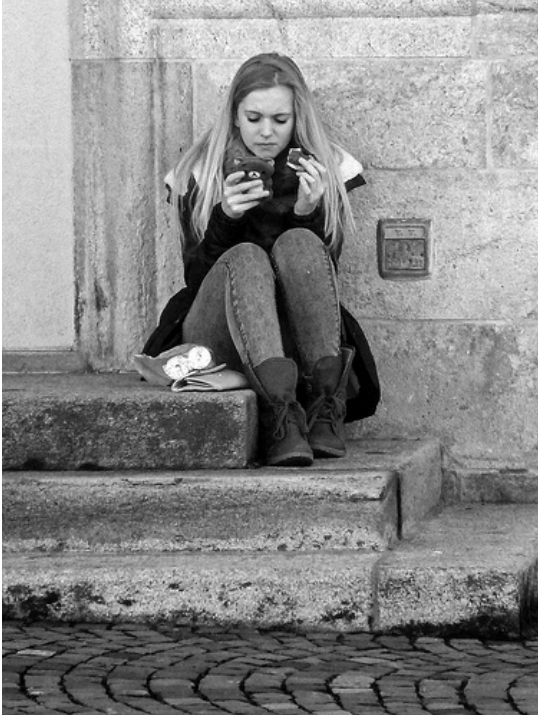


Why Social Media Matters

By Peter DeWitt (http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/) on July 12, 2013 5:54 AM (2013-07-12T05:54:04-05:00)

"I saw the potential power of that technology to connect people around issues of common interest." Benjamin Rattray, Founder of Change.org.

The other day I went to get something to eat for lunch and two teenage girls were in the booth across from me. One was sitting with her face buried in her Smartphone. Her friend, who sat across the table from her, watched her friend endlessly text with someone else.



(Flickr Photo Courtesy of hdzimmermann)

My cynical side wondered how the friend who was not texting felt about being at lunch with a friend who clearly wanted to text with someone else. But...then the two girls began talking about the text one was receiving. Whenever I walk into a restaurant I seem to see people with food in one hand and their phone in the other.

As my friend **Sean Slade** (<https://twitter.com/SeanTSlade>), from **ASCD's Whole Child Initiative** (<http://www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx>) likes to point out, I am optimistically cynical, so where the two teenagers were concerned, I changed my mindset to a more positive light. The two girls were participating in what teenagers usually participate in during the summer; they were communicating with each other in person and staying connected with someone else. Just so I don't paint a completely rude picture of the two girls, they both were very polite to the server.

It's easy for some adults to discount teenagers' use of social media as something annoying but the reality is that teenagers have a constant need to stay connected. Clearly it would be nice to find a balance and turn off the devices while eating lunch but perhaps my values are a bit different than others.

The truth is, on many different levels, social media matters. Whether it's two teenagers who are eating lunch and staying connected with other friends, or adults who use it to spread the word about something important. Social networking, through the use of Twitter, Facebook, blogging and other media are changing the face of how we interact and communicate.

Life Changing Moments

Recently, my brother who lives in Cairo had to flee the country to Europe because of the civil unrest that is taking place. In year's past, when he lived in the Middle East it would have taken our family days to know whether he was safe or not. When violence and unrest happen phones are not easy to come by and communicating to others outside of the country can be difficult.

However, as I turned on Good Morning America and heard about the violence taking place, and was panicked a bit about his whereabouts, I looked on Facebook and he posted that he was safe and sound out of the country. If you don't have a family member or loved one living in those types of circumstances, perhaps you can easily discount the important use of social media. For our family, it provided us with instant comfort.

The reality is that Twitter, Facebook or other forms of social media, they have all created venues for important movements to communicate.

Whether it's people in Cairo who want to get the word out about what is happening in their country or a movement like Change.org to take on social justice issues and get the word out. It could even be something as simple as educators who want to connect and learn from one another on Twitter. Social media is important and if you're not on it, you're denying yourself the ability to grow.

Recently, the group that calls themselves the **Badass Teachers**

(http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2013/06/why_we_need_badass_teachers.html?qs=Badass+Teachers)

(BAT) has grown to over 21,000 on Facebook in a matter of 3 weeks. Social media has helped them unify their voice and debate on issues that they never felt comfortable talking about out in the open. That clearly, can bring about good and bad behavior, but that is not the fault of social media. People have been negative long before the creation of Twitter and Facebook.

The strength of social media is that it provides individuals with a voice who never felt as though they had a voice before. Benjamin Rattray, the founder of **Change.org** (<http://www.change.org/>) said in a recent **N.Y. Times** (<http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/04/change-org-merges-old-school-advocacy-with-social-media/>) article, *"I saw the potential power of that technology to connect people around issues of common interest."* He's right, and groups like Change.org are making important contributions to social justice issues.

What Blogging Can Teach Us

Blogging, which is another form of social media, has become one of the most important mediums in the public education movement. Educators, parents and students are able to provide their opinions of what is happening in their schools.

For administrators, blogging becomes a very important communication tool. Some school leaders will write about the events going on in the building or highlight an event that already took place. It gives parents another perspective to their child's school experience.

More outspoken administrators are beginning to blog about educational reform. They are providing information to parents about Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), high stakes testing and the Common Core State Standards.

Too often in mainstream media, or state education departments (as well as the USDOE) communication can be skewed to sell their ideas. **It becomes a way to market their initiatives**

(http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2013/06/business_leaders_asked%20to_sell_the_common_core_to_the_public_q=Commissioner+King). The importance of individual voices, who also may have a bias, is that it gives the public the opportunity to see how all of these changes are affecting real students and real schools. Hopefully, bloggers help provide a much fuller picture to what is happening.

In the End

As important as it is to stay connected with friends, social media is so much more important than that. It provides a different view of what is going on in countries that are in the middle of turmoil, it provides a voice to educators who feel as though they lack a voice in the greater educational conversation, and it helps families here from a loved one that they are safe and sound. Before you discount social media as a fad, make sure you understand how important it is, and realize that it is changing the face of how we live.

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