

## Social Media-The New Place to Connect and Learn

There is no denying Social Media has changed the way we communicate and learn. It is a movement that is rapidly evolving, transcending cultural, generational, and international bounds. It is within the midst of this evolution that Educators are being challenged to find innovative and creative new ways to incorporate this growing phenomenon into their classrooms. Consider the following statistics (taken from Digital Insights) regarding the global presence of social media:

- Over 6 billion hours of video are watched each month on YouTube—that's almost an hour for every person on Earth
- Twitter has 255 million active users who collectively send 500 million tweets each and every day?
- There are more than 50 million Facebook Pages
- 20 billion photos have been uploaded to Instagram

Considering these statistics, it is clear that Social Media is not going away and will continue to be an integral part of our lives as well as our students. With that in mind here are a few ideas as to how we as Educators can use these tools for the power of good and teach our students to do the same:

- **Google Plus** is a tool that allows Educators to build an instant academic social network. With this tool users are offered a feature called "communities". This feature is a great way for teachers to expand their personal/professional networks through connecting and sharing resources with a wide audience of like-minded educators and teachers from all around the world. Here are a few Education Based Communities:
  - **Educational Technology**
  - **Google Apps for Education**
  - **School Technology Leadership**
- **KidBlog** Kidblog.org is one of many free tools that allow teachers to control an online environment while still benefiting from social media. Keeping a blog is a phenomenal way to work on your voice as a writer, and to truly explore and hone in on your personal interests. By requiring students to keep a blog in place of some traditional assignments, you help them establish their digital presence as an emerging thought leader.
- **Skype** If you've ever invited a guest speaker into your classroom, you know how invaluable this experience can be for your students. Students are more engaged with those who can offer first hand insight into what they are learning. And while you still can invite guest speakers from the community to your classroom, Skype videoconferencing software allows you to effectively bring in people not just from the community but from around the world.
- **Pinterest** I like to think of this as the Big Toolbox for Building, Sharing, Connecting, and Learning just about anything. This tool has rapidly become a favorite amongst Educators to share resources and information short of Twitter. It lets you build visual 'boards' and easily 'pin' parts of the web (text, images, videos, websites, etc.) onto those boards to share within the Pinterest community. Currently there are over 350 boards titled "Lesson Plans," and over 400 boards with the keyword "Classroom."