

Promote Your School Through Social Media

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

During the past few years, I have noticed that schools are using social media more to inform and promote their accomplishments and activities, but I did not have much experience using social media either personally or professionally. Last summer I attended a Lead Like A Pirate conference and learned more innovative ways that principals are using Twitter. This sparked my interest in how I can educate myself on ways to use social media to promote our school.

My first dilemma was not technical in nature, actually. I am a private person and do not agree with how much people share on social media. This is a philosophical belief. I was raised to not brag or boast about accomplishments. However, schools have been forced to create their own positive stories due to the onslaught of criticism in the news about public schools. During my tenure I have seen funding for schools slashed, forcing the need for referendums at the local level. It is necessary to promote the good work going on in our schoolhouses to secure the appropriate funds for each student. It's not about bragging; it's about surviving and students thriving. It is my responsibility to positively promote my school, staff, and students in every possible way.

My second dilemma is my lack of technical experience. This was not helped by my age or that I am not an avid Facebook user. However, I am a quick learner when I have a purpose that will ultimately benefit students. I also am good at asking my talented staff members when I need help, which is often. It is clear that social media is not going away. Instead of clinging to former ways of communicating with parents, I accept the challenge of using technology to reach the greatest number of stakeholders in the most expedient way. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to learn ways to use social media platforms to educate people about the good work happening at our school.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered... how can I use social media to share our Jerry Ross school mission and ongoing learning opportunities with more stakeholders?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I started to talk to colleagues in my district to see if they were using social media. I checked with central office personnel to make sure that I was compliant with district policy. I read the book 140 Twitter Tips for Educators. Then I created a Twitter account for our school. My 19 year old nephew helped me set it up and shared some tips with me. My goal was to have 100 followers by the end of the year and to create at least one post per week, which adds up to 36. Mid-way through the year, I had over 80 followers and had made over 30 posts.

I was on-track, but was receiving feedback from some parents who did not wish to create a Twitter account. That led me to start an Instagram page in early February. I soon learned that Instagram is great for posting pictures and videos. I also learned that many of my current and former students are using Instagram,

targeting a different group of stakeholders. In a few short months, I had created 29 Instagram posts and accumulated over 80 followers.

Finally, I took on my greatest challenge: Facebook. Earlier I had mentioned that I philosophically am opposed to oversharing on social media. Facebook is a breeding ground for this. However, the parent on my school improvement team adamantly argued that Facebook is still the number one social media platform used by parents. In early spring, I created a Jerry Ross Facebook page and have well over 100 followers after just a few posts.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, I learned that it is important to use multiple forms of social media to achieve the greatest impact. I also learned that creating posts takes more time than I had anticipated. Finally, I learned that there are other staff members who are willing and able to create positive social media posts.

It's important to use different social media sites to appeal to different stakeholder groups and for different types of information. For example, most of my teachers signed up for Twitter accounts, but not all parents use Twitter regularly. Also, photo posts are visually appealing and convey positive moments well, which led me to opening an Instagram account. Finally, Facebook is still the premium social media site for our parents. By starting a Facebook page, I was able to reach over 100 additional parents.

Keeping up with intentional social media posting takes time. Unfortunately, there are many times throughout the year when I work 70+ hours per week on teacher evaluations, student discipline, professional development, meetings, and more. I discovered that without a plan, creating positive social media posts is often at the bottom of the pile. I solicited the help of a younger teacher to create a plan for the 2017-18 school year.

There are several staff members who are willing and have time to help create positive school posts. I was able to get help from a 4th grade teacher who would like to pilot Twitter as an educational component to her classroom instruction. I also had a 3rd grade teacher volunteer to be the official Jerry Ross Social Media Representative. Teachers and staff will send her photos with messages and she will post them on various social media.

In conclusion, I created 82 Twitter posts and accumulated 149 followers throughout the year. I created 29 Instagram posts and have 82 followers, many of whom are current and former students. I created over 20 Facebook posts, including 4 videos, and amassed 182 followers. This is only the beginning as I plan to continue this research project next school year as one of my professional goals.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

The greatest insight I gained from this action research journey is that structure is key to its success. I learned that I needed to dedicate time to review the steps to be sure I was on track. The inquiry process was easy to follow, but all pieces are necessary for a successful cycle. The process led me to reflect and revise my project a few times, which I believe is a good thing. It also helped clarify the true purpose for my research project.

I have learned that I enjoy research more than I thought I would. Typically I want to know the answers to my questions right away, but I submitted to the process and allowed unanswered questions to linger. For example, one of my questions was how to best measure the success of my inquiry research. I have not yet

arrived at an answer for this, but will continue thinking, reflecting, and constructing a way to meaningfully measure the impact of social media for schools. I am working with a teacher to create a survey that we will use at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year. We are hoping that the results of the survey will motivate more parents to create social media accounts so that they can be included in the daily successes of students at Jerry Ross.

I have learned to use the inquiry process with my teacher leaders. We are currently using the process this summer to research best practices in positive behavior management. We were ready to adopt a brand new behavior management school-wide system until we started asking questions. How do we know this is good for kids? Is there research to support this change? Will this system actually reduce behavior problems? Do we really have significant behavior problems that interfere with student learning? I believe all educators must participate in action research to continually improve and meet the changing needs of 21st children and families. I like the emphasis on data to support action. This is often lacking in decision making in schools.

My final thoughts about this project is that is not finished, and that is okay. I found value in the research and work I created and do not want to abandon this project. I am excited to learn about newer social media apps like Snapchat to reach even more stakeholders. I also am interested in expanding my outreach by identifying unique users to determine how many stakeholders we are reaching through the use of social media. Ultimately, it will be rewarding to get quotes that validate this project in the future.

References:

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