Social Media in Education: Enhancing Learning and Managing eSafety

ABSTRACT

Social media is both powerful and purposeful, yet its full potential is still to be realised in education. How can it be used to transform our classrooms in the same ways that it has transformed many other aspects of our lives?

This eBook discusses and examines how social media can be used in Learning and Education.
INTRODUCTION

So much is written in the press about the negative use of technology (in particular social media) and young people.

Yet technology and social media has become such an integrated and important part of our lives. We see ‘tweets’ on the television, read facts on Facebook and gather information on Google+. In the past 24 months social media has toppled governments, helped us rescue flood victims and delivered us both localised and international news in almost real-time.

Social media is both powerful and purposeful yet its full potential is still to be realised in education. How can it be used to transform our classrooms in the same ways that it has transformed many other aspects of our lives?

This eBook discusses and examines how social media can be used in Learning and Education.
#1 - WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

1. Definitions and Characteristics

There are lots of definitions about social media on the Internet but it is important not to get too caught up in exact terminology. The reality of the situation is that pretty much the whole of the Web has now turned social and most new content that is published online allows for social interaction. This might include comments, the ability to edit a page or a personal recommendation such as ‘liking’ on Facebook.

So instead of thinking about a definition of social media it is perhaps more useful to think about some common characteristics of social media sites and services. Generally speaking social media contains at least some of the following things:

- social media **challenges traditional models**
- social media allows people to **communicate**
- social media allows people to **collaborate**
- social media gives people an **audience**
- social media services **reverse the hierarchy** and are built from the bottom up
- social media is **open and transparent**

2. The Social Media Revolution

Whether you have your own definition for social media or even disagree with some of the characteristics above, the one thing that everyone seems to agree on is that social media, social networks and the social Web are moving from strength to strength. The term given to this by the Web site socialnomics (www.socialnomics.net) is the ‘**Social Media Revolution**’. Socialnomics has also produced a viral YouTube Video that provides a number of interesting facts and figures about the rise and growth of social media.

The facts include:

- If Facebook were a country it would be the world’s 3rd largest and have a population 2 x the size of the U.S.
- There were over 75 million more people playing Farmville than there were real Farmers
- A new member joins LinkedIn every second
- 1 in 5 couples meet online

The video concludes by stating that, ‘**Social Media isn’t a fad, it's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate**’. This is an important statement for those wishing to make more use of social media in education.
3. Popular Types of Social Media

There are literally hundreds of social media services on the Internet. The table below shows some of the most popular types and their main purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Registered users create a personal profile, add other users as friends, exchange messages and photos, including automatic notifications when users update their profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Plus</td>
<td>Real life sharing through the Web including messages, video conference and photographs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>A video sharing Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>A micro-blogging platform where users send 140 character messages to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>A social network for business-related and professional networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flickr</td>
<td>Primarily a photo sharing website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordpress</td>
<td>An open source blogging platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slideshare</td>
<td>A presentation sharing Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>An online encyclopaedia that anyone can edit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del.icio.us</td>
<td>A social bookmarking Web site where you can share URLs with you contacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>A virtual pin board where you can individually (or as part of a team) post notes that contain text, links and embedded video.</td>
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</table>

It is also important to remember that many social media sites are now starting to converge in functionality (eg; you can communicate and share photographs or you can log into another social networking service with a single sign in user ID).

“Social Media isn’t a fad, it’s a fundamental shift in the way we communicate”

- socialnomics.net
4. Social Media in Education

Social media in education is also very important and it is useful to think about the characteristics of social media that we mentioned above and think about how this relates to our classrooms.

Studies have shown that students do best when based in educational settings that challenge traditional models and reverse the hierarchy, allow young people to communicate and collaborate, that provide authentic audience for children's work and exist within systems that are both open and transparent.

Within some of the other sections of this eBook we will discuss how social media can have an impact on whole school communication, pedagogical approaches and staff professional development. It is also important that we understand the impact of social media on privacy and some of the challenges that can be encountered with social media and young people.

While children under 13 can legally give out personal information with their parents’ permission, many Web sites altogether disallow underage children from using their services due to the amount of paperwork involved. It is for this reason that some Web sites (e.g. Facebook) list that young people under the age of 13 are not allowed to register under the site's terms and conditions.

It is however important to understand the difference between registering to use a social media service and and viewing a social media page. For example YouTube's terms and conditions require you to be 13 or over before you are allowed to register and upload content. But, there is no age restriction on being able to visit the YouTube site and view online materials unless e-safety tools, such as safe search and YouTube for Schools, are enabled.

As well as the above there is a growing academic interest in the use of Social Media in schools and Education. Professor Stephen Heppell from the University of Bournemouth has offered some recent thoughts on this subject to the Government of South Australia.
1. School Web sites

A number of schools and education authorities such as East Lothian in Scotland have actively embraced some types of social media (particularly blogging) to develop school Web sites.

Edubuzz (managed by David Gilmour) is a Wordpress Multi User blogging platform that is available for all learners within the education authority (school district). The EduBuzz project has been running for over five years and continues to be a massive success. Most schools in East Lothian now use edubuzz blogs for school Web sites and other classroom projects (eg: residential education).

The Executive Director of Education and Children's Services also has a blog and Twitter account which shows that he is fully supportive of the initiative. Leadership is a very important component of social media adoption in schools.

Some schools such as Preston Lodge High School have over 450 subscribers to their school Web site blog by email. Effectively this has created a very easy to publish, up-to-date digital newsletter that anyone can sign up to via Google's Feedburner Service.

At Law Primary School the school Web site blog was given as an example of good practice in a recent National School Inspection report by HMIE. This has given other schools confidence to develop a similar model. The sharing of good practice is also a very important component of social media adoption in schools.

2. Home-School Communication

Some schools have been very progressive in social media adoption and one of the European leaders in this field is Saltash.net Community College in Cornwall, UK.

You only have to look at the Saltash.net home page to see they are forward-thinking and proactive when it comes to social media adoption. Parents and the wider school community can get updates on school news via the Saltash.net twitter account, pupils and staff upload work, assignments and achievements to the school's YouTube channel (effectively creating a school television station) and you can even 'like' the school on their Facebook page.

The school also has a farm animal enclosure and you can visit the pigs and chickens 24/7 via the school webcams. If you're lucky enough you can also attend one of the school's live broadcasts via twitcam (an online video streaming service). You can even contribute financially to school projects via paypal (an online payment service owned by eBay).

Other schools are also making use of live video streaming services such as Qik. For example, Musselburgh Grammar School has broadcast a live music event from the school's drama studio to other classrooms in the school. As the event was not open to the wider community parents and friends of the pupils involved could also join the live broadcast online and watch their children perform. The video was also archived for those who could not tune it at the time. Schools wishing to copy ideas like this need to be mindful of copyright laws, in particular the difference between performance rights and broadcast rights.
3. Setting up School Social Media Accounts

When setting up social media accounts for your school it is really important not to become reliant on just one person for account management. This may mean that the passwords for accounts are shared across a variety of people. It is also important that social media communication is not seen as being any different to other forms of whole school communication.

_The siloing of social media and traditional communication is a known barrier to adoption in schools and education._

4. Mobile Apps

62% of 12-15 year olds in the UK now own a smartphone, and so mobile devices have never been more involved in the social media mix. While management of these can prove challenging for schools, mobile devices also provide opportunities to improve communication.

Some schools, for example Porchester Junior School in Nottingham have also developed a school mobile phone app to help keep young people, parents and wider stakeholders up-to-date with what is going on at the school.

Services such as e4education.co.uk allow you to develop school news Web site apps in a cost-effective way without the need for app development expertise.

5. Whole School Policies

The use of Social Media for whole school communication needs to be included within the whole school communications policy and not as part of a separate social media policy.

A key consideration here is to ensure that you have permission from parents to share information online about their children (if this is what you are intending to do). If you do not feel comfortable sharing pictures of children working or children first names via your school social media channels then there are still lots of things that you can share about your school online (eg: events, key dates, anonymous examples of children's work, etc.)

Further information on school policies are covered in Section Six of this eBook.
In chapter one of this eBook we discussed some common characteristics of social media. These characteristics included:

- social media **challenges traditional models**
- social media allows people to **communicate**
- social media allows people to **collaborate**
- social media gives people an **audience**
- social media services often **remove hierarchy** and are **built from the bottom up**
- social media is **open and transparent**

It is important to remember these characteristics, as they are also common characteristics associated with education reform.

Many countries globally are trying to create classrooms that challenge traditional models and reverse the hierarchy, allow young people to communicate and collaborate, that provide authentic audience for children's work and exist within systems that are both open and transparent.

_This means that by embracing the use of social media tools for learning and teaching we can start to build a culture that may help contribute to the reform of our school systems._

This chapter examines some examples of how social media has been used successfully to enhance learning and teaching.

1. Cultural Relevance

Young people are engaged when they are learning about things or with things that they can relate to or that are relevant to them. Social media is highly culturally relevant at the moment for young people (from Facebook to the Xbox Live) and harnessing these tools for education can develop powerful contexts for learning.

Social media is also highly relevant across society. In the UK in 2011, **eight out of the ten** most popular search terms were directly linked to a social website. Facebook was the most popular search term in the UK.
2. Real-time Data

As all experienced educators know one ingredient of a successful lesson is to try to use up-to-date, real and authentic data rather than contrived data that young people can not relate to. Twitter is a good social media service to help with this because you can ask your Twitter followers to provide you with data that can then be used within a lesson.

One example of this is the Twitter snow lesson where a teacher's Twitter network was asked where they lived and if it was snowing. The tweets were plotted on to a Google Map and then the map imported into Google Earth where the real-time satellite imagery could be overlaid onto the map. The pattern that emerged provided an excellent context for discussing the weather, weather patterns and weather systems.

Another example of how Twitter has been used in Maths can be found here.

As well as collecting data from Twitter followers there are a number of Twitter accounts that regularly provide information that can be used in classes.

One example of this is the UK War Cabinet from the UK National Archives. By visiting or following this Twitter account you can watch the events of WWII unfold 70 years to the day through the original Cabinet Papers. It is a good example of how comparative real-time data can also be engaging for children and young people. Another great live example is Titanic in Real Time which document the journey of the Titanic from its launch to its fate exactly 100 years to the day.

3. Collaboration

Social media tools can also be used to encourage collaboration. Google Apps for Education and Google Plus provide some great (and free) collaboration tools to assist with learning and teaching.

Google Docs (which is part of the Google Apps for Education suite) provides real-time collaboration for students and staff working on word-processing documents, spreadsheets and presentations. You can have up to 50 people collaborating in real time within a document.

Well-managed collaboration on student projects normally results in an improved output and increased student pride. Meaningful collaboration is also a vital skill within enterprise education.

Google Plus can equip classrooms with a free ten-seat videoconference solution to allow face-to-face collaboration across geography, time zones and classrooms. Along with other services, such as Skype in the Classroom, social media video conferencing provides a great opportunity to beam experts into your classroom.
4. Audience

Social media can also be used to provide an authentic audience for children's work. A good place to start might be the production of a Wikipedia Page for your school or an article for something in your local area.

Writing, re-writing or editing an article about your school in Wikipedia can easily be the output of a well researched cross-curricular project and at the same time it is likely to improve the image and marketing of your school (Wikipedia is very popular in Google rankings).

This type of task is also hugely empowering for students. How often do they normally get to publish to the largest encyclopaedia in the world?

Classroom blogs or blogs used as ePortfolio can also be used to generate audience for young people's work. Leamore Primary School in Walsall, UK is a great example of this. Each class has their own class blog and each pupil has their own blog which is used as an ePortfolio of their best work and reflections on learning. The ePortfolio Blogs are password protected for safety reasons but parents have access to the password so they can see what their children have been learning about.

Another way to provide audience for students work is through sites like YouTube - effectively creating a school television station. A good example of this is the Drummond Community High School, Edinburgh, UK Animation Club.
1. Personal Learning Networks

Much like the term 'Social Media' there has been a lot written about the definition of 'Personal Learning Networks' over the years. Some of the pioneering research in this field has been completed by Dr Alec Couros, University of Regina, Canada.

Dr Couros argues that most typical teacher networks are one way and that teachers are delivered information on professional development and professional learning. He also talks about the rise of the 'networked teacher' where due to the increase in social media tools available for teachers professional learning and professional learning becomes two-way, driven by dialogue and as a result more open and reflective.

The key thing to remember about any Personal Learning Network is that they are, by definition, personal and depend on the interests and willingness of the individual to engage. When considering the use of social media to develop Personal Learning Networks it may be useful to break them down into three component parts.

The first of these is face-to-face, even in the Internet age and with the rise of social media you can't actually beat sitting down and talking to someone. Trusted professional feedback is also often born as a result of trusted relationships between colleagues.

The second component is one of closed digital communities. These are digital closed communities of practice where people may not know each other but they are connected through interest (examples might include TES Forums and the Microsoft Partners in Learning Network).

The last components are digital open communities that are often un-moderated and are built around tools that have not been designed for education but have been adopted by educators. Examples of these tools include Blogs, Social Bookmarking and Open Content Repositories.

Some of these tools and services will now be discussed and exemplified below.

2. Online Communities

Online communities normally require registration and have been designed for a specific purpose to link people together via interest or for a specific project. The best online communities are ones that are allowed to grow organically over time because the users suggest new ideas or topics of discussion to keep the community vibrant and up-to-date.

Examples of online communities include:

- Microsoft Partners in Learning Network - a community for teachers and school leaders interested in using technology in education.
- TES Forums - a place where subject teachers discuss issues, upload and share resources.
- Promethean Planet - a place to share and discuss Interactive Whiteboard Resources.
- EUN Community - a hub for European Union led projects as well as providing a facility for users to create their own communities of practice.
3. Using RSS

Reading about other people's work and their reflections on classroom practice can be hugely valuable to your own professional development. Globally thousands of people are blogging about what is going on in their classrooms every day. The trick is trying to keep track of the blogs that interest you and to be automatically updated if someone posts something new or interesting.

Blogs produce an RSS feed. This means that you can aggregate content from a variety of blogs into one place using an RSS Reader, such as Google Reader.

You will need a Google Account (which is free) to start using Google Reader. By using an RSS reader you can easily follow hundreds of blogs from educators around the world but only have to visit one website (your personal Google Reader page) to check for up-dates.

CommonCraft has produced a number of great little videos on using social media tools including one on RSS and one on using Google Reader.

4. Social Bookmarking

Social Bookmarking is when you save the URL of a Web site that you like to another Web site rather than to your favourites on your Web browser. The advantage of this (and where there 'social' comes into play) is that you can see if anyone else who is using the service has also saved the Web site that you have just saved. This is useful because users who have saved the same Web site as you will have often also save other Web sites that you will be interested in.

This makes Social Bookmarking another great way to collaborate with people globally, to swap ideas and useful websites that you have found to help aid school improvement.

CommonCraft have also produced a nice video to tell you about a Social Bookmarking service called Delicious.

5. Searching the Future Web

Google Alerts allows you to receive automatic email notifications any time that a key word or phrase you've asked Google to look for is published on the Internet. You can also create an RSS feed for alert terms (see RSS above). The use of Alerts is an important 3rd Millennium research skill and these are already used widely in higher education.

As well as setting up alerts for professional interests e.g.: "formative assessment," "outdoor learning," and "international school links", it is also useful for schools to have a Google Alert set up around their own school name.

Used in this way Alerts can be used as an early warning system if someone writes about or mentions your school online. Importantly, it's also a really good way to track wider student achievements. For example, many children take part in activities outside of the school and some of these activities are really impressive and worthy of recognition. These achievements are often written about in the local media and normally the child's school is mentioned. As most papers are digitized, Google Alerts gives you an opportunity to receive this information as it is published. This is often before you have a chance to read a paper copy of the local news.
6. Micro Networks

Micro networks such as Twitter are a great way to receive short and concise advice, recommendations and resources from educators around the world. Tony Parkin (former ICT Adviser to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) has written a good article that provides a good oversight of how you can find educators to follow on Twitter.

Hash (#) tags are also used within the Twitter community to bind conversation together. Most conferences now have a Twitter Tag and you can you services like Twazzup.com to search for a #tag and then aggregate all of the tweets and images shared on Twitter from the event.

Other micro networks that are worth exploring for professional development purposes include Slideshare and SlideBoom. These are online communities where people share presentation slides and they are very popular with educators.

7. The Importance of Recommendation

As the above notes demonstrate there are an awful lot of professional development opportunities that are available on the Web and many of these are linked to social media services.

However, just like any social service, recommendations about a product are important. This is similar to recommending a product or a seller after you have bought something on Amazon but within this context we are recommending professional development opportunities to others.

CPD Scotland is National Resource that has been developed by Education Scotland. One of its services is CPD Find, this is a national directory of paid for and free CPD opportunities. What is interesting about it is that it is not just a catalogue of courses because some of the courses have been endorsed by peers and you can see what other people think of the course content, delivery and value for money.

Including a system for open peer feedback and recommendations should be an important consideration for anyone who is interested in developing their own CPD portal. It also encourages teacher who attend the courses to become more reflective.

8. Research

Research into the use of social media for CPD is limited because the tools and service evolve so quickly. However, this report, produced in 2011 by The Pearson Centre for Policy and Learning and NoTosh Ltd and titled ‘Tweeting for Teachers,’ provides a number of useful case study examples of how social media can support teacher professional development.
#5- INTERNET SAFETY AND RESPONSIBLE USE

1. Internet Safety and Responsible Use

Whenever we talk about Internet Safety we must also talk about Responsible Use. Similarly, when we talk about the safe use of social media we must also talk about the responsible use of social media.

Unfortunately some people still believe that the only way to keep children safe online is to ‘lock and block’ access to parts of the Internet through over-restrictive Web filtering based on lists of inappropriate URLs. The reality of this is that this doesn’t remove the actual dangers (perceived or otherwise) and it also makes it almost impossible for educators to deliver key Internet Safety and Responsible Use messages.

A fundamental requirement to keeping children and young people safe online is to make sure that they have received an appropriate education in how to use tools and services appropriately. They also need to understand the wider issues of privacy and how to report if they experience something they do not feel comfortable with.

In addition, using smart Web filtering technology that can identify inappropriate content in real time, eliminates having to block large and potentially useful parts of the Web.

The Cloud Learn Research Report from Heppell.net and the Nominet Trust provides a useful insight to UK schools who have started to challenge the culture of ‘locking and blocking’.

2. Understanding Terminology

One important consideration of any aspect of Internet Safety and Responsible Use, including the responsible use of social media, is terminology. If we want to help keep children and young people safe online we must all be speaking the same language and this should include an understanding of tools and services that children and young people use.

When exploring tools and services it is important that adults ask what Web sites children use, but also how they use the Web site and what the Web site is used for. Only by understanding the purpose of social media tools will we be able to offer children and young people appropriate advice and support to help them stay safe.

The meaning of a word ‘friend’ is an interesting example of how technology may be changing language over time. A friend to an adult is likely to be someone they trust, someone they are happy to meet for a coffee, someone they are happy to invite to their house etc… Yet a friend to a young person may just be a connection on a social networking space. Establishing a common language is really important.

3. Privacy

Language is also really important when it comes to the term ‘privacy’. Recent research such as the Pew Internet Report suggests that young people are more concerned about privacy than ever before. However, although many young people will tell you they are concerned about their privacy online very few young people can actually tell you what privacy is. It’s a good example of young people telling you what they want you to hear, rather than actually understanding the meaning of what you are asking.
In Europe we have laws that protect our privacy but the reality of it is lots of people just give their data away. Other people (including our friends on social networks) also give data / information about other people away as well.

We often just don't know what we have signed up for when we 'tick' the small print at the bottom of the terms and conditions of a new Social Media Service. Helping young people understand terms & conditions, privacy and what privacy setting means is an important aspect of keeping young people safe online.

4. Digital Footprints

Digital footprints are the digital trail that you leave behind you on the Internet whenever you comment on a blog; share something on a social networking space; or upload an image or video. Other people can also contribute to your digital footprint by uploading things about you that are linked to your name or profile. An example of this might be when you appear in a newspaper that is then digitised or a friend ‘tagging’ a photograph of you on Facebook.

The majority of people have got a digital footprint these days (even if they don't know it yet!) and almost all young people will have a digital footprint that will get bigger as they get older. Digital footprints are not something that we can stop but we need to make sure a young person's digital footprint leaves a good impression. This is particularly important when it comes to employability where increasing employers are looking at the social networking profiles of perspective employees as well as job application forms.

One important emerging trend is that many very young children have got digital footprints. These are footprints that have often been created by their parents. This is backed up by an interesting piece of research on the AVG Blog which found:

- The average age at which a child acquires an online presence courtesy of their parents is at six months, and by the time they are two 81% of children have some kind of ‘digital footprint’.
- A third (33%) of children have had images posted online from birth
- A quarter (23%) of children have even had their pre-birth scans uploaded to the Internet by their parents
- Seven per cent (7%) of babies have even had an email address created for them by their parents
- More than 70% of mothers said they posted baby and toddler images online to share with friends and family

The important consideration here is that we must make sure that parents receive information about responsible behaviour on social networking sites. This has to include education into the potential implications of creating digital footprints for their children.

Resources like the Internet Archive Wayback Machine can be useful in helping young people understand that it is almost impossible to delete anything from the Internet.

5. Social Media Policy

Internet Safety and Responsible Use needs to be included in your Social Media Policy. But even more important than this is acknowledging the Internet and other Digital Technology in your schools Child Protection and Learning & Teaching Policies.

We will look at creating a Social Media Policy in more detail in Section Six of this paper.
6. Social Media on the Curriculum

When trying to include social media in the curriculum it is important to emphasise that social media is just another tool that teachers can be use to motivate students and to enhance the teaching process.

One way that we can encourage young people to behave responsibly when using social media is for teachers to model the responsible use of social media tools during their normal classroom practice.

Teachers can put structures in place to help support learners in the use of social media which involve modelling behaviour, working jointly with children, developing rules and eventually leading to independent learning (supported by social media tools) that is built around a classroom culture of trust and respect.

There are also a number of resources to help teachers in Europe to deliver key messages around Internet Safety and Responsible Use. The European InSafe Network is a great place to start looking for resources to support you with your teaching.

Some other great resources support and advice have been developed by the Social Media Companies themselves, and include the Microsoft Privacy Centre, Google Family Safety Centre and the Facebook Help Centre.
1. Creating a Social Media Policy

The important thing to remember about social media policies is that there is absolutely no right or wrong way to write one. Your social media policy needs to reflect your organisation, who you wish to communicate with and what you feel comfortable doing.

You should also consider if you actually need a social media policy in the first place. Rather than a separate policy that silos social media as an ‘add on’ strategy it might be better just to include social media in some of your other school/institution policies and procedures. For example, social media and social networking should be mentioned and included in your school ICT Policy and your school Learning & Teaching Policy.

If you do decide to create your own standalone policy then the following list of rules to include will help you make a good start.

1. Introduce the purpose of social media
2. Be responsible for what you write
3. Be authentic
4. Consider your audience
5. Exercise good judgment
6. Understand the concept of community
7. Respect copyrights and fair use
8. Remember to protect confidential information
9. Bring value
10. Productivity matters

The above list was first published on the Mashable Web site and is designed for enterprise. But we can apply much of what is in the list to education.
Mashable.com is also a great Web site to subscribe to in your RSS Reader because its news items will keep you up-to-date with the latest social media tools and trends.

One country that is very progressive in the development of Social Media Policies is Australia, in particular Victoria. They have provided some good social media guidance on their Web site.

2. Challenging Opinion

One challenge that you will come up against what trying to adopt social media in your school or institution will be opinion. It seems that everyone has an opinion when it comes to social media and some of these opinions are more positive than others.

The key here is good communication. It doesn't really matter how you communicate with stakeholders (letter, email, Facebook) but you need to make sure that everyone in your learning community knows that you are going to be trying something new. People are often anxious about change and this includes changing of practice due to technology adoption.

Where possible capitalise on good news stories about the positive use of social media in school and education and piggyback off the back of these stories to explain why social media adoption is the right thing to do for your institution.

Information evenings for parents on new practice, curriculum change and Internet Safety & Responsible Use can also be helpful to keep parents informed.

3. Technical Challenges

Social media adoption is also likely to present a number of technical challenges particularly around content filtering and security. Therefore, a good relationship between school management, teachers and corporate ICT Departments will be vital to ensure that there is a clear understanding and agreement on any technical changes that may be required.

Many education authorities have been so concerned about the risks from social media that they have a blanket filtering policy that blocks access to all social media websites. Clearly this will require some significant work with the corporate ICT team to have the policy relaxed to allow controlled access.

One consideration is that ‘locking and blocking’ may not solve the problem of irresponsible social media use. It could simply hide any problems where the consequences could be potentially a lot worse. For example, students may become frustrated with a blanket ban on social media and attempt to bypass filtering restrictions through the use of anonymous proxy sites. This increases risk as once connected to a proxy site, students will have unfiltered access to any content, not just social media pages. More information on the risks posed by proxies is available in this white paper from Bloxx.

With modern Web filtering technology it is now possible to provide more granular access to social media sites. For example, it is often possible to allow access to read but not post comments or get access to a page but have games blocked. In addition, flexible policy management features can also be used to allow access for specific year groups at particular times.
One other concern for corporate ICT teams can be around the increased security risks associated with social media sites. For example in Nov 2011, a security vulnerability in Facebook was exploited by hackers that resulted in violent and pornographic being posted on users’ profile pages. Other social media platforms have also been exploited to deliver malware that if not detected could cause significant damage to computers or the loss of important data.

To minimize these associated security risks, you should work with your ICT team to ensure that anti-malware software is deployed at the endpoints – PCs, laptops etc, and at your network gateway level.

The Cloud Learn Research Report from Heppell.net and the Nominet Trust provides a good insight to how schools can work with corporate ICT departments to deliver the best possible outcomes for learners.

4. Cultural Challenges
The biggest challenge that you will have when it comes to social media adoption in schools will be cultural challenges. Changing the culture of any organisation is hard, and schools and other education institutions are no exception to this.

When trying to introduce change into any organisation you need to make sure that you take people (employees) with you.

If you are serious about introducing social media into your school you need to win the hearts and minds of school staff. The only way that you will do this is if you can demonstrate impact and give clear and concise reasons about why you are keen to adopt social media. The reasons for social media adoption are to improve school communication with stakeholders, to enhance learning in teaching that leads to improved motivation and increased attainment and to develop virtual CPD opportunities.

One staged model to help with social media adoption in you school or other education institute might be:

1. Agree a shared vision and purpose of why you want to adopt social media in your school. Make sure that everyone is speaking the same language and you have a localised definition of what your school thinks social media is and the benefits it can bring. Some of these ideas were covered in section one of this eBook.

2. Start with the use of social media at whole school level. This includes your school Web site and other things that were discussed during section two of this eBook. This will get your school recognised as being forward-thinking but also send clear messages to staff that the use of social media is acceptable.

3. Once staff members have started to accept social media, focus on how social media can be used to enhance learning and teaching. Some of these ideas were covered in section three of this eBook. It is important to remember do not focus on the tool but what the tool can do if it is used in the right way to improve the classroom experience.

4. When social media is being more widely used to enhance learning and teaching encourage staff to consider using social media tools for professional development (section four of this eBook). Using social media in this way can help link staff by professional interest.

5. Throughout the process emphasis to all members of the school community that Internet Safety and Responsible Use and providing advice on the safe use of social media must be the responsibility of all staff. We covered a number of strategies in section five of this eBook.

The above stepped model is useful as it takes staff on a journey of engagement from information sharing to empowering. It also means that you can introduce different aspects of social media adoption as people become comfortable with the tools and the terminology rather than providing all the information and resources at once.
CONCLUSION

The evidence contained in this eBook must surely be enough to convince even the most reluctant user that social media has tremendous potential in education.

Combined with appropriate technology solutions what is required now is for educators to take risks in the classroom and unlock the power of social media to create better learning environments for children and young people.

Remember we need more classrooms that challenge traditional models and reverse the hierarchy, allow young people to communicate and collaborate, that provide authentic audience for children's work and exist within systems that are both open and transparent.

The adoption of social media in our schools will help us on our journey.