonating them and making embarrassing comments about them, including comments of a sexual nature. It's imperative that teachers not list students as friends on personal sites, because doing so provides students with access to material not intended for their perusal, and also creates a perception of familiarity in students' minds that goes further than intended by the term *friend* in the context of social networking.

Guard Your Password with Your Life

Teachers need to be careful about providing students with passwords or access to their personal sites. Students armed with a teacher's password have accessed inappropriate sites and posted inappropriate material on a teacher's account after the teacher left a logged-in computer unattended. This caution applies to other technologies as well. A teacher working with students to develop a media production lent his cellphone, which was equipped with a camera, to students. Unfortunately, he forgot that his spouse had taken photos of him naked as a practical joke. The joke wasn't so funny when the students discovered the photos.

Perils of Cyberbullying and Cyber Libel

Students' and parents' postings directed at other students or teachers are generally outside of teachers' control. Bullying

escalates outside of school hours, because harmful comments are often posted at that time. When students make bullying remarks about others or inflammatory comments, the *School Act* can provide quick remedy to this problem.

Section 24(1)(b) of the act allows school administrators to suspend students when, in the opinion of the principal, "the student's actions are injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school." Other students and school staff fit the definition of "others in the school."

It is more difficult to address comments posted by parents. First, one must differentiate between "qualified privilege" or "fair comment" and comments that are defaming where harm can be established. Opinions about a teacher's instructional approach or effectiveness likely fall under "qualified privilege" if the parent is speaking to a person with a duty to receive such information (for example, a principal or superintendent) and "fair comment" if the parent is speaking to others in general. This is why sites like RateMyTeacher.com have not faced libel suits.

That being said, when comments are inflammatory and harm to the teacher is evident, court action is a possibility. The hallmark case, given the size of judgment, is *Newman v Halstead*, a 2006 decision in British Columbia. In this case, the parents continued creating webpages entitled Least Wanted Educators and Bully Educators, and posting the names and photos of the teachers after they were told to cease and desist. An award of \$676,000 was ordered for the defamation of nine teachers, a former school trustee and a parent.

In cases of significant defamation, the ATA has filed suit against parents. Another 2006 case, *Angle v LaPierre*, resulted in a judgment in excess of \$50,000 in damages against four parents and School Works Inc! for making wrongful and defaming comment.

Although access to the courts is an option, it is generally restricted to worst-case scenarios, because civil suits take a long time to resolve and can cause a lot of hassle to the person suing. It is not uncommon to



wait three years for a matter to be heard. In the interim, the matter remains alive, even though the offending behaviour might well have abated. Sometimes, though, the person being sued profits by getting a bigger soapbox and broader audience. The media will generally report on the assertions and allegations made by the parent being sued without providing the same level of reporting after the teacher was found to have been defamed. Finally, although it's easy to establish that comments can be hurtful and inaccurate, it must also be established that the person defamed has experienced harm to his or her reputation or standing. The latter is more difficult to do.

That being said, where harm is clear and the offending parties are unwilling to change, pursuit through civil court is possible. Prior to taking any legal action, though, one must make it clear to the offending party that the comments are unwelcome, and the statements

unacceptable or inappropriate, and clearly request that the offending posting be removed and the activity stopped.

Teachers are advised to make copies of all offending messages or postings, keep a record of when they were posted and keep the URL (Web address) of the posting. Most important, teachers need to contact a Member Services staff officer as soon as they have a concern to ensure that the postings are removed and that all necessary steps have been taken should legal action become necessary.

Tread Carefully

Digital technology has changed the working landscape for teaching, just as it has for other occupations. The new technologies have become invaluable tools for enhancing the educational experience, but they also have a darker side; they are indeed a double-edged sword. Teachers need to be careful not to commit hara-kiri on the wrong edge.

Upcoming PD Events

April

- 10–12 Career and Technology Studies Council Conference
- 10–12 Middle Years Council Conference
- 11–12 Association Instructors Training Session
- 24–26 Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council Conference

May

- 1 Convention Association Meeting
- 2–3 Joint Professional Development Area Conference/Curriculum Symposium
- 2–4 Health and Physical Education Council Conference
English Language Arts Council Conference

