The Teacher Webpage and its implications for Teaching/ Learning and Education

Michael F. Shaughnessy, Bill Gaedke & Mark Viner

Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico

Abstract

The teacher webpage is a relatively new phenomenon in the realm of education. This paper addresses its importance and relevance to teaching, learning and education. Teachers need to be aware of its use and public relations potential as well as communication possibilities.

In the Internet age, teachers are increasingly utilizing the world-wide web for educational purposes. A relatively new aspect of this entire endeavor is the "Teacher Webpage" or webpage. Typically, the teacher will post a wide variety of data and information regarding themselves, their education and experience, as well as attendance and other policies. This enables students to gleam further information about their instructors, the course and other tangential information. This paper will review the utilization of the teacher webpage to communicate to parents, establish guidelines regarding student's work and issues regarding academic integrity.

Communication Issues

Increasingly parents have minimal time to attend parent teacher conferences and teachers are not always able to responds to phone calls due to other duties (coaching, etc). A good teacher webpage should include an e-mail address and possibly a cell phone. In addition, some "timeframe" should be included as to the availability on weekends and evening. Preferences (morning, afternoon, evenings) as to contact time should be indicated. Priorities should be listed such as: attendance, class participation, tests, homework) There should also be communication to interest the parents.

In addition, a teacher webpage policy should in place (or stated) at the local school or district level and a link provided. This policy should provide a consistent template for teachers on how to respond to students and parents in a timely and appropriate manner.

School Board Policies

Links should be provided so that parents can access school board policies regarding dress code, attendance, general department information and school bullying policy. Some schools will have a section on sexual misconduct and drug alcohol policies on school grounds. Specific school board policies relative to specific classes should be articulated.

Pictures

Often a faculty member or teachers will post a professional or informal picture so that parents will have at least a tenuous relationship with the teachers. Often, along with the picture a teacher may share personal information about their past, perhaps involvement in sports, a family pet, hobbies or personal interests (travel) or reading preferences. This could also include values, attitudes and their philosophy of education, professional opportunities and memberships in professional organizations.

Academics

The classes taught by the teacher should be clearly articulated and requirements specified. Syllabi may be posted or linked and or accessed. Samples of good students' work or rubrics may also be linked along with due dates and classroom assignments. Behavioral expectation may also be posted or discussed formally or informally. This includes student behavior policies regarding digital devices and computer use in the classroom.

Expected computer skills (word processing, e-mail etc) should be listed so that parents are aware, for example of high school reasonable expectations about what their student should know and do with digital technology. If a student is absent for extended period of time, procedures for make-up work should be clarified. The structure of the course could be explained in terms of requirements, types of tests and assignments (multiple choice, true/false and fill in the blank, matching columns, essays and projects).

It should also be made clear that accomodations and modifications for students with exceptionalities, will be made as per the Individual Education Plan. Legal issues regarding grading should also be made clear as per FERPA.

Resources

A section listing the recommended books, articles, movies, websites, u-tube and possible options for additional recommendations may be helpful for parents. Said resources section could be include tutors in the community and possible in-house volunteers. Obviously, the local library and school library are resources but a retired teacher could also provide assistance. In addition, online experts may be consulted as provided by the teacher. For example, a teacher project may include a link to an online project that collaborates with NASA. This project may provide links or an e-mail address that allows students to correspond directly with a NASA expert.

Current Concerns

A teacher webpage may want to address the needs of the students with various exceptionalities and provide links to online programs/websites and mobile apps that address and support learning exceptionalities. Links should also be provided to the special education office. Indications as to availability of students' records and confidentiality issues should be discussed or stated. There are always prevailing issues that need to be discussed such as bullying, cyber-texting and appropriate computer and cell phone use in the classroom. For example, some teachers may want their students to use a cell phone in her/his classroom to locate information for research or to respond in real-time to a survey the teacher has created. In this case, the teacher or school should have an appropriate behavior policy on using digital technology effectively in the classroom.

Teacher and Student Responsibilities

The teacher should provide direction or policies regarding appropriate classroom expectations and behaviors. This would include the use of technology. For example:

1. Cell phone use in the classroom.
2. Appropriate computer and digital technologies use and behavior.
3. Copyright issues regarding student assignments and use of the Internet.
4. Clear and transparent communications to parents on classroom polices. This could include having the students sign and or acknowledging the classroom polices.
5. The teacher should set reasonable expectations on how often the student should "check-in" to the classroom webpage to view announcements or updates of classroom assignments.

The students should be expected to follow the classroom polices in relation to behavior and academic performance. For example:

1. Students should acknowledge having read and accepted the teacher's classroom polices listed on the teacher's or school's website.
2. Students are expected to follow classroom policies and behave accordingly. This includes traditional classroom behavior along with technology and social media use.

Guidance for Parents

Teachers should be providing some guidance to parents as to:

1. How much time their child should be spending on homework, reading and watching television.
2. General classroom policies and expectations of their child in the classroom concerning behavior and academic performance.
3. General polices regarding technology use and appropriate behavior inside and outside of the classroom.
4. On Internet use and social media. For example, publishing on social media is considered a public document. Therefore, the parent or child may be held responsible inappropriate postings such as the online bullying of another student.

Updates

On occasion, teachers may want to update information and communicate with students and parents alike. For example, many school districts have now begun to use the Internet for direct instruction during "snow days". Students at home can now access their assignments, their grades (where and when applicable) and can receive feedback as to their latest work.

On occasion, there may be exemplary sports or music or other activities that teachers can indicate on their home page or web page.

Lastly

Often teachers feel there is a disjoint between the home and the school. Teachers often feel that parents are non-supportive, but have no way to communicate their thoughts, values, and perspectives on the importance of education. The teacher web page is a viable source to communicate to parents their beliefs about their subject areas and their feelings as to the importance of daily review, reading and homework.