

Getting Started with Social Media in the Classroom



■ Social media is a powerful tool for connecting communities and communicating to others. EdTechTeacher Shawn McCusker presents a wealth of ideas for harnessing that power in the classroom.



One of the most important reasons that students come to school is to learn how to communicate effectively. Today one of the most powerful forms of communication is social media.

The rapid rise of social media in our society means that often our students are using technology that their parents may not fully understand or even know exists, leaving students to learn how to use them without the support of parents to help them navigate the process.

Some schools, (and the nation of France) have made the decision to ban social media from schools but doing so can leave students unsupported and without guidance in trying to understand these powerful platforms.

Some of the incivility that exists in electronic spaces today results of the lack of common, shared norms for behaviour in these environments. This state of 'normlessness' is called [ANOMIE](#). Schools are in a unique position to serve society in this capacity. When schools choose to embrace the use of social media as a tool to showcase learning, they begin to model the norms of appropriate and effective use for their students in much the same



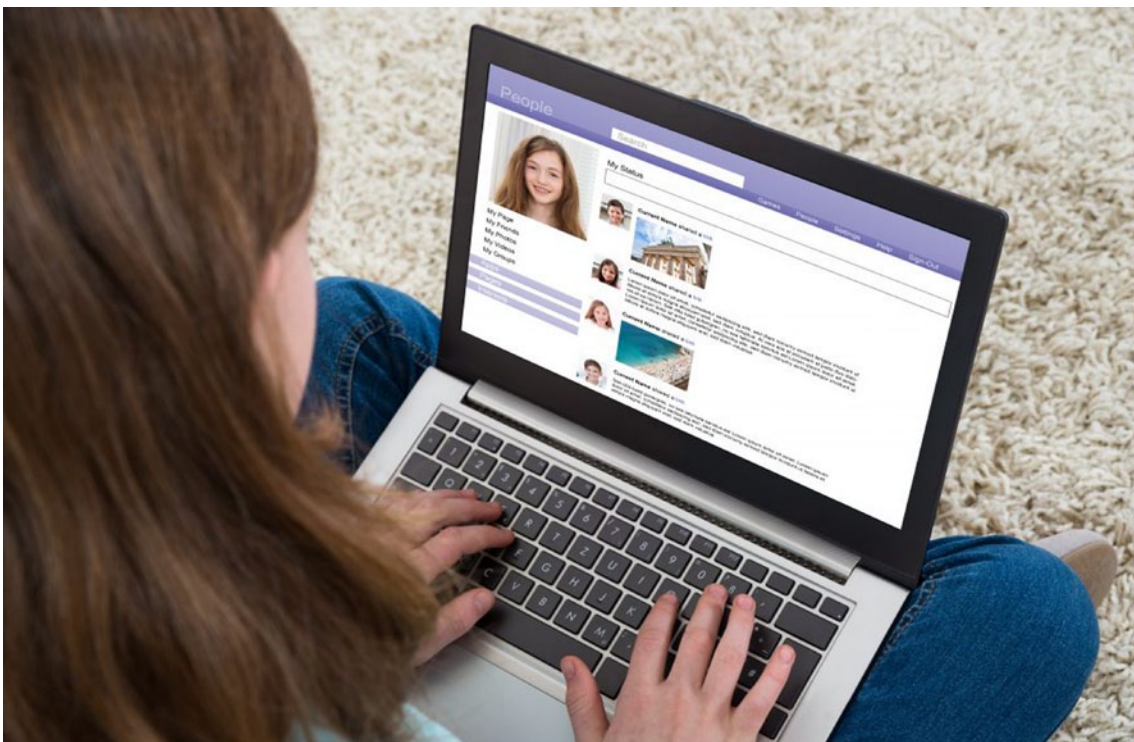
way that they model the norms of speech, dress, and so many other important areas of life. Once prepared, students can begin to leverage the powerful pro-social potential of social media to share ideas, find their public voices and contribute to society.

So how can you as a teacher begin this process? There are many ways to begin using social media in the classroom that can teach values, while at the same time making learning experiences powerful for students. Here are some ideas that might help your class or your school to get started.

Younger Grades:

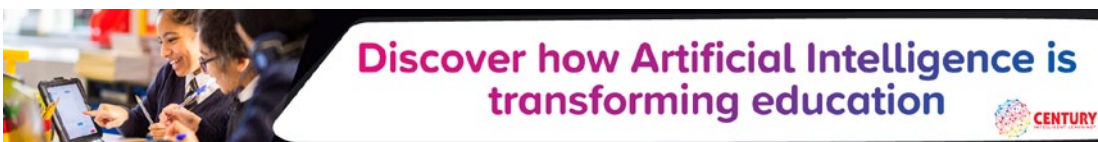
- Having a shared class account managed by the teacher allows for discussion of what it means to share publicly.
- Teachers can then work with students to fashion and share tweets. Some teachers have had students write paper tweets as a class, choosing which tweets they will share.
- One elementary math teacher created a twitter account for her dog. Periodically ‘the dog’ would share math challenges with the class. Once the class had solved the problem they would share their answer back through twitter.
- Have students craft a statement of what was learned to be shared on the class accounts at the end of the day. This can give parents a starting point to discuss the day with their children.

- Classes can connect with other classes across the nation and world to comment on their shared reflections.
- Using the class account, reach out to experts to answer questions that arise in the course of study. Beyond individual experts, museums and educational institutions are often eager to connect and share with younger students.
- [Mystery Skype](#) offers a chance for classes to connect with others around the world. These connections can then be maintained through class social media accounts.



Middle Grades:

- Have students create tweets to promote upcoming school events on the school's social media accounts. This allows them to represent the school and to distinguish between formal and informal sharing. An individual shares information differently than an institution or organisation does.



- Learning management systems (LMSs) create closed discussions and chats that can be good practice for communication that can be shared publicly in the future. This is good practice for understanding when their comments are public or private. In addition, it sets the stage for discussions about formal or informal language and the norms of online commenting.
- While studying Geography, connect with a school from the country or region being studied to ask them questions.
- Art teachers can create blogs, a Padlet or an Instagram account to showcase collections of their students' work to share with parents and other in the community.
- Music education programs can use social media to share their performances. Tools like [Soundcloud](#) can be used to store and share this work.
- Social media can bring student art and music to a willing audience regularly in a way that will be more meaningful to both the students and their audience.

Upper Grades:

- Gain empathy by directly reaching out to those who are living moments of historical significance. When world events are taking place, find someone there and ask them what it is really like to live in that moment.
- Conduct online discussions as you read. Using hashtags, teachers can have students conduct book clubs on twitter sharing their thoughts on the text with classmates.
- Connect with authors. Many authors are very active on social media and are willing to join discussions and answer questions about their work and their writing process.
- Many authors arrange to video chat with classes. This can allow classes to move beyond consuming literature and really understand what it takes to create it.
- One Science teacher had his class participate in [Organelle Wars](#). Groups had to create propaganda campaigns to argue that their assigned organelle was the most important. Their work caught the attention of experts around the world and led to conversations that took learning to a whole new level.
- Connect with local national or world leaders. These leaders are quite willing to reach out on social media and interact with their constituents, regardless of age. In addition to getting a response directly from their elected officials,



it offers a chance for teachers to demonstrate respectful questioning and accountability.

- A list of UK government agencies and officials' twitter accounts. <https://twitter.com/tweetminster/lists/ukgovernmentdepartments/members?lang=en>
- A list of US members of Congress on twitter: <https://twitter.com/verified/lists/us-congress>

Teachers can ask students to read and evaluate information shared by these government leaders and agencies via social media in order to check them for accuracy and to identify perspective and bias.



More ideas for students of all levels:

- Schools are communities that need the support of the communities that they serve. Regularly sharing can make the work of the school open and transparent to the community.
- Many types of student work can become audio. Share student podcasts to showcase their work. It is not common for people to read a 3-page essay on social media, but sharing podcasts is a popular way to consume information.
- Use blogs to connect with other classrooms from different regions and encourage feedback between the groups.
- Use the polling features (twitter and Instagram) to ask questions and gather data to use in math science or social studies.
- Use sites like [Visible Tweets](#) to follow a hashtag.
- Use [Padlet](#) to [group student work](#) and allow students to reflect on classwork as a whole.

Students should not be left to learn how to safely navigate social media by themselves. By carefully choosing to use social media in the classroom, schools and institutions can impart values and behaviours that promote safe and appropriate use, while at the same time connecting students to the world around them and providing an authentic audience for the meaningful work that they do.



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