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Principles of engagement that stem from students' social media use

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ABSTRACT

Social media presents new challenges for integration into schooling and curriculum. How can teachers avoid an add-on and/or teacher-centric approach to technology; one which effectively ignores the cultural worlds of students? In searching for a more student-centred approach to encourage contribution and innovation, this response to Pangrazio identifies three pedagogical principles. These comprise maintaining supportive relationships, valuing contributions and group work with friends.

Most often, educators begin to 're-think' education, schooling or teaching as a response to new media. Educators tend to add what's going on in society to what's going on within the curriculum. For example, when with the advent of the information super highway, sometimes called the Internet, we added it to knowledge-building retrieval practices. At first children began collecting content on various curriculum topics by 'Googling it'. This has been confirmed in Hsu's (2016) study of K-6 year teachers who rely heavily on viewing websites for representation and information practices. The idea of 'technologising' learning by adding-on a technology component to established practices with no actual enhancement to learning or pedagogical reformation has long been occurring in schools (Lankshear & Bigum, 1998; Prestridge, 2012). There is not much Google can't answer! However, some teachers who have gone beyond 'adding' technology have tried to maintain the learning integrity towards research as an inquiry process (Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur & Sendurur, 2012). Rather than 'clip & glue' practices, teachers have adapted the integration of the internet by developing complex questions that Google can't answer. Developing students' skills in accessing, interpreting and evaluating 'information as data' has shifted how students engage with this media and this is underpinned by how teachers design learning activities.

The same can be said for social media and how teachers are currently re-thinking its integration into schooling and the curriculum. To 'add' social media as a text, to be analysed, interpreted and evaluated for its generic structure suggests a simple integration approach. It seems when a new technology emerges we tend to integrate or add it to what we currently do. What is done in society is done in the curriculum to add flavour, to make it more relevant for our socially-mediated students and/or to 'teach' about the implications of its use. For example, I have witnessed approaches to understanding *Romeo and Juliet* prose through a texting sequence. By texting Shakespeare it may be assumed by the teacher that more meaningful and or relevant learning occurs. Additionally, by analysing the structure of a social media text, an 'Insta' or a Snap Chat post, suggests a limited 'add-on' approach that does little to leverage how students are engaging in these environments that may affect or reshape schooling, teaching and the curriculum.

Teenagers are now living in a world where access to the Internet and a range of digital devices is a necessity often considered before other fundamental life requirements such as food. When walking into a restaurant or hotel the password to free wifi is an important currency. In the US, 92% of Tweens go online daily (Lenhart, 2015) and access to the internet becomes a search for a social lifeline and

data is considered a valuable commodity. Even though access to social media has increased, findings from nearly ten years ago still remain comparable today. Tweens' 'out-of-school' use of technology is more frequent through use of social networking (Facebook, YouTube), messaging and gaming, however, in the majority of cases it is not complex (Luckin et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2014). Tweens are digital technology users, performing basic functions such as communication – posting/liking/commenting – for entertainment and googling web-based information outside of school. Similarly, inside school, formal learning technologies tend to be for word processing and web searching, again supporting basic functionality (Wang et al., 2014). Using technology for complex tasks to support creativity and productivity, such as blogging, web editing and game design is still ad hoc and infrequent in schools, unless directed by a specialised curriculum.

The approaches to adding social media to the curriculum presented by Luci Pangrazio are heavily teacher-centric. The discussion suggests that teachers incorporate social media as a text and interpret the structure, use and ideology of this literacy device. Advocates of this approach also focus on safety concerns and privacy as the school's responsibility to tell students how to behave. This approach is driven by teachers for students. Alternatively, I would like to suggest an approach that takes heed of the student in the technology-pedagogy paradigm. Much of what we discuss and present in education policy and materials comes from adult dialogue prescribed for the child. Rather, a focus which acknowledges students and how they are engaging with the technology, not the technology itself, provides an alternative to a teacher-centric model. Principles of engagement, rather than incorporation of social media into lessons, is offered here as opportunities for new ways of learning within existing curriculum, schooling and teaching. Three principles are suggested that are driven from student social media engagement (Prestridge, in press):

1. Maintaining supportive relationships
2. Valuing contributions
3. Group work with friends.

Simply put, students who engage in social media are active participants who want to develop and build relationships. In socially-mediated spaces they are valued by their peer group and gain an insight into how they each live, act, think and connect. As active participants in their socially-mediated worlds, they bring a sense of self, as a sense of purpose to the manner in which they want to interact in the school, with the teacher and their peers in the classroom. It is these ideas or principles around socially-mediated engagement that need to play a more important part in how teaching and learning is enacted using social media.

To illustrate how mediated social engagement can guide teaching and learning in a modern classroom the term 'contributor' will be used. In social media, contributions matter. They are the currency of engagement. Therefore, it is important that the contributions students make in the classroom are valued and activated by the teacher. Often in classrooms we see teachers in control of the learning, 'brushing off' ideas that are not in the direction they want the lesson to take. The teachers control the whiteboard and the content. Technology in the teacher's hands is used in teacher-centric ways. This is the same as, for example, when YouTube clips are chosen by the teacher. They are teacher-centric to illustrate a topic.

In trying to flip this, teachers could consider technology in the student's hands working with friends in interest based groups with guidance and support from the teacher. Approaches could involve crowdsourcing content from students and using this student-generated content as important sources for learning activities. Students need to be co-teachers and co-learners explaining and sharing their ideas, building new ones with their peers and the teacher. It is in the discussion, in the communication process, in which the student contributes their understandings that stimulates further thinking and problem solving when immersed with technologies. Students can explain, validate ideas, shape and re-

shape each other's thinking. The technology can make this visible and collaborative. Students working in teams contribute to the discussion of actions and thinking processes (Abrams, 2017). Through guided collaborative learning where technologies and learning pathways are in their control, students have the opportunity to contribute their ideas/concepts and also have the opportunity to 'talk' about those ideas, where they work as a team for a common goal.

Contributing should also be considered in terms of creating content, creating games, creating you tube clips on how to play, being producers in this social media world rather than only users or consumers. In the majority, students are consumers of other people's content. However, with such high-productivity software available on the internet or in the palms of their hands on smart phones, anyone can be a producer of content. Enabling students to be the creators of content, of YouTube clips as 'gamers', for instance, positions them as the innovators. But YouTube clips per se would only be authentic in the context of outside school game play. What needs to happen in school is the shift from being a consumer of content to a creator of content that is valued in the education community. This could happen through authentic problem-based or project-based work. These kinds of approaches have happened in schools and have been successful when students have been able to explore interests that are relevant to them. In other words, schooling and the curriculum has to be meaningful for the students. Team work, using technologies and critical thinking underpin such activities. This requires a contributing mindset, one that is evident in social media use but less evident in classrooms. What it may do is build the capability to be the contributor, the influencer, the innovator.

Thinking about social media and the use of technologies in this way positions the student as in control, 'doing' something purposeful with the technology around which discussion and experimentation is taking place. Jonassen's (1995) long-ago idea of being a 'designer' with technology aligns to being a creator or producer with students contributing to their learning. He reminds us of why being a contributor rather than a consumer is so important:

The people who learn the most from the design and development of instructional materials are the designers, not the learners for whom the materials are intended (p. 42).

If our students could: contribute more to the curriculum; have more control over the direction of their learning in school; provide ideas that are valued in class; and collaborate with friends on authentic projects, then we might see that these principles of engagement that are learning behaviours typical of being a participant in a community of learners, inside and outside school.

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Sarah Prestridge has been a researcher, university teacher educator and classroom teacher in the field of Educational Technologies for over 25 years. Her journey began with a rather large computer in her classroom where she tinkered with her grade 6 class on the use of simulation software in the early 90s. She ran an Edu-Tech Lighthouse project that examined ICT and Mathematics, studied her Masters in Educational Technologies and worked as a Curriculum Adviser for Education Queensland. Her PhD examined models of effective professional development to enable teachers to use technologies effectively in their classrooms. Her passion for leading others along the pathway of technology integration has been fuelled by the excitement both teachers and students generate while playing to learn. Sarah currently lectures in Educational Technologies at Griffith University, Australia.