



LIVING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

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Educating the Girl Child for Justice

Sr. Kathleen Bryant, RSC
Religious Sisters of Charity

An eighth grade girl, after hearing a talk about the spiritual and human development of young women wrote:

The sister really helped me open my eyes about all of the things I am capable of doing. I learned that countries that have more women [in leadership] than men tend to be more peaceful. I have now begun to see myself as a change maker in today's world. I can see myself as a big time executive in the next 15 to 20 years.

Sr. Kathy discussed how women today are still struggling to find their voice and take a stand for what is right. She told us that we as girls and women are powerful, smart and are underappreciated. Women are underappreciated because we still do not have equal pay even though we are wanted more by corporations because the way we run things brings in more money. In other parts of the world where women are more involved in government, there is less violence, more peace and better economical systems. She told us to fight for our rights for equality.

We all know that students hear beyond our words and with their own young filters, so the above comments need to be nuanced. However, these eighth grade girls caught the spirit and the lesson of the importance for young women to find their voices and to use them in order to create a better world. Their human and spiritual development leads them to care for others in this world, to desire peace and justice. Feminist spirituality always leads to care and compassion for those neglected, not self-absorption.

How do we recognize that girls have a different spiritual and moral development than boys in our classrooms and schools? Since Carol Gilligan's studies, we recognize that girls learn differently from boys and in the last ten years we see further distinctions in the way girls come to know themselves as *knowers*. How do our curriculum, lesson development, classroom activities and projects provide opportunities for both genders? As principals and leaders in education, how do you *influence* your teachers, students and parents to promote non-violence, justice and peace, which flows from empowering both genders to develop fully?

Ask a classroom of students to list the ten greatest men in the world. You are most likely to get a list of ten men. If you ask if Mother Teresa was on the list or Madame Curie, students may respond that that is not what you asked for! Years ago we recognized the need for inclusive language, sensitivity to gender and stereotypes in textbooks

and curriculum. However, have we also recognized the different human and moral development between the genders? How might this knowledge impact our pedagogy and leadership in education? For every hero lifted up, we need to lift up a heroine. For every mystic, scientist, prophet and saint we need to match women for men, so that all of humanity is recognized.

This article will look at some of the realities of the girl child in our schools and suggest ways we might increase our awareness and empower these young women.

My teaching experience varies from elementary grades through high school, from California to Ireland to Zambia, Africa. There are similarities, not in pedagogy or learning environments, but in the way we educate, often unconsciously, about gender and social responsibility. I think we have an unconscious expectation, perhaps no longer true that the girls will for the most part be clean, well groomed, refined, polite, and not show anger or frustration as easily as the boys do. With young boys I think we are more patient with their acquisition of verbal skills. In the last 50 years we have grown tremendously in our sensitivity to stereotypes and yet there are still some unconscious patterns at work. I remember a unit on gender and sexuality that I was teaching years ago that stressed the mathematical and scientific abilities of most boys over girls. When the standardized test results came out the following year, our all-girls'



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SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

The Time is Now

“I really like Google, I can do everything there...”
Secondary school student

This observation, made during The Learning Partnership’s May 2011 mini-summit, *Social Media in Education: Exemplary Practices*, succinctly captures the perspective of a growing number of students who feel their classroom experience should more directly reflect their world, one where the use of social media is a constant.

During the mini-summit, elementary and secondary students, teachers, principals, central office Information Computer Technology (ICT) personnel and university educators/researchers shared their views and experiences about the potential of social media to enliven classrooms, engage students and deepen the learning experience for all. Presenters and audience members alike enriched the discourse through an interactive backchannel and a Twitter feed.

The event was attended by administrators, educators and representatives from educational organizations and the business sector. It provided intriguing insights into student expectations regarding a relevant, engaging education. It was also a forum through which students and teachers showcased specific examples of innovative ways for integrating social media into their programs. School-based staff also highlighted administrative and outreach activities that enhance their particular school communities. The view from the central office, ably provided by an academic ICT representative and a chief information officer, highlighted some of the challenges and available supports for schools in moving forward on the appropriate use of social media in schools.

An important element of the mini-summit was the use of social media to expand and enhance the conversation. We used Today’s Meet (www.todaymeet.com) as the primary backchannel (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backchannel>). It was fascinating to note how quickly participants embraced the backchannel to expand the conversation and to add new threads. Almost simultaneously the Twitterverse was active with tweets containing the hashtag #tlprtt, used as a keyword/search term to follow the postings. Both channels provided insights and commentary. In this interactive milieu, we learned more about differing perspectives on social media, equity, teacher professional development, the voices of the students and the types of technology that participants were using during the mini-summit. The backchannel also became the support system for attendees. Any problems connecting to the network? Ask the backchannel. Get a response. Move on. Consider what this might mean in a classroom.

SEXTING AND TEENAGERS

OMG, WHAT R U THINKING?



SEXTING HAS GROWN DRAMATICALLY among young people across North America over the past few years. Sexting is the practice of sending or posting sexually suggestive text messages and images, including nude or semi-nude photographs, via cellular telephone or over the Internet.

While sexting can and does occur between people of any age, there is real concern about teenagers who are engaging in this activity.

According to a 2008 study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 19 per cent of teens between the ages of 13 and 19 have sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos of themselves. Of the 22 per cent of teen girls that reported doing so, 11 per cent of these girls were between the ages of 13 and 16. When asked whether they have seen nude or semi-nude photos that were not intended to be shared with them, 25 per cent of teen girls and 33 per cent of teen boys answered this question affirmatively.

In a Pew Research Center Internet survey conducted in December 2009, 15 per cent of cell-owning teens ages 12 to 17 said they have received sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images of someone they know via text messaging on their cell phone. The research indicates that older teens are much more likely to send and receive these images; eight per cent of 17-year-olds with cell phones have sent a sexually provocative image by text and 30 per cent have received a nude or nearly nude image on their phone.

Texting and Teen Social Life

Texting has become a centerpiece in teen social life and parents, educators and advocates have grown increasingly concerned about the role of cell phones in the sexual lives of teens and young adults. In a March 27, 2011 article in *The New York Times*, Kathy, a 16-year-old female student indicated that at her school, if you like a boy and want to get his attention, “you know what you have to do.” Saif, an 18-year-old student, described sexting as a way to express your feelings. He said, “If a guy and a girl are in love, instead of saying it face-to-face, they can say it through technology.”

When asked why do girls sext, Zoe, an 18-year-old student responded, “A freshman girl doesn’t consciously want to be a slut, but she wants to be liked and she likes attention from the older boys. They’ll text her, ‘Hey hottie’ and it will progress from there.”

The world of teenagers is steeped in highly sexualized messages. Hit songs and music videos promote sexting. “Take a dirty picture for me” urge the pop stars Taio Cruz and Kasha

in their recent duet *Dirty Picture*. They say, “Send the dirty picture to me. Snap.”

In a 2010 Super Bowl advertisement for Motorola, the actress Megan Fox takes a cell phone picture of herself in a bubble bath. “I wonder what would happen if I were to send this out?” she muses.

“You can’t expect teenagers not to do something they see happening all around them,” said Susannah Stern, an associate professor at the University of San Diego who specializes in adolescence and technology.

“They’re practising to be a part of adult culture,” Dr. Stern observed. “And in 2011, that is a culture of sexualisation and of putting yourself out there to validate who you are and that you matter.”

In January 2009, six teenagers in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, three girls and three boys all under 18 were charged with child pornography for sending and receiving nude pictures of themselves via cell phone after the images

