



# Professional PRACTICE

## CYBERSAFETY AFFECTS YOU TOO

Cyberbullying is one of the big issues facing schools right now – and it doesn't just happen to students. Incidences of teachers being defamed or directly targeted online are on the rise, so it has never been more important to protect your privacy. But these days, it's not so easy.

If you have given personal details, for any reason, to students or former students, potentially you are at risk. *Professional Practice* talked to Greg Gebhart (above), the Australian Communications and Media Authority's (the ACMA) Senior Trainer for the Cybersmart Outreach Program about the harsh realities of cyberbullying and some preventative measures.

The ACMA's highly successful Cybersmart Outreach Program sends expert trainers like Greg Gebhart to schools to run presentations for staff, students and parents and professional development workshops for teachers in all states across Australia. As schools become increasingly aware of the importance of cybersafety education, they are taking a proactive approach leading to increasing bookings for the presentations and workshops. As for the question of cyberbullying in relation to teachers, Greg Gebhart is aware it is an issue:

*"Students bullying teachers has always occurred. What has changed is the platform. Cyberbullying of teachers has become an issue in some schools and needs to be dealt with accordingly and in line with each school's policies."*

  
victorian institute  
of teaching

*Value learning. Value teaching.*

## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 05 | JUNE 2010

*Professional Practice* is the official newsletter of the Victorian Institute of Teaching and is used to communicate important policy decisions and developments that may affect a teacher's registration. It provides a forum for the discussion of professional issues most relevant to teachers: their learning, their practice and values. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not of the Victorian Institute of Teaching.



*continued from cover story ...*

*“There seem to be three types of cyberbullying that target teachers:*

“Firstly, students make comments online about their classroom perception of teachers. These might refer to unfair treatment, personal hygiene, sexism or racism.

“Then we have students who set up a social networking site impersonating a teacher, potentially committing identity theft by using the teacher’s details to register on a website or an online transaction.

“The third category includes online abuse targeting the teacher, hate email, hate groups set up in social networking sites, fabricated allegations of inappropriate behaviour, personal details or photos put online with the intent to embarrass or humiliate the teacher, or information that is manipulated to be taken out of context.”

## Cyberbullying can even be unintentional

Comments made 'between friends' can reach a far wider audience than intended – including the teacher concerned – thanks to the reach and accessibility of online information. A young person might not fully understand the seriousness or ramifications of a careless comment. Education about cyberbullying is a critical step. Students need to understand the potential impact, and the far-reaching consequences of their personal behaviour.

For teachers, minimising the risk of being exposed to cyberbullying, whether intentional or otherwise, is crucial. There are some simple key things to remember. Social networking has benefits, but it is important to ensure the privacy of your profile by not choosing obvious passwords, by making the most of built-in privacy and safety features, and by choosing a private profile accessible to invited friends only. A public profile on a social networking site is accessible via search engines, and invites the risk of uninvited contributions.

Even if you have a private setting, consider the possible effect of all material posted. Remember to use your professional judgement with any comment or image. Reviewing your 'friends' list regularly is a must, and asking your friends not to 'tag' you on any photographs without your permission is essential.

Deciding to email, text, or add students or former students as friends on a social networking site is a matter of personal discretion, but significant caution is advised.

*Communicating via the official school email account or virtual learning platform helps you keep a professional distance and ensures that all communication is logged. Online, email or phone communications between you and a student that fall outside agreed school guidelines may expose you to the possibility of disciplinary action.*

There have been many cases of teachers getting into difficulty due to text or online conversations with students. Even teachers acting with the best intentions can be victims. One teacher who gave their mobile number to a student for school reasons found themselves signed up to an adult site after their number accidentally fell into the wrong hands.

It is the safest policy to keep all your details – email address, online IDs and mobile phone number – private. If you have a Bluetooth, it should be set to refuse connections from strangers, to avoid another Bluetooth user in your vicinity sending you a message without knowing your number, or even accessing your contact list, emails, texts and photos.

If, despite your best efforts, a student contacts you privately without your prior consent, make a written note and alert school leadership. You can also contact your mobile network, internet service or social networking provider as they may investigate and take any appropriate action required.

## Frequently asked questions

Greg Gebhart, Senior Education Trainer for the ACMA's Cybersmart Outreach program, answers questions about this issue.

**Q** *When taking a group of students to the city, I commonly give them my personal mobile number so that they can contact me if they are running late or get lost. Is there a problem with this?*

**A** Often teachers' mobile phone numbers are given to students for safety reasons and with the best intention. However a teacher's mobile phone number can end up with students who have a grudge. It would be wise for the school to purchase a school-owned mobile phone for excursions. Schools should have a policy about student teacher contact which may incorporate the use of mobile phones.

**Q** *I text VCE students on my own mobile phone if I need to catch up with them to check work and timelines. It makes me more efficient and shows them that I trust them. Surely you would agree this enhances student learning?*

**A** Schools should have a policy about student – teacher contact which would incorporate the use of mobile phones. It's important to check this policy and ensure that teachers use their mobile phone in accordance with that.

**Q** *Because this town is a relatively small community, many businesses have my mobile phone number. Business owners are often parents of students at this P-12 school. I don't feel that I can stop them from ringing me regarding their children.*

**A** Rural communities are close knit and it is often very hard to limit contact through the use of teacher mobile phones. It may be best to explain to the parents that this is your personal mobile phone and if they need to contact you over school matters then this should occur through the school. Perhaps there is a school policy about this as well.

**Q** *I am exp...*  
*my Eduma...*  
*their work.*

**A** This sho...  
school po...  
acceptab...  
email. Ec...  
email ad...  
students...  
Ultranet...  
system v...  
student...  
Providin...  
email a...

**Q** *Faci...*  
*websit...*  
*it is sa...*  
*securit...*  
*my frie...*  
*I can t...*

**A** Wh...  
you c...  
copie...  
the m...  
the ir...  
cases...  
publi...  
onlin...  
becar...

**Q** *M...*  
*their '...*  
*a sign...*  
*our re...*

**A** Wh...  
their s...  
contro...  
sites. I...  
teache...  
conten...  
This wo...  
is man...  
networ...  
the tea...  
but the...  
student'

**Q** *I have...*  
*wanting...*  
*At what...*  
*ie when...*  
*student...*

**A** There a...  
this area, h...  
that there...  
time before...  
refer to sch...



pected to give VCE students  
il address so they can email me

ould be linked to the appropriate  
olicy and what is viewed as  
le contact with students using  
dmail is not a personal or private  
dress and may be used to contact  
depending on the school policy.  
or a school learning management  
ould reduce the need for  
s to submit work through email.  
ng students with your personal  
ddress is not recommended.

ebook is secure. The Facebook  
e continually reassures me that  
fe and private. I click on the  
y buttons to make sure only  
ends can contact me. Surely  
rust their technology?

ile some sites may be secure,  
cannot stop 'friends only' making  
s of content or photos and putting  
aterial on their websites or sharing  
nformation elsewhere. In some  
this may make private information  
ly available. Never put anything  
e that would be embarrassing if it  
me public.

any of my students want me to be  
'friend' on Facebook. I feel this is  
of their trust in me and enhances  
ationship.

ile teachers can control what is on  
ocial networking site, they cannot  
l what students put on their  
n some cases this has resulted in  
rs having access to inappropriate  
t, which has led to investigations.  
ould also be the case if a teacher  
aging a class or school social  
king site which does not have  
cher's personal details on the site,  
teacher has linked access to the  
s personal private website.

e ex-students contacting me,  
to become a Facebook 'friend'.  
stage can I safely do this –  
oes it stop being a teacher/  
ationship?

re no exact time guidelines in  
owever it would be suggested  
should be a significant lead  
e adding ex-students. Again  
ool or Department policy.



## NCHRCs and WWCs

Our field officers are often asked questions about criminal record checks. If you are asked for a criminal record check – for instance if you want to coach the local basketball team, you would be asked for a WWC (Working With Children check) – there's a very simple answer: if you are a registered teacher, you don't need one. That's because you already have a current NCHRC (National Criminal History Record Check).

As indicated in the *Working With Children Act 2005*, teachers who hold a current Institute registration card with evidence of a current NCHRC, ie completed within the last five years, are not required to also obtain a WWC check. The standard for an Institute check is higher than for the WWC check.

An NCHRC involves an examination of the records held by police services in all Australian States and Territories. It reveals details of all convictions (or findings of guilt) for criminal offences that can be released under each jurisdiction's legislation.

Another common question relates to renewal of the NCHRC. In the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, section 2.6.22A "Routine criminal record check" states that:

*Without limiting section 2.6.22, the Institute must ensure that a criminal record check is carried out under that section in respect of each registered teacher before the end of the 5 years after the last criminal record check carried out in respect of that teacher under this Part or any corresponding previous enactment.*

Teachers need to possess a valid NCHRC at all times, and as a result will be contacted before the end of the five year period covered by the check, not when the five years have expired.

## Understanding the VIT's Disciplinary Process

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* requires the Institute to develop, maintain and promote a Code of Conduct for the teaching profession, but does not provide any mechanism to enforce the Code.

Without specific enforcement provisions a breach of the Code of Conduct per se is not serious misconduct, serious incompetence or lack of fitness to teach.

The test for whether disciplinary proceedings are held is not whether the Code of Conduct has been breached, but whether the teacher's competence or conduct amounts to serious misconduct, serious incompetence or lack of fitness to teach.

For example, a teacher whom it is alleged had a sexual relationship with a student would face a formal hearing. If the allegation was proved, the teacher's registration would be cancelled because their conduct amounted to serious misconduct and lack of fitness to teach – not because they had breached the Code of Conduct.

Disciplinary proceedings against teachers demonstrate the conduct teachers should not engage in, and the minimum level of competence a teacher must achieve. The ethical behaviour outlined in the Code of Conduct illustrates competent practice and appropriate behaviour by teachers, and should assist teachers to make better decisions about their conduct and practice.



## The Victorian Institute of Teaching is changing

The Institute's website is being revamped with a new look and feel to make our service better, and allow you easier access to more information. We're introducing school and teacher portals, and all registration will take place online, which will make the process more streamlined and accurate.

### *Here is a sneak preview of how the website will look:*

For principals, we will be creating a school portal. You will be able to use it for a range of purposes, such as accessing secure information, checking our detailed public register, or making recommendations for teachers to move from provisional to full registration. It will be easy to access via the website by using your current school user name and password.

By later this year, the teacher portals will be up and running so you can go online to apply for provisional or full registration, renewal of registration, application for fee waiver and criminal record checks. You can fill in your information directly, so that you know it is being accurately recorded, and then at any time you can access your information if you want to change details – for instance a change of address.

You'll find the system highly user-friendly, with guides along the way helping you to fill in each section. Of course, you'll still need to provide hard copies of relevant documentation, such as statutory declarations.

### *How we communicate with you!*

You will notice a number of changes in our communications with you during the next few months. Our new website will give you access to your own secure site for information and correspondence. We hope you find it more flexible, detailed and easier to use. We're also moving to a more sustainable approach, with fully online newsletters, digests and circulars. This edition of *Professional Practice* will be the last you receive as a hard copy posted to you, with further editions being sent to you by email.



*Value learning. Value teaching.*

## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 05 | JUNE 2010

*Professional Practice* is the official newsletter of the Victorian Institute of Teaching and is used to communicate important policy decisions and developments that may affect a teacher's registration. It provides a forum for the discussion of professional issues most relevant to teachers: their learning, their practice and values. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not of the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

# LATEST UPDATES

## *CRT Connection*

If you are a Casual Relief Teacher or a teacher returning to the profession, you have the opportunity to undertake some professional learning through the full-day seminars that the Institute runs across the state during the year. Seminars are free to registered teachers. Details of the program and registration forms can be accessed through the Institute's website <[www.vit.vic.edu.au](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au)> then 'I am a casual relief teacher'.

Institute-supported CRT networks meet regularly in local areas. Teachers have the opportunity through these networks to become part of a supportive professional learning community. The networks and contact details for their leaders can be accessed through the 'I am a casual relief teacher' page on the website.

Any queries concerning the support for CRTs can be directed to Dawn Colcott on (03) 8601 5842 or <[dawn.colcott@vit.vic.edu.au](mailto:dawn.colcott@vit.vic.edu.au)>.

## *Field Officer's Note*

The teaching profession's Code of Conduct seminars led by Institute Field Officers give rise to many interesting discussions. A recurring theme recently has been the role that information and communication technology plays in our personal and professional lives.

When, if ever, is it appropriate to give students and their parents your personal mobile phone number? Are social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, an appropriate forum for teacher/parent/student communication?

Some teachers strongly argue that the contents of their page on Facebook are private. They use the site as a diary and don't consider it anyone's business but their own. Because of the role teachers play in society and the extent to which the profession is publically scrutinised, teachers need to be overly protective of their privacy. Social networking sites are public spaces and content, both words and photos, are easily accessed and transferred. Of course, teachers should never accept students as their online 'friend'.

Another issue which has surfaced over recent weeks is the growth of comments about individual teachers on these sites. Teachers are reporting seeing professionally offensive comments and other scurrilous written commentary about them and their work written by students on social networking sites. Having these comments removed appears to be difficult and time consuming. In addition, these comments circulate rapidly and uncontrollably.

Teachers who find that they are in this situation should contact their union for advice. Another source of advice might be the Law Institute of Victoria Referral Service.

Field Officers are available to visit your school and talk to teachers about the Code of Conduct or other areas of the Institute's work. To make a booking, contact Mary Walker at <[mary.walker@vit.vic.edu.au](mailto:mary.walker@vit.vic.edu.au)> or (03) 8601 5845.

## *Twilight Seminar*

The rights and needs of children and young people, and the capacity of communities to work in partnerships to support their wellbeing, was the subject of the Institute's second Twilight Seminar for 2010, held on 27 May. Guest presenter was Carla Meurs, developer of the Solving the Jigsaw approach – creating a safe space for children to consider the stories of their lives in a supportive and nurturing environment.

The next Twilight Seminar will be held on 26 August. If you'd like to be included on the invitation list, please contact Valmai Lee at the Institute on (03) 8601 5849 or email <[valmai.lee@vit.vic.edu.au](mailto:valmai.lee@vit.vic.edu.au)>.

## *Career Expos*

As part of its function to promote the profession of teaching, the Institute exhibited at The Age VCE and Careers Expo 23–25 April. More than 30,300 people visited the expo over the three days. Rosanna Golf Links Primary School teacher, Donald Eddington, and Tintern Schools teacher, Sally Wilkinson, spoke to a capacity audience of parents and secondary school students about why they loved teaching. Their enthusiasm for teaching and for their students was obvious.

The Institute will also exhibit at the Herald Sun Melbourne Careers Expo 30 July – 1 August.

### **Editors:**

Damian Cowell and Tony Brandenburg

**Design by:** Clear Edge

### **Published by:**

Victorian Institute of Teaching  
©The State of Victoria  
Victorian Institute of Teaching  
June 2010

Copyright protects this publication. All rights reserved. Permission is given for copying of this document for use within all school sectors and for purposes permitted by the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Other reproduction by whatever means is prohibited without the prior written permission of the Victorian Institute of Teaching, Victoria.

### **Contact us:**

Telephone: 1300 888 067  
Fax: (03) 8601 5801  
Email: [vit@vit.vic.edu.au](mailto:vit@vit.vic.edu.au)

### **Write:**

PO Box 531  
Collins Street West  
Victoria 8007 Australia

### **Visit:**

Level 24 Marland House  
570 Bourke Street  
Melbourne 3000

### **Website:**

[www.vit.vic.edu.au](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au)