Asynchronous Interactions: Social Networking in the classroom

This group explored ideas for the use of social networking in classrooms and the issues that schools, teachers and stakeholders are still struggling to overcome.

What emerged was a sense of the Do's and Dont's for schools and teachers who are using, or intending to use social networking e.g. Facebook, Twitter, in the classroom These are listed below.

1. Do harness social networking to promote collaboration
Enrol your students in social networking projects like ThinkQuest which brings children of different ages together from around the world to talk about ideas for projects and then work on them together virtually. "This is extremely valuable in terms of teaching students about the concepts of global learning and global citizenship." Or use GoogleDocs to encourage collaborative learning, with students collectively working on a document and using social networking to discuss the work; the process of discussion and editorship promotes meta-learning and reflection on what's been done already.

2. Do use social networking to make learning relevant
Use Facebook to help students relate their learning to the world around them, and bring the theory to life. For example, ask students studying subjects such as Health & Social Care to respond to questions in closed Facebook groups from real parents about their children. The teacher will need to ask friends to post real-life questions for the students to respond to, whilst the students do the hard work, drawing on their knowledge to respond sensitively. This can lead to discussions as the student, parent and other parents discuss ideas. PSHE & Citizenship departments can run careers talks in a closed Facebook group each evening. The teacher cues up friends and family in different careers and each evening students log in to Facebook and post questions to the 'guest' about their career. These discussions give those participating a much more realistic idea about the careers, and those that aren't able to log in can access the discussion in their own time. A'Level ICT teachers can use social networking to explore the impact of ICT on society. Tell students to set up an 'ICT News' Twitter account and tweet each week about any aspect of the news relating to the impact of ICT on society. If they tweet the same story as another student, both must find another. This will give students a current set of reflections, and also demonstrate how relevant their A'Level subject is.

3. Do use social networking to extend the school into the wider community
Use Twitter to communicate with your local and regional community by tweeting about what is going on at school, from sports fixtures/results to school plays and concerts thereby giving a sense of an active school community. To draw the community in post questions on everything from 'Would you like to help us with our music concert?' to 'What did you think of the play?' You could give all staff the same Twitter log in, and ask them to tweet from their mobile or computer during the school day - from celebrating an achievement, to asking followers the answer to a question a student has asked. Going further, get departments to set up a departmental twitter account to tweet questions and ideas from students during lessons... someone in the world will respond. "The students think really carefully about what to tweet, and are fascinated when someone takes the time to reply. We then have a good discussion about what we think about that tweeted response. Tweeting also raises our profile too - it shows we are trying to learn beyond the boundaries of a classroom, which shows we recognise that a community can help as much as a textbook." Finally, search for the lesson topic with Twitter hashtags - for example,

#oxbowlakes or #lakes. See who is referencing the topic and send a tweet with their username in, asking them a question or for their view on the topic. The more frequently this is done, the wider their community of learning becomes. You can even find experts who are willing to tweet with students/classes, such as NASA Fellows.

4. Do use social networking to connect with different parts of the world
Use social networking to set up international study groups. You could link students studying American Civil Rights in New York and England, for example. Having taught an introduction to the course ask students to tweet questions they want the answer to. Challenge the partner school to respond with evidence contemporary to the period to illustrate their answer. "This whole project was only possible through Twitter - I tweeted asking for a partner school and found one in less than an hour. I tried to do something similar 3-4 years ago and it didn't work - social networking has made this easy." Alternatively, establish public-private links, either between schools or schools to businesses - like one state school who linked with a private school in the UK plus a school in Rwanda to collaborate on a project to raise money for shoes so that Rwandan school children could walk to school. The students can do everything via Twitter and Facebook - from sharing experiences, agreeing the charity campaign, and writing/editing letters asking for donations - whilst also learning a lot about each other, and breaking down barriers. Primary schools can also use Twitter to connect with the world and promote global citizenship. For example, Year 6 primary school students worried about starting 'big school' in England are given tweets of advice from their contemporaries in Australia who are on summer holidays and have completed their first year. Another school in Australia has given all of its Year 5 students an iPad to use Twitter and Facebook to ask for advice and help from any other Year 5 students in sister schools around the world who are also linked up via iPad.

5. Do use social networking to make the most of enrichment activities
You can send updates via Twitter from an overseas residential, including photos; you could ask parents to follow and tweet questions providing an extra challenge to the students. Or task students with writing Facebook group wall posts at the end of each day; students not on the trip can read them and ask questions, which the trip students must respond to. Or give your department Twitter log in to your frequently disengaged students and make them responsible for tweeting updates about what they were seeing and doing. In the lesson after the trip, the class can discuss whether the tweets are a good reflection of the day - providing a chance for reflection on the trip. You could also use Flickr for students to share photos of their trips, such as to World War One battlefields. Students studying the nature of warfare through time, for example, can be given different foci, such as 'weapons' or 'tactics' and once they've uploaded their photos ask other students to view the Flickr album, decide what feature of warfare has been documented, and use the photos to explain what the photos showed about that aspect of warfare.

6. Do use social networking to develop subject specific knowledge
Give story telling and literature a 21st century edge: challenge students to turn long narratives of battles into tweets as if written through the course of the battle; ask some students to assume different roles, tweeting an account from one side or the other. Or task students with setting up character profiles on Facebook and populating all of the information (friends, likes, dislikes, favourite music, religion) - both for individuals in history and in literature. Students can go further by writing wall posts for the person essentially summarising their life or a period in their life. Although these approaches are essentially non-social (i.e. there is little social interaction) it is harnessing the format of the social networking sites to serve a particular purpose. Nevertheless, you can turn this into social

networking by asking students to set up profiles for different people associated with a main character. Tell them to friend one another and begin interacting on the wall, discussing issues/ideas that would have been pertinent to them at the time. This has been done in English Literature (characters in literature, or summaries of chapters), RS, Citizenship, Government & Politics and History. Develop subject knowledge on Twitter by setting up an account for each topic explored - a business studies teacher might open @productionmethods, @marketing etc. Tell students to log in as that user and tweet something they've learned, and respond to another's. This creates a whole Twitter feed with @productionmethods, for example, which can be distributed and shared with the whole class, and used for revision. You can also set up debates in Facebook groups using wall posts. Give students specific rules for engagement - such as they must contribute one comment, respond to another's comment, and log back in x days later and respond again. Finally, try out newer forms of social networking such as Xtranormal and Voicethread, by pairing up students to devise exam revision conversations, or giving a group of students some prompt material with a voicethread, to which students must respond to by working together virtually.

7. Do use social networking to promote self review and reflection
Use social networking to set homework questions about students' learning, such as 'How do you know you made progress in X this week?' and 'What particular activities helped you to learn best?' One student's comment can prompt another student to agree or disagree, and an interesting discussion about learning can ensue. Alternatively, use Twitter live in your classroom and ask students to tweet comments about the lesson. A Maths teacher asks for comments about how well students understand the concept and any question they have about it. "I instantly see what most questions or comments are about and so social networking is helping me to adjust my lesson and plan future ones accordingly."

8. Do use social networking to support particular students or groups of students
Use social networking for students who don't contribute in lessons. Make a rule in your classroom that students must either contribute verbally in the lesson or in online discussion after the lesson: "This means I'm using social networking as an effective tool for me for assessing their learning whilst not making them feel intimidated by waiting for a response in class." You can also use social networking to support tutor groups and exam classes, setting up closed Facebook groups, such as MissyXs GCSE 2010 class. Use the group wall to praise, share messages, post resources/homework, and post points for discussion. Students quickly begin to use these groups as an informal support network ("Help! I don't know what I'm doing - I'm confused! I've got the politics book and gone over the first election debate thing, but what else do I need to do?"). Use Twitter in a similar way (set up a class username); parents have contacted the teachers to say how helpful Twitter is as they can follow the class username and see what their child is doing and help out. Finally, use Twitter to support students with particular learning needs. For example, one teacher uses Twitter with an ASD student to manage his calling out and interruptions by asking him to tweet his comments. If pertinent, they are read aloud and celebrated and, if not, the teacher lets it go. "He learned how to make appropriate comments by seeing which things I read out and was better able to participate in class discussion." Although not strictly 'social networking' this creative application of the software contributes to the learning and development of students.

9. Do use social networking to support teacher's professional development
One teacher's comment sums up what social networking offers to teacher CPD: "Twitter has been revolutionary to me. Finding like-minded professionals on Twitter has opened up loads of conversations about pedagogy and given me a ton of new ideas that I've been

able to implement in the classroom. I've participated in UKEdChat numerous times and each time it's given me food for thought which is great as I strongly believe that the more teacher reflect, the better they become." Personalise CPD to your school by asking your school to introduce a hashtag for the school and run 'Twitter ideas hour' each lunch time. Or use Twitter on INSET days, setting up hashtags for each workshop to share responses to issues. If you do consider harnessing social networking for CPD senior management teams might need to consider current 'regulations' (such as requiring all teachers to participate in 6 hours twilight per year), and decide if they will credit CPD via social networks. This might require discussion on how a teacher would 'prove' that a session of social networking has supported their development. Similarly, consider how INSET days of the future operate if teachers have been undertaking very different training via social networking?

10. Do make sure that teachers, students and parents know how to stay safe online
Train users (students, teachers, parents) how to stay safe: there is a wide range of guidance available.[1] Your school could offer online safety training as part of staff and student induction programmes, or as part of the student's ICT and PSHE lessons. To support parents, your school could send letters/emails to parents explaining how the school will promote e-safety, and include advice on web safety at home. Schools could also run e-safety parent evenings where the school could also demonstrate the benefits of social networking.

A. Don't ignore people's fears about social networking and cyberbullying
Use support and training to tackle people's fears:
  i. Change the way we talk about cyberbullying. Encourage staff to see cyberbullying as the *symptom* of a cause rooted in the student/s doing the bullying, not the cause in its own right. Be positive about the value of social networking sites providing evidence of bullying (when before there would often be little), so the issues can be tackled. Set the 'issue' in its wider context: no form of communication (verbal, non-verbal, written, virtual) should be used in a harmful way.
  ii. Trial social networking in a closed platform (such as Edmodo or Fronter) before beginning to use public sites. "I've had a fortunate experience in that my Senior Management Team, whilst initially petrified of Facebook, are now convinced of the merits of social networking. Why? Because they've seen what students have done with Edmodo... They see [Facebook] now in terms of a positive educational tool rather than anything else. Once the conversation moves onto those sorts of terms I think it is a lot easier for them to stomach."
  iii. Run professional development for staff in the use of educational value of social networking - including a 'how to' for absolute beginners, privacy and safety training, and demonstrations of social networking to enhance learning
  iv. Integrate social networking into a curriculum plan or programme of study (which will include assessment and reporting to parents/carers). After Step iii encourage department teams to tweak a programme of study to incorporate social networking, such as participation in a group discussion, to show it can be used responsibly to enhance learning.

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[1] Many group members cited "Using Facebook in the classroom" by Professor Stephen Heppell & Juliette Heppell http://www.heppell.net/facebook_in_school/ Also see Childnet International http://www.childnet-int.org/blogsafety/index.html. For advice for teachers concerned about being the target of cyberbullying, see advice by The Department for Children, Schools & Families (2009) and Childnet International https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/cyberbullying-staff.pdf To train students to stay safe online, see guides such as CBBC's http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/help/web/staysafe and CEOP's Think You Know? http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/ and ChildNet's http://www.childnet-int.org/blogsafety/index.html

B. Don't think social networking only begins at a certain age

The experiences of those teaching students under 13 years old highlights that "By introducing them to these environments at school it can help them develop online social skills." Addressing online social skills before the age of 13 is a very important component of early age education so that they are wise about staying safe when they turn 13.[2] As a parent teacher explains: "In my son's primary school, they have set up a website page for each class [in their closed VLE]. The teacher posts a comment or question each week and my son is expected to post a reply, or read someone else's reply and post his response. Before he even did this, he was taught staying safe rules, such as what information he should never put about himself when he is writing online, and only talking to someone he definitely knows. The teacher checks contributions carefully and gives feedback on what they did right or wrong, even down to saying something about his age or region where he lives."

3. Don't think that a locked alternative is sufficient
Environments such as Moodle, Edmodo etc work well as a training ground for staff, students and parents, but they have a shorter shelf life for students than sites such as Facebook. Students feel they are 'wasting time' on a closed VLE which has only teachers and classmates on it compared to the fast, seamless site that has all their friends on it, plus more; and they don't like having to switch between them. The social networking functions on VLEs can also be cumbersome so students are 'turned off'. Closed VLEs do offer a safe environment to train staff, students and parents about the advantages of using online networking, but once the educational advantages of social networking are evident, make the transition to using open public sites to maintain high levels of use/interaction.

D. Don't assume every student wants to or can use social networking for learning
Some teachers have experience of students who do not want to engage in learning using social networking: "I have 3 students in one group who don't have or want Facebook accounts which amazed me because they are 17-18 year olds."[3] Hence, social networking must be seen as just one weapon in your weaponry for learning.

E. Don't assume that every teacher's rhetoric is the same as the reality
We all talk about what we are doing in very different ways. For one teacher, "social networking to support learning" actually means using Facebook to post a homework reminder, whereas for another it means setting up a term's worth of group discussion and facilitating that discussion. If you want to harness social networking for education develop a shared language. There can also be a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality. Some teachers make vast claims about how they leading on social networking to support learning when in reality there is little evidence beyond tweeting reminders, for example. Consider a progression model for the use of social networking in education so that you and your colleagues can better assess and evaluate the stage of their own practice.[4]

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[2] This is a view echoed by a debate hosted on DigitalMe in 2011 http://www.digitalme.co.uk/should-under-13s-be-allowed-on-facebook-officially-join-in-the-digitalme-facebook-age-debate/

[3] The reasons for this are being investigated by the Institute of Education (among others) and, so far, research suggests that for some students they feel a sense of intrusion - they do not like to associate social endeavors with academic ones.

[4] See Appendix D for one group member's example.

APPENDIX A

Example school policy on social networking

<u>Scope</u> *(who does the policy apply to, in what contexts, and which forms of social networking)*
This policy covers the use of social networking applications and websites by our staff, governors and elected members, and other third parties employed on behalf of the school. This policy covers the use of all social networking applications which might be used for any school or local authority purpose, or any personal purpose, regardless of whether the application is hosted corporately or not. This policy also applies where school members are contributing in an official capacity to social networking platforms provided by external organisations. This policy refers to all social networking applications, including (but not limited to): blogs, online discussion forums, instant chat, collaborative spaces, media sharing services and microblogging applications. Examples include: Facebook, Twitter, all MLEs and VLEs (such as Edmodo, Fronter, Moodle), Flickr, MySpace, Bebo, YouTube, FormSpring, Xtranormal, Voicethread, and Messenger.

<u>School / educational use</u>
I. Before engaging in social networking activity, any school member wishing to participate in social networking has the right to training, including how to stay safe on the web. Training should be given to all students; this training should be adapted so that all groups of learners, regardless of need/ability understand the important messages.
II. Before engaging in social networking activity with students in or out of school hours, school members should agree clear parameters and rules about conduct on social networking websites. These rules should be shared with the students before social networking activity commences. It would be helpful if they were also part of the school member's profile on the social networking site.
III.Before engaging in social networking activity with students in or out of school hours, a department or team may wish to evaluate the risks of a particular site by asking the following questions:
   • Are there adequate privacy options available (e.g. the site does not disclose age, location, address in individual's profiles)?
   • Can comments be moderated prior to and after publishing?
   • Is the service generally recognised as trusted and reliable?
   • Does the service have responsive reporting systems in place (e.g. are you able to report / flag an offensive post to the operator of the site and how quickly do they act)?
   • Is there a clearly identified pastoral/disciplinary process in place in the event of an incident?
IV.Any use of social networking by a school member with a student or group of students should have educational objectives. Use of social networking by a school member with parents should also have objectives which serve the interests both of the school and the parents.
V. The use of social networking by school members should be agreed by the senior leadership team or line manager. It might be helpful if any planned use of social networking is communicated to parents.
VI.If another school member reads a post by a school member that is 'live' that they feel is unsuitable, for any reason whatsoever, they should inform their line manager.

VII. In the case of engaging parents in social networking to support student's learning, guidance should first be provided to the parents about conduct on social networking sites.

VIII. If parents try to use public forums on social networking sites for any purpose other than supporting learning - such as raising concerns about their child's progress, bullying, behaviour etc, they should be encouraged to use channels better suited to professional and confidential discussion.

IX. If whilst participating in social networking a student or parent makes an inappropriate comment the school member should: (a) print screen and email the attachment to their line manager explaining the context, (b) if appropriate, reply to the comment explaining that it is an inappropriate comment, (c) cease any further discussion with that student until you have discussed the issue with your line manager and next steps have been agreed. If the comment is particularly offensive or sensitive, use your professional judgement to decide whether to flag it to the social networking site provider (in order for it to be removed).

X. If whilst participating in social networking a student veers off the topic of discussion and makes a disclosure or what you suspect to be a disclosure, you must follow the same protocols as detailed in the school Safeguarding Policy.

XI. If you suspect that you or another member of the school community is a victim of cyberbullying report it to your line manager and the school anti-bullying manager. If possible, print screen any evidence that could help to support the investigation.

XII. If a child has posted an illegal image, makes a threat, racist comment or posts any other indecent communication in one of your groups/rooms/twitter feeds, they could be committing an offense. Report any activity of this sort to your line manager.

XIII. There are certain online behaviours that are governed by the Virtual Global Task Force which enables parents, schools and young people to make reports of actual or attempted abuse by sexual predators online, which the police will investigate. If you suspect any behaviour, report it to your line manager.

Personal / private use

i. Whether you are an active user of social networking, or just an occasional contributor to online discussions, posting comments on a photo or video, your words and reflections could get you and the school into trouble. Remember: nothing is private, nothing can be deleted.

ii. Avoid being swept along with the popular tide of comment and voicing opinions that perhaps should be kept offline.

iii. It is reasonable that you might wish to express your disagreement with government policy (local or national). But before posting, consider the ramifications of abrupt or passionate comments.

iv. If you do wish to express your own views publicly, you could add a statement to your blog, discussion or profile such as 'The views expressed here are my own and not representative of my school'. But please be aware that this by line does not protect every comment you make.

v. If you are frustrated with an aspect of the school, such as the buildings, the services, or staff, or with the local authority, its employees or any third party's reputation, do not use social networking as a way to vent your annoyance. Negative comments could amount to misconduct.

vi. Some elements of our work as a school are confidential, including staff changes, employment, procurement, partnerships and personal information relating to colleagues and children. Information relating to any of these aspects must not be discussed on the web.

Enforcement
Any breach of the terms set out in this policy could result in the publishing rights of the school member being suspended and the commencement of the School & Local Authority Dismissal and Disciplinary procedure.

Possible related policies*
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
PSHE & Citizenship Policy
Internet policy in school
Equality policy
Anti-bullying policy
Complaints procedure
School & Local Authority Dismissal and Disciplinary Policy
Terms and conditions of employment

* The school may need to review these policies to see that they are in sync with the new social networking policy. Furthermore, the school should liaise with its Local Authority (LA) as some have authority-wide policies on the use of social networking.

APPENDIX B

Example student policy on social networking (in student planners)

Please see Appendix 1 in Handheld learning report.

APPENDIX C

One teacher's progression model for the use of social networking in his classroom

One teacher explained that he'd found his journey in the use of social networking had taken this format:

a.   Teacher to student communication (one directional messages, wall posts, tweets etc)
b.   Teacher-led discovery and sharing of online resources
c.   Teacher led discussion (including interaction, assessment, argument)
d.   Student-led discovery and sharing of online resources
e.   Student-led creation and publication of resources/ideas
f.   Student-led discussion/learning (including interaction, assessment, argument)

The group agreed with this journey, although did suggest that, as with any model of progression, students will be at different stages of progression at different points, and could move up as well as back in the model depending on the quality of the teacher's planning and resources. The group also wondered whether there should be another level within the model - namely one of teacher-student mutual support, wherein the student's use of the technology surpasses the teachers, but the teacher is still required to support the student's substantive and conceptual understanding. Finally, to ensure that teachers with a lot of rhetoric effectively evaluate themselves, it might be helpful if each stage had a 'just beginning, establishing, established' rating within it, each term being given clear examples to help teacher's position their practice.