

Ways Teachers are Using Social Media in the Classroom Right Now

By Valerie Fraizer



Being artists AND a teacher, we are ALWAYS looking for ways to get your students excited about learning. One innovative method is through social media. But while some teachers already use Tweets, status updates and text messages in their lessons, you may be unsure how to employ these tools in an engaging way.

“Students are using these technologies in their personal lives, so it makes sense to leverage them for teaching and learning,” says Kathy Cook, who holds a master’s degree in education and is director of educational technology for the University of Phoenix College Of Education.

1. Tweet or post status updates as a class. A teacher lets students propose nuggets of learning that are posted for parents to read.
2. Write blog posts about what students are learning. Some blogs reflect about Elementary STEM lab for parents to read each week. You could let your students write for the world. Another teacher reflects about learning and classroom happenings.
3. Create a class/ grade level Facebook page. Use Facebook to get feedback for your student’s art projects. On the Facebook® social network, teachers can build pages for their classes that they can use for communicating to their class/parents like posting announcements, class activities and assignment deadlines, etc. It is an easy way for parents to see what their kids are doing in class.
4. Another option is employing tools like the Edmodo® site, often referred to as the Facebook for schools, which Cook says “provides a secure place for teachers to interact with students, parents and administrators.”
5. Use YouTube for your students to host a show or a podcast. You could have your students host a “Focus Show” which could lead to them podcasting.
6. Devise a Twitter “channel” for a special interest projects. The Twitter® microblogging service, with its 140-character limit, is a good choice for teachers who want to deliver short bursts of information to students or help them practice concise writing. If students follow other people on Twitter, though, your messages may get lost in the shuffle. A suggestion though to prevent this by using a specific hashtag that students can use to filter your posts. Twitter is a practical option for teachers to communicate privately with parents.

7. Use Skype for guest speakers. This is an excellent tool for schools that are short on funding. This doesn't mean you can't invite guest speakers from the community to your classroom, but Skype® video conferencing software allows you to efficiently bring in people from around the world. You can reach out to other art teachers, authors, experts etc. in their fields and see if one of those individuals is willing to videoconference with the class.

Gone are the days when students were limited to the library for in-depth research. "Technology allows students to have access to a wealth of resources for learning," Cook notes, "including many primary sources of information." Why have your students ask you the question when they can look face to face with the person and engage in authentic learning and conversation?

8. Communicate with other classrooms. The [Global Read Aloud](#), [Global Classroom Project](#) and [Skype](#) are three examples of how teachers use social media to connect their students as they collaborate and communicate.

Validation as to WHY? It's in the Standards

If you're going to ignore social media in the classroom, then throw out the ISTE Standards for Students (Technology) and stop pretending that you're 21st century. Social media is here. It's just another resource and doesn't have to be a distraction from learning objectives. Social media is another resource and tool that you can use to make your classroom more engaging, relevant and culturally diverse. Let's be honest, students are always on their phones and why not take away the time that they would be wasting playing a game and having them post something interesting art related?

Establish online guidelines.

"It is important that class pages are constantly monitored by teachers," Cook says. "If there are inappropriate comments or posts, they can be removed, and the offender can be restricted from posting but not viewing in the space in the future." School boards and districts are getting in on the act, too. For instance, Cook notes that the New York City Department of Education has its own [social media guidelines](#) for the classroom. Having your schools and even your district's support is very essential.

Set a good example.

Make sure you cover digital citizenship in the classroom after introducing the social media you will be using, so that students understand how to use social media inside and outside of school. Get ideas from your peers. You may already use the LinkedIn® professional network or even Facebook to connect with other teachers, so why not take advantage of those relationships to exchange lesson plans and other ideas?

Ideas for social media for you as an educator:

LinkedIn: Stay connected with peers in a professional environment that allows you to share your resume and skills. This site is a must for those who understand that few jobs last forever.

4Teachers: If you want to learn how to teach with technology, or if you want to hone your current skills and teach others what you know, then this venue might be for you. Learn about new tools, get support and stay on top of your game.

EDU4DR: Join this social network by and for teachers and educators who want to make a difference in disaster prevention education.

Ning: Not only can you build a community using this platform, you can join any community that exists now. Search for your subject or for your grade level to find a community filled with supportive members.

Promethean Planet: Billed as "the world's largest interactive whiteboard community," this site offers support for teachers through searchable resources, lessons, educational Web links and many more tools.

ProTeacher Community: This is a community for school teachers in grades PreK-8. Participants mostly are from the U.S., but guests from around the world are invited.

TeacherLingo: Tryout this educational community that connects teachers from every educational level.

We the Teachers: Find teachers in your neighborhood or from around the world to share lesson plans and other classroom resources.

Facebook: Face it — Facebook has come a long way as far as reputation is concerned. While concerns over privacy still exist for younger students, you can join Facebook simply to gain access to groups such as Social Media Guidelines for Educators, where you can join the discussion surrounding social media guidelines for schools and school districts.

Ideas for social media for your classroom:

Blackboard: You may not have thought about Blackboard as a social media tool, but it offers all the interactivity you can desire with students and with parents. Corporations and nonprofit organizations now use this platform to stay in touch with employees and members, for educational purposes and to increase organizational performance.

Google Docs: You might not think of a utility as a social media platform, but Google Docs provides a way to collaborate, share and discuss documents, spreadsheets and presentations in a private environment. Go to [Google for Educators](#) to learn more about how to use this resource and other Google educational tools.

Moodle: This virtual learning environment is free to use, and it includes a myriad of ways to build 'community' in the classroom.

TeacherTube: Add this site to [YouTube](#) as a means to share instructional videos. TeacherTube, however, is more inclined to provide a safe venue for teachers, schools and home learners. Also, try [School Tube](#) for more video sharing in a safe environment.

Twitter: Do you use Twitter as a teaching tool? Learn how to use Twitter in the classroom and find resources and links to help define your project through [Twitter for Teachers](#), a "collaborative effort to teach teachers about Twitter."

Using Instagram in an Educational Context: The EmergingEdTech blog is a wonderful source for tips, strategies, and ideas for using social media and other new technologies in the classroom.

Pinterest: platform is a visual pin board that allows users to pin images from blogs and websites, making it easier for them to refer to these later.

Sites I used as a resource and to revisit:

<http://toponlineuniversityreviews.com/2009/25-excellent-social-media-sites-for-teachers/>

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/social-media-resources-educators-matt-davis>

<http://www.teachersandsocialmedia.co.nz/>

<http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2010/05/100-inspiring-ways-to-use-social-media-in-the-classroom/>

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/guidebook-social-media-in-classroom-vicki-davis>

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-with-technology-articles/using-social-media-classroom/>

