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Addressing Appropriate and Inappropriate Teacher-Student Relationships: A Secondary Education Professional Development Model

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Abstract: Schools and colleges of education spend very little time on teacher ethics and morality, defaulting to mentor teachers in the hopes that candidates garner what is necessary from them, in order to be successful in the real-world classroom. At a time when the nation is reeling from teacher shortages, vigilance—not expediency—must be maintained as adults are placed into very challenging circumstances with teenagers. However, districts are resorting to creative credentialing, often relying only on state data-bank background checks, thereby placing students at risk. The facts are that lines are blurred today for a variety of reasons between teachers, students, and also coaches and athletes. Sometimes inappropriate behaviors emerge that lead to arrest and imprisonment for teachers, regardless the type of school. Specifically, secondary educators need professional development to assist them in their decision-making, so as to avoid career-ending and life-altering criminal, career, and even emotional and moral mistakes in their relationships with students.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide a practical professional development tool to assist district and site level administrators, teachers, and coaches in providing a safer educational environment, by way of addressing appropriate and inappropriate teacher-student relationships. This professional development is less about analytical research and more about solutions to implement to provide a safer and more richly secure environment for schools.

The past few years have seen a sharp rise in both the number of reports and arrests at education establishments, in terms of inappropriate relationships both at school and also continuing while at home (Walters 2016).

Presently, there is a dearth of professional discussions addressing the lines of authority that must be maintained by classroom teachers today. There are few credential classes on the ethics and morals of teaching, or how to draw and maintain boundaries of authority and morality. In the 1990s, there was a glimmer of hope, as it appeared that moral and ethical issues slowly became parts of teacher training programs. Also during that time, college administrators and public schools were envisioning the value of programs for teachers that accentuated things like character education and classroom ethics (Benninga 2003). This interest has dropped off significantly. As

a result, therein lies some of the fertile ground for the formation of gray areas that have enabled the formation of some inappropriate teacher-student relationships (Laliberte 2013; Doerschner 2011).

The time spent by teachers with students is increasing each year. Secondary teachers add coaching responsibilities in athletics. Added to the fixed academics, and spending time with students both at school and after school has increased. This reality places teachers with students for additional hours throughout the day. Comparatively, this equates to more time than teachers spend with their families each night. The rise of social media and instant communications, along with a hyper-sexual American culture, tend to exacerbate the balance of moral boundaries between teachers and their charges (Lavoie 2012).

Surveys of schools and colleges of education yield few programs that incorporate training in the establishment of boundaries that naturally exist between generations (Zarra 2013). There is often a rush to press student-teachers into action, due to teacher allocation shortages. Who can resist opportunities to grow into the education profession, sooner, rather than later? (Darling-Hammond 2001; Voke 2002) This is especially problematic for younger and newer teachers and coaches. These classroom “professional novices” are expected to teach students which are quite close to them in age.

Whether or not teachers and students realize it, there has been a rise in predation across American cultural landscape (Wolak, Finkellhor, Ybarra, & Mitchel 2008). Along with this rise, sexual identity rights been litigated, resulting in cultural changes—especially in the areas of sexuality and gender. Predators come in all shapes and sizes, and can be found among adults and students in schools from elementary through high school. Likewise, predators are smart and are savvy in their uses of social media (Hlavaty 2016; Alford 2012). This combination has added much pressure to the American classroom. Then there is social media.

Generally speaking, those which act impulsively in an age of social media are often ensnared in a “gotcha world,” and often cannot seem to find a way out. This is problematic for children and teenagers, since their developing brains are highly vulnerable (Barry & Murphy 2014). Teachers are also caught up in their own vulnerability. This fact is one basic reason for this article. Professional development that tackles such issues informationally and strategically—and before they occur—is most necessary in secondary schools today.

The Problems of Inappropriate Teacher-Student Relationships

Inappropriate teacher-student relationships occur when certain boundaries are crossed by teachers, administrators, coaches, and their students and athletes. Given that, there are three basic types of teacher-student relationships that develop, each with its own set of characteristics and boundary considerations. These are categorized in the following, and include: (1) Intra-school academic relationships (Stipek 2006), (2) Intra-school extracurricular relationships (Stipek 2006), and (3) Interpersonal non-school related relationships (Stipek 2006; Zarra 2013; Noddings 2005).

Intra-school academic relationships. Common characteristics of these academic relationships between teachers and students include, among others: Class-time discussions, group work, small-talk, directions, and even jesting. They also include the serious questions and answers given within the context of class time, or another structured session of time within the school day. Essentially, the daily routines and regimens expected both formally and informally within the context of the classes in question, can fall into the academic relationship category.

Intra-school extra-curricular relationships. The characteristics of school extra-curricular relationships include those school-related responsibilities and roles usually outside of

the regular classroom teaching requirements. Coaching athletics is the first thing on everyone's list. Working with competitive academic and extra-curricular teams are also examples of activity-based extensions of the school, or regular classrooms. In addition to athletic coaching, there are other responsibilities such as mentoring, character-building, teamwork, student council, leadership classes, and many others. Parents often play a role in these activities, as well.

Interpersonal and non-school-related relationships. Interpersonal relationships away from school are usually what hit the media, when any such relationships become inappropriate. These types of relationships typically do not involve academics or school competitions. However, private tutoring can be included. The difference between academic and extra-curricular teacher-student relationships and interpersonal teacher-student relationships, is the absence of professional responsibilities and activities. Moral and legal considerations come into play at this juncture. However, not all interpersonal relationships that develop between teachers and students cross-the-lines professionally.

Blurred Boundaries

Educational expectations change annually. Teachers cannot be expected to be all things to all students professionally, or personally. Adults should never be expected to cross over from the professional into personal relationships with students (Richter 2011). "The system thrusts human with raging hormones closely together in work environments. Competitions and 'play' conditions force proximities and are sometimes abrasive to moral boundaries." (Zarra 2013, p. 18) Some of this friction comes by way of technology and the privilege granted to students to occupy their time with it in class.

Technology and ubiquitous access. Today the common understanding of new communication technologies is that they bring with them new ways to stay in touch with people (Prensky 2005). Relationships can develop faster and broaden more quickly with access between people that literally spans the 24-hour-a-day cycle. The media is saturated with cases of inappropriate relationships and even arrests, whereby some technology medium was used to enhance and deepen emotional ties. (Zarra 2013, pp. 41-42) "The online world is full of emotions and imaginations—a world where many cyberspace answers are multiple choice. In this world there are few incorrect responses" (Zarra, 2013, p. 103). Marano (2004) explains how this technological world can easily "ensnare the unaware."

An extraordinary number of people spend an extraordinary amount of time online connecting with other people. They reveal their deepest darkest secrets to folks who may be strangers, and they often find these relationships so compelling they seem more emotionally real and alive than the marriage they are actually in. Indeed, online relationships can be unusually seductive. They are readily accessible, they move very quickly, and under the cloak of anonymity they make it easy for people to reveal a great deal about themselves. Putting themselves into words, getting replies while they're still in the emotional state of the original message, relying heavily on imagination to fill in the blanks about the recipient, people communicating online are drawn into such rapid self-disclosure that attachments form quite literally with the speed of light.

The establishment of boundaries is critical for success in today's classrooms. These boundaries must also include considerations and policies regarding communications' technologies, and participation of teachers and students on social media as friends. In an effort to establish and maintain boundaries, the following professional development model is suggested for schools and districts. Moving expeditiously toward a sensible and workable set of boundaries for the sake of protection of students, families, and careers is the only sensible choice to make. For many school districts it equates to the more sensible legal choice, as well.

A Professional Development Training Model

Schools, whether public or private, must begin to provide teachers, coaches, and administrators the types of professional development necessary to prepare teachers for their careers, with very serious attention paid to appropriate and inappropriate relationships with students. However, defining these relationships is not enough. This professional development must reach into the elementary grades and ascend through high school levels and into teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities. This professional development must be considered as important as those that emphasize drug and tobacco awareness and school safety.

Byer and Salcedo (2007) contend that schools should adopt policies that put into practice training of all education stakeholders. This should be implemented sooner, rather than later. Accordingly, this training, in order to be effective, should include the following considerations:

- summarize the conduct that school administrators expect of all school personnel and the actions to be taken if suspicious behaviors are observed;
- identify the behavioral signs that indicate a child is uncomfortable with a school employee's conduct;
- characterize four types of behavioral triggers that create risks for school employees;
- list general rules of behavior that help avoid claims of misconduct;
- recognize personality traits and motivating factors that lead to inappropriate relationships;
- analyze actions by asking peer-observation and self-policing questions that help to detect potentially inappropriate behaviors; and
- describe the criminal, civil, and ethical consequences of inappropriate behavior.

In efforts to inform teachers, some states have come up with specific codes of professional conduct, while others use general goal statements. In fact, an analysis of several states revealed there is no one code and not one set of laws that acts as an umbrella of protection for teachers and students. In fact, even state criminal and civil codes approach the issue differently.

For example, states developed codes of conduct that are specific to their states, usually arising from current problems faced. Codes either relate state expectations for positive professional conduct, while at the same time others list the actions that are forbidden by teachers toward students. Some state codes of professional conduct have stronger language than others, but that is changing. Due to changing definitions of sexual abuse, bullying, and an overall increase of both incidents occurring and being reported, states are taking the time to rewrite, or revise, their education professional codes of conduct and sexual abuse laws. In some cases, the laws pertaining to adult relationships between professors and their students, are also being examined. The only question is, are teachers and teachers-in-training even hearing about these changes?

An analysis of several state's policies and codes of conduct yields three summary points. These states include California (CTC 2009), Florida (Florida 2012), Illinois (ISBE 2012), New York (New York 2012), and Texas (Coldiron 2012; Smith 2007). *First*, common to the sample of states codes of conduct was the emphasis on professionalism and the expectations to remain distinct, as such, in training and in action. *Second*, states focus on general aspects relating to respect of colleagues, students, and their families. *Third*, states codes emphasize that teachers must be about intellectual pursuits in their academic pursuits in the classroom. (Zarra 2013; Chen 2012)

States have reported increases in arrests of teachers having sexual relations with their students, from elementary levels to high school levels. This is true for both male and female teachers (Oliver 2011; Zarra 2013). The sexual "relationships" that occur in college, between

professors and their students are less reported (Gattis 2016). Education professionals must question why these relationships develop, as well as the reasons teachers are willing to risk their families, careers, and their freedom to engage in emotional and sexual relationships with their students. Interestingly, more women than men seem to be making headlines for arrests these days for engaging in inappropriate and illegal behaviors with their students. Sexual expression seems to have gone wild in our culture.

Murray and Murray (2004) exhort to teachers to remember who the adults are in the classroom, and not to either blur or cross this line of authority, with which they are entrusted. The authors also recommend that teachers continue to remind themselves that (1) less touching is better, (2) teachers invited to off-campus student-only gatherings should politely decline most of them, (3) when there is an anticipation of being alone with a student on campus, find other students or ask another adult to be in the area, and (4) teachers should be careful not to share too much of their private life at school or on social media sites where students can use the photos or information against them. Setting and keeping boundaries has now become a full-time consideration. Therefore, teachers should be aware that students are watching and listening at all times. Consequently, interacting with colleagues socially, and with students in front of other students, should be done with great caution.

Schools and districts must get serious about protecting their teachers. No one can guarantee a perfectly safe school, neither from bullying, nor from potential violence, and certainly not from emotional connections occurring between humans. However, there has to be a shared responsibility between the colleges and universities training teachers, the schools in which student teachers are placed for practicum, and the districts that eventually hire these teacher-candidates.

When it comes to hiring practices, potential problems can be thwarted at the point of interview. Good professional development is key for principals and administrators, at the school sites and district level. Training administrative personnel brings with it the responsibility of knowledge of current law, in terms of which questions are allowed under the law when a person is in the interview stage, versus those questions that can be asked of a tenured teacher switching schools, or even changing positions between districts.

The following questions and rationale are results, partly from asking recently hired teachers to share on social media pages. Other sources are from personal communications with administrators. The bottom line is that the suggested professional and categorical interview questions are meant to be comprehensive and reflective, and in some cases expanded to meet this goal. Diminishing the risks associated with hiring teachers means better safety measures for all involved.

The Twenty-First Century Teacher Candidate: Seven-Question Interview Framework

The following seven questions are intended to be included during interviews with prospective new hires. Some of the questions are uncomfortable to ask and to answer. The goal in asking these questions is the possibility of a safer environment for students. Hopefully, the respondents will be honest in their responses.

There is always a chance that one or more of the questions either has been legislated and currently incorporated in interviews, or eventually be legislated as out-of-bounds in the initial phase of hiring interviews. State legislatures are always revising their hiring policies (Darling-Hammond & Ducommun 2011; Walker 2016). However, make no mistake about it. Culture has shifted and hiring new teachers today must come with more difficult questions for the candidates

than in the past. Districts must decide for themselves the appropriate questions to ask new teachers and which levels of risk they are comfortable in assuming.

The object of each questions is not to pry into a candidate's personal business. It is every education stakeholder's responsibility to make certain that the people placed in charge of classrooms are not bringing their excess baggage into the classrooms. These issues, when addressed on the front end of hiring save much heartache and legal ramifications later.

Question #1: Divorce. "We understand that you checked the "divorced" box. Would you mind providing a few details as to whether there any form of abuse involved?" Under the circumstances in which teachers find themselves with students, asking about divorce is appropriate, especially if recent relationships with adults have proven to be violent, abusive, or both. "Divorce is commonplace today, but the reasons for the divorce could limit the classroom adversely, as well as the relationships with the faculty" (Zarra 2013, p. 159), particularly among close friends, or if an ex-spouse works on the same campus for which the job is available. Divorce does not rule out someone for a teaching position. However, there may be extenuating circumstances or serious victimization involved, in which case could carry over into the daily lives of students in class.

Question #2: Drugs. "What are your views of the recreational use of drugs and the legalization of illicit drugs, such as marijuana?" The mood is shifting among some Americans about the recreational use of certain drugs, yet the research is becoming clearer with each study about the overall effects upon brain development and efficiency (Barry & Murphy 2014). Teacher's views about certain cultural and moral issues affect young minds, especially teenagers, seeking support for their own personal experimentation. Arrest records nationally for teachers having inappropriate relationships with students show high rates of substance abuse, including alcohol and recreational drugs (Wolak, Finkelhor, et al. 2008; Hamilton 2015).

Question #3: Tattoos and Piercings. "Do you have any body art, or tattoos that, if left uncovered throughout the course of the day, would be deemed offensive to one or more students, parents, or faculty members?" (Zarra 2013, p. 160) Tattoos and piercings are not an automatic disqualification. However, districts must be careful not to be seen as silently supporting something offensive, or condoning an edginess in culture which may be out of the mainstream of the community which is served by the school, by not addressing the issue in advance. Identifying with contemporary culture is one thing and may enhance a teacher's "cool factor," in his or her relationships with students, but school image in the community is much more important than any one self-expression, or at least it should be.

Question #4: Adult Sex Industry. "Is there anything in your past or present that connects you to (1) the adult film industry, (2) the adult sex-toy industry, (3) online pornography (either by appearance in, or purchase of these materials), (4) hosting or maintaining an adult or erotic website, or (5) the signing of any past or present contract that associates you in any way with the adult sex industry, whether online or in real time?" (Zarra 2013, p. 160)

The general axiom still applies to teachers that what is done on one's own private time is their own business. However, this philosophy no longer holds the same privacy assurances as in the recent past. The onset of social media, personal websites, video channels, adult dating and sex procurement sites, and immediate online posting brings that philosophical axiom to a new level of consideration. The seizure of computers and phones demonstrates that what is past is still present.

Older children's and teenagers' minds are quite fragile, because of their heightened emotional states (Barry & Murphy 2014). One's sexuality is to remain deeply personal and any teacher that leads a double life does little to cause teenagers to focus on academics while they are

passing around videos and texts in class about the teacher standing directly in front of them (Caulfield 2012; Rubinkam 2008).

Students need good role models as they prepare for relationships of their own. They need exposure to healthy and good choices. They are bombarded with so many different distractions and temptations. Truthfully, they do not need their teachers to be part of these distractions.

Question #5: Sexual Abuse. “What is your personal opinion about the (1) impacts of child sexual abuse committed by adults who were abused as children, and (2) Would you speak to the effectiveness and professional ability of these adults to teach students effectively?” (Zarra 2013, p. 160)

Adults who perpetrate sexual abuse upon children are usually victims, themselves. Teachers which form inappropriate relationships with their students, and who come from a past which contains sexual abuse victimization, are greater risks (Barry & Murphy 2014). Arrest records indicate that many teachers arrested for sex crimes with teenagers claim sexual abuse in their past. School district administrators must consider their own boundaries, in terms of rights, responsibilities, opportunities, taking of risk and student safety. The best advice would be to steer clear of placing any teacher in with children, or teenagers—which was sexually abused as a child (Hensley 2016). This is not a hard-fast rule, but it is common sense. If there are any questions as to the psychological health of the candidate-in-question on this issue, the risks increase. Again, this is sensible.

Question #6: Addictions. “Are you aware of any addictions you have to legal or illegal substances, the Internet, or behaviors, and are you aware of any predispositions or moral weakness you might have toward addictions?” (Zarra 2013, p. 161)

Smoking cigarettes is no longer allowed on public school campuses. Schools are tobacco and alcohol-free zones. This does not mean that teachers do not have struggles with these elements, which remain prevalent in every day culture. Teachers must refrain from the use or possession of any of these on school grounds. District administrators must be aware that someone has a past history of alcoholism.

All persons on school campuses understand that extinguishing smoking materials is the expectation, before coming to campus. It is fair to ask whether such an addiction would get in the way of a teacher doing his or her job. Whether it is pain medication, certain opioids, e-cigarettes and/or tobacco-less cigarettes, alcohol, pornography, chewing tobacco, or any other addictive element, administrators take major risk by placing those who are addicts in positions of authority with students. With each passing day the addict runs the possibly of falling into usage on campus, or around students, parents, or fellow faculty members. Thus, legal, professional and personal boundaries would be crossed.

Question #7: Online Social Media. “What is your current use of online social media sites, and what are some examples of private sites to which you subscribe? Would you have any problem disabling or deleting sites before any offer to hire you, or allow a neutral party to view your page(s) as a prerequisite to this hiring?” (Zarra 2013, p. 161)

Teachers must be careful what they post online and the sites they subscribe to as members, whether paying or not (Barry & Murphy 2014). “However, being careful and being accountable are somewhat different expectations. The former relies on the honor system, where the district would accept the word of the teacher. The latter would be more along the lines of the example provided by many law-enforcement agencies and political agencies that vet those whom they hire.” (Zarra 2013, p. 161) A bottom line is about how concerned districts are about protecting students,

balancing the teacher candidates and their privacy rights, within the context of and increasingly sexual and addictive American culture.

Getting Serious About Teacher-Student Relationships and Safety

If school districts are serious about protecting teenage students and saving teachers' careers—as well as avoiding the damage done to families when inappropriate relationships occur—setting aside one day at the beginning or middle of the school year to address questions in small groups seems most reasonable. These can be addressed by department, or groups arranged by on-site administrators.

At a time when WASC accreditation is paramount, the addition of such an intervention program would do wonders for a school. There is always discussion about intervening with students. Taking time out to do the same for faculty would be of great benefit.

Colleges and universities that train teachers, would do well to take a class session or two and address the concerns of inappropriate teacher-student relationships. The following eight topical categories of questions are meant to provide assistance for teachers-in-training, for those in district professional development, and colleagues seeking answers for safer classroom environments for their students. These questions, and subsequent recommendations, are generated from a review of the literature, a comprehensive comparative study of teacher arrest records and convictions nationally, discussions with administrators within this author's professional network, and personal conversations with parents and students affected by inappropriate teacher-student relationships.

The eight sets of questions provided are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, the questions are topical and serve as launching points for additional professional development for teachers, administrators and even coaches, as districts deem necessary. The questions are categorized by topic for the sake of organization and efficiency, and are presented with secondary education in mind. The questions also align with the basic framework of this article.

As districts attempt to utilize the questions, they should consider the best format, in terms of scheduling. Often, what works the best is to bring in someone who has studied the issues and has no personal stake, other than the safety of the students and the protection of the reputation of education community.

Professional Development Topic 1: Boundaries and Barriers to Teacher-Student Relationships

There must exist boundaries between teachers and students. Some of these boundaries are natural, due to age, gender, or interest. Others are established as policies and adherence to them is a form of social contract between teachers and students. Consider the following questions, as the administrators and faculty explore what boundaries are best, and how to establish these at your school.

- Are there any boundaries and barriers that should exist between teachers and students?
- What are some “natural” and “created” boundaries? Explain the differences.
- Do you think today's teenage students are more or less apathetic about education and their future? Explain.
- In what ways are today's technologies problematic, in terms of relationships between teachers and students, and between parents and teachers?
- What are two cultural changes brought about by newer communication technologies?

- To what extent has modern technology detracted from the importance of face-to-face relationships? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

**Professional Development Topic 2:
Technology, Temptation, and Students**

The ubiquity of technology and the apparent addictions of students to their smart phones have added extra pressure upon schools. The explosiveness of social media, coupled with the teenage penchant for attention, are bringing new temptations to teenagers. Often these temptations play out in the classroom, with online posts, resulting either for the need for new school and classroom technology policies, or resulting in disciplinary actions.

As a school's faculty and staff discuss the following questions, they should consider what solutions can be reached to ensure educational use of technology, and what issues may arise between teachers and students, with inappropriate uses, especially with smart phones.

- Why do you think more teachers are risking careers and freedom to have sexual relationships with their teenage students?
- Does your district or school have a sensible acceptable-use technology policy for its teachers and students, for both on-school and off-school hours?
- How would you approach your own teenager in the family if you were to discover that he or she has been viewing a great deal of pornography as well as sexting older friends, or a teacher?
- How would you define *teenage maturity*, providing three examples of behaviors to illustrate the definition?
- What causes teenagers to be impulsive in their actions? What is taking place in their brains to prompt such impulsiveness?

**Professional Development Topic 3:
Teenage Brains, Maturity, and Emotions**

Anyone working in education understands well that students and their biology are different each day. This is especially true in secondary education. The following questions regarding the teenage brain and emotional development are likely to elicit humorous anecdotes. As educators consider the following questions, the readers are asked to consider that there are students making choices to become involved with teachers. Students make these decisions while they are still in the midst of sorting out their individuality. They often lack the knowledge that their emotions are hyper-intense, and that their brains are often not wired up to understand unintended consequences and extenuating implications of their actions.

- What are the roles of the chemicals in the teenage brain, and how does each affect behaviors?
- In what ways are emotions unreliable as the foundation of knowledge and truth in the lives of teenagers? What is your role as teacher in assisting toward a better understanding of these emotions?
- How has modern technology assisted in expanding and retracting social interactions in human relationships?
- Considering the average teenage male and female, how would you describe the teenager's ideas about these love?

**Professional Development Topic 4:
Relationships between Teachers and Teenage Students**

At this juncture, some very difficult issues may arise when discussing the questions in topic four. For example, a school may have just experienced a horrible situation that has affected the confidence and morale of the school. The community may still be dealing with legal and emotional fallout from an inappropriate relationship between a teacher and student, or a coach and an athlete. Whatever the case, being able to have an open and honest conversation about all that had happened, as well as establishing a proactive approach to safeguarding is beneficial in the long-run. Educators should keep these things in mind when addressing the following questions.

- What are three factors you would use in determining whether certain teacher-student relationships are appropriate or not?
- Can you recall any incidents on a local or national level that illustrate the need for a serious discussion and policy revisions regarding teachers and their relationships with teenage students?
- Why do you think there are more problems being reported, and more arrests being made, that involve teachers and teenage students having sexual relationships?
- How important are moral compasses for teachers and students, and what roles do parents play in helping to develop these?
- What personal and professional factors would lead a teacher to risk everything for a romantic connection and sexual relationship with a teenage student?
- What are some factors that are always present when teachers and students engage in inappropriate relationships?
- If your principal asked you to give a two-minute speech making a case for your faculty and staff to discuss appropriate and inappropriate relationships on campus and off, what would you say?

**Professional Development Topic 5:
Social Networking and Relationships in a Digital World**

Most newly-hired faculty come from the millennial generation and understand the importance of technology and its involvement in the daily lives of their students. However, the issues of social media and networking take on a different aspects for the teacher used to posting online as a student. As teachers, the shift must be made toward understanding the different roles of social media, and develop methods to use classroom technology for educational purposes. The reality is that the emerging Z Generation is wired differently than the Millennial Generation.

Relationships on social media, forged before being hired, may have to be reconsidered. The fact is that involvement in social media may be based on different criteria for the new teacher. As faculty discuss the questions in this category, they should keep in mind their social media routines may have to change, in order to work and live above reproach, as well as grow into new boundaries in the profession as educators.

- How are social networking, a social network, and social technologies different?
- What are five ways that social networking can positively enhance relationships between teachers and teenage students?
- Why are teenagers in schools so attached to their cell phones?
- Considering the power of information and connection possibilities that exist with smartphones today, what are four ways teachers can harness this power for use in the classroom?

- How social is too social for teachers, in relation to students and parents?
- Are there any restrictions on communication between teachers and students during off hours?
- What are some principles for appropriate after-hours communications and between students and teachers, and are these principles practical for your campus? Why, or why not?

Professional Development Topic 6: School Culture and Relationships

The wider purpose of a school often encompasses added social dimensions, for the sake of meeting the needs of students and their families. Exploring the various dimensions that comprise good relationships between students and teachers, between schools and families, and across the community are beneficial to the larger purposes of the school. Faculty should consider what comprises good relationships between colleagues, as well as additional intra-school relationships. This type of discussion not only provides clarity of purposes, but also may prove to be a worthy endeavor for school accreditation visitations.

- How does a school's culture and daily schedule assist in the development of relationships between teachers, students, and parents?
- Why is it important that people and relationships be given a high priority in secondary schools?
- What are some of positive ways teachers can build and maintain relationships with their students in the classroom?
- What do you think are some the differences between student-centered and student-focused philosophies of education?
- What is a "good" teacher, in terms of both classroom interactions and outside-of-class interactions with students?
- Do you agree or disagree with the social roles taken on by schools today, in terms of caring for the needs of students and families?
- What are some reasons that teachers might give for not developing relationships with students outside the secondary school classroom?

Professional Development Topic 7: Education Policy: Morality, Purpose, and Common Sense

Why do teachers choose their careers? What factors drive teachers toward excellence? What is compromised in both character and ethics when teachers choose to engage in inappropriate relationships with their students? How would such choices hurt the community-at-large? Is it ever the place of a school administrator to share with his or her faculty that he perceives the development of inappropriate relationships? These are all excellent beginning questions, in-and-of-themselves.

Teachers, for the most part, take their craft very seriously. Teachers and administrators should keep this seriousness in focus, as they delve into greater detail, in examining their individual and corporate moral purposes. There is much to lose by one poor choice and much to gain by affirming and practicing good choices.

- As an educator, how would you define *moral purpose*? Explain the extent to which it is important in education, using both general and specific terms.
- Are you aware of your state's professional teacher's code of conduct?

- Should administrators have more latitude to ask personal, probing questions at teacher candidate interviews? Why, or why not?
- Do you see any reason to change veteran teacher evaluation processes? In light of the arrests of teachers accused of sex crimes with teenage students, would you add anything to the interviewing or evaluative process for the sake of student security and teacher protection?
- How much responsibility do you think seventeen- or eighteen-year-old students should bear if they become involved in sexual relationships with any of their teachers?
- Is there a need for professional development for teachers or a need for parent-information evenings for families in order to review laws and policies such as (1) general communication technologies, (2) district and school communications acceptable-use policies, and (3) the appropriate boundaries between teachers and students?

Professional Development Topic 8:

Technology: Tools and Tactics

Changes in the cultural climate regarding sex have more than seeped into secondary classrooms. It is more like a deluge. A major concern is that sexual predators are fully aware of the utilities of technology and methods in accessing potential victims. However, along with this very serious issue, there is also the issue of how easy it is today to accuse someone of something completely false. False allegations are devastating and can ruin lives. Take care when posting personal items online. Online statements and images can be manipulated and crafted to allege something that is not at all taking place outside the digital realm.

Part of the proactivity required today for teacher vigilance is to consider what to do if a colleague is falsely accused of something that could result in a loss of career, destruction of one's family, or the ruination of a career and community reputation. What should be done if a colleague discovers another faculty member is involved in an emotional, physical, or sexual relationship with one or more students? To whom should this be reported, even if it is alleged? Many states have *mandatory reporting*, which empowers people and holds them legally responsible for not reporting, at the same time.

- How have communication technologies, and the environments of teenagers, enhanced sexual predators' accessibility to today's teenagers?
- What are your feelings about changes in states' laws that decriminalize sexual relationships between teachers and students at, or above, the state age of consent?
- Why do you think so many female teachers are having sexual relationships with their teenage students?
- What signs exist that indicate a teacher is getting too close to a student?
- What would happen if false accusations were made against a teacher, coach, administrator, or counselor?
- How would you handle allegations that a colleague allegedly had an inappropriate relationship with a student?
- Would things change if the colleague were eventually arrested for a sex crime though maintaining all while that maintaining nothing inappropriate had occurred?

Conclusion

Professional development today should be more than planning curriculum and discussions of pacing calendars. The implications for lacking proactivity on appropriate and inappropriate teacher-student relationships are greater than ever, should even an allegation come to light. Whether districts use the suggested professional development offered in this article, there is no escaping the fact that something has to be done for administrators, and for faculty to address the issues presented.

While asking questions and beginning dialogue about teacher-student relationships are essential elements for essential professional development, most are equally aware that such topics are provocative, as well. However, schools must go much farther than discussion, if they plan to minimize the legal risks, while endeavoring to affect twenty-first century teacher-training, and teacher retention (Scherer 2003). Teachers stepping in front of classrooms and assuming the professional title without proper training is becoming a regular occurrence in American cities. Such practices bring with it very definite concerns and implications, and also place the reputations of veteran faculty at greater risk.

The reality is that teachers and students are spending inordinate amounts of time thrust together for academics, competitions, athletics, and even choosing to give up free time, to spend lunches together for intervention and remediation. This is not a bad thing. To be sure, the natural inclination for most teachers is to sacrifice for their students. However, far too often, the ubiquity of communications' technologies enables relationships, which begin at school, to extend into the homes of both teachers and students. Teachers must beware the hazards of getting "too close" to their students, and therefore guard against any appearance or development of inappropriate relationships.

Districts and schools that take time to address what is proper and educational between teachers and students, indeed are thinking proactively and headed in the right direction. This is equally as true for colleges and universities whose mission is to train teachers for the twenty-first century. Classes must be offered to that include the questions and issues raised in this article.

Boundaries are good things for students. Boundaries are equally as good for teachers and anyone who works with students. Teachers who know how set and reinforce boundaries, in so doing, seek higher levels of professionalism and respect. Thus, a teacher should never enter an emotional, physical, or sexual relationship with a student for any reason. Such a mistake is not only illegal, but ruins families. It is a career-stopper, and an abuse that should never find its way into America's schools.

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