**The Use of Social Media in the Classroom**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the controversial issue on the use of social media in the classroom. It compares arguments for and against this topic. This paper offers examples for how to effectively use social media in the classroom to keep up with technological trends.

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**Introduction:**

“Fewer than 20 percent of teachers use social media in the classroom, although most do personally, ” (Bidwell, 1). US News reported on the controversial issue of teachers using technological tools in the classroom, revealing that there are both positives and negatives about incorporating teaching with social media. Social media usage is increasing rapidly, and proponents for using it in the classroom argue that that it can help connect the classroom to the outside world, and also keep up with technology. Those arguing against the usage claim that social media should be limited for personal usage, and conflicts may arise due to the unclear boundaries.

Technological tools, such as tablets, smart boards, and laptops, have been gaining more popularity in classroom rather than social media tools. However, many ideas on how to use social media as an educational tool in the classroom have emerged.

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**Social Media and Communication**

Communication amongst individuals has become essential for human development and interaction. Communication, whether it is in verbal, non-verbal, or written form, is a part of every day life. Today, the word communication has a new meaning. We use social media to communicate with people all around the world. Through this powerful tool, we are able to meet new people, form new relationships, and keep those relationships throughout life. Most importantly, we can use social media at our own leisure and convenience. We can use social media as a way to connect, share, and collaborate information. Social media can be used for computer-based interactions, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. It can also be used as an information-sharing tool such as Wikipedia, or sharing pictures or ideas such as Pinterest.

Social media has become an integral part of life. New Internet tools are constantly being posted and updated, and it is a controversial topic to discuss if social media is taking over society. It is important that we all keep up with innovative technology, including the newest social media tools, to stay connected and informed in life. Some argue that we should educate children about social media, while others believe that social media should stay out of the classroom. The use of social media in education can be used positively, while others say there is no need for the use of social media to carry over into education.

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**Arguments against the use of social media in the classroom**

The argument that social media should not be used in education is based on the fact that schools should be separate from technology. Some argue that social media is dangerous, and school settings are designed to benefit students and protect them. Schools take on the responsibility of giving knowledge to students that can be used in and out of the classroom. Social media often publicizes a lot of information, and many take it too far. Parents, teachers, and students often disclose information that cannot be taken back once it is put on the Internet. Teens try to catch the attention of their peers, emulate their behaviors, and often take it too far. They put themselves at risk to meet and interact with strangers, and experience harassment or cyber bullying. Social media sites often have age restrictions, however, they are not very strict. Many groups on social media are unhealthy and can be accessed by unwanted users.

This argument that social media is unsafe is valid, however, there are many ways to prevent the dangerous consequences involved. It is imperative that we inform students of the potential risks of using social media, such as receiving messages or invitations from strangers, receiving false information, and information disclosure. It is also imperative that we inform students of ways to avoid the consequences, such as by keeping profiles private, or blocking and reporting and harmful interactions. The goal of social media is to allow others to communicate, share, and explore the Internet with comfort and leisure. If we block social media use in classrooms to prevent danger, it essentially blocks the opportunity for learning. Students will not have access to the social web, and will not learn properly how to use the Internet safely. Cyber safety is an important skill for all Internet users, and if we do not allow children to practice it in schools, they can be exposed to danger. Many say that a teacher communicating with their students outside of the classroom is inappropriate and dangerous. However, there are closed systems described by Tomaszewski, in which schools operate the social media sites. Only people within the school have access to these sites. Examples of these include EdMoto and Saywire, which facilitates communication for learning, but protects students and teachers at the same time.

Others argue that social media is solely designed for entertainment, not educational purposes. In *Edelman Value, Engagement and Trust in the Era of Social Entertainment Survey*,” half of the respondents to the survey responded that social media is a form of entertainment. It is true that social media exposes users to an immense amount of celebrities and gossip. This is a part of everyday life. However, faculty, teachers, and parents use social media as tools to enhance their own learning. Celebrities and gossip fill up social media, but so do informative articles.

Another argument against the use of social media in classrooms is that it increases off-task behavior. Students will spend majority of their time on these sites rather than in a textbook or conducting research. However, using social media can also be a way to teach multi-tasking or time management. Social media is just an activity that needs to be used for learning and leisure. The correct use of social media increases communication, collaboration, and efficiency. It also allows students to be creative and expressive, such as on their personal pages.

Perhaps the biggest argument against the use of social media in classrooms is that schools are supposed to educate children on certain topics in the curriculum. However, schools are also supposed to produce well-informed, educated students who can become active participants in society. Our society is constantly using and keeping up with technology, and it is important that we show them that we can incorporate academic development with the real world.

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**Arguments for the use of social media in the classroom**

Many teachers are using social media effectively in the classrooms, proving that this can be a great tool. With the use of online guidelines, many useful resources, support groups, and ideas posted on the Internet, teachers can learn from each other to use social media as a tool in the classroom. “Social media is another tool that you can use to make your classroom more engaging, relevant, and culturally diverse,” (Edutopia,1). Many teachers actually create their own Twitter or Facebook accounts for the class. Students, teachers, and parents can access these sites and tweet or post updates as a class. It is imperative that teachers establish online guidelines prior to using these sites. Students can comment and stay engaged with their peers, teachers, and the material. Students can provide feedback and reflect on what happened in and outside the classroom. It can become similar to a classroom blog, or it can be just for posting questions and polls. It can be used as a study group as well.

A specific physics teacher, Michelle Gould Burgess, is an advocate of integrating social media in the classroom. She calls her teaching method a “flipped classroom” because high level thinking tasks are done in the classroom. More advanced level activities are done in the classroom. Burgess keeps a blog, in which her students are subscribed to. All homework assignments are emailed, and posted online. This encourages the use of social media and the mastery of email. The students are learning the material, as well as how to keep up with the 21st century and the growing use of social media.

“Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter are in the [top 15 sites on the World Wide Web](http://mostpopularwebsites.net/1-50/).” Adam Renfro encourages teachers to make the classroom connected and meaningful to all of their students. Using social media in the classroom allows real-word experiences to be emulated in the classroom. It teaches them technological skills. He recommends using Twitter to post calendar notices, tips, collaborations, and polls. He suggests letting students tweet during class by creating a specific Twitter hashtag for that class. Students will participate more! This can also be done with a Facebook page for the specific class in which students are connected to. In fact, the Twitter and Facebook pages can be connected!

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**Conclusion**:

The use of social media in classrooms is a controversial topic, however, effectively using this tool is beneficial to both students and teachers. Teachers do not need to reconstruct lesson plans to start using social media. Integrating social media into the classroom can start small! It will encourage connectivity and participation, and will eventually start to become just another tool in the classroom. Teachers will step out of their comfort zone and students will become excited about learning. The use of social media in the classrooms enforces that students are learning in and out of the classroom.

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