

DELINEATING ARGUMENTS: CASE STUDY

Friending a Teacher

ISSUE

Mr. Higgins is a 23 year-old Social Studies teacher at Thunder Ridge Middle School. Over the weekend, he received a friend request on Facebook from Derek, who is one of his students. Derek is a B student who is generally quiet in class. Mr. Higgins has never had a problem with Derek, but he also hasn't interacted with Derek much, either in or outside of class. In order to keep his school life separate from his personal life, Mr. Higgins decided when he

took the job at Thunder Ridge that he would not accept a friend request from any of his students. When Derek's parents hear that Mr. Higgins did not accept Derek's request, they schedule a meeting with Mr. Higgins to demand that he accepts the request. They are worried that Mr. Higgins will damage Derek's confidence in school if he continues to reject their son's request.

DEREK

Derek considers himself a technically savvy student. He thinks that social media are fascinating and he is an avid user of Facebook. One of the reasons why he likes Facebook is that it gives teachers and students a way to get to know one another outside of class. Derek sent the request to Mr. Higgins in order to include Facebook as part of the learning environment at Thunder Ridge.

At the meeting, Derek explains why he thinks Mr. Higgins should accept his request:

Look, Mr. Higgins, everyone is on Facebook these days. You should know this because you have a profile and even with your privacy settings I can tell you use it a lot. If you are using Facebook, you should be a good Facebook citizen and accept requests from people. It's just part of the deal. And it's not a big deal. There's no harm in being friends with students. If you post something, you're ok sharing it, so why not let me learn a bit more about you? I mean, I'll find out anyway when I Google you, so it's not like there are a lot of secrets to find. What really makes me mad about rejecting my friend request is that you aren't treating me fairly. I never do anything wrong in class, so there is no reason to reject my request.

MR. HIGGINS

Mr. Higgins is a popular teacher at Thunder Ridge. He is well known for creating new ways to bring technology to the classroom. Most of the students at Thunder Ridge follow him on Twitter. He doesn't hold Derek's request against him, but Mr. Higgins decided before he started his job that accepting friend requests from any student wouldn't be a good idea.

Mr. Higgins explains his decision to Derek:

Even though online platforms are changing the way students and teachers interact, there need to be boundaries. Facebook is a personal space and if I accept your request, I am worried that you'll forget that I am your teacher. There is a further problem to keep in mind. If I accept your request, I am obligated to accept a request from any student. Even if I had a guarantee that you would handle being friends on Facebook appropriately, I cannot be sure about this with everyone, so I don't want to be in a position where others can accuse me of playing favorites based on what friend requests I accept. And I'd like to ask you, Derek, if you are friends with your parents on Facebook. I'm guessing that you are probably like most of your classmates who don't want to be friends with their parents because they want to keep their social lives private. My Facebook account is no different. It is a place for me to have a life that is separate from my job as your teacher.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES: Derek's parents, Derek's classmates, Mr. Higgins' colleagues

PERSPECTIVES