How Teachers Are Turning to Social Media to Extend Learning

By Laura Heinauer Mellett on September 18, 2013 9:57 AM | 3 Comments

Social media is one of the trendiest ways teachers are enhancing lessons and engaging students both in and out of the classroom.

With just a smartphone, iPad, laptop, or a home computer, social media can improve teaching and extend learning time in a way students get excited about. Through social media, students can log on any time or any place to do their work, allowing more interaction beyond the school day. It's also something, when harnessed creatively and effectively, that students enjoy doing, which increases the chances they will spend more time engaged in their work.

In a new paper, "Mobile Learning: Transforming Education, Engaging Students, and Improving Outcomes" Brookings Institution scholar Darrell West examines how both mobile learning and social media are enabling and engaging learning in ways that transform the learning environments for students.

"We need to think of education as an individualized and year-round activity, not just something that takes place in bulk form within schools between 8:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Fridays when schools are in session," he writes. "Content should be ubiquitous and customized so that students can follow their learning passions and figure out where to get answers to basic questions. ... One of the greatest virtues of mobile technology is the way it enables social collaboration."

Here are several of the most innovative ways teachers are using social media and mobile technologies, both for themselves and their students.

Sharing work socially. Whether with Twitter hashtags, Facebook groups, or Instagram teachers are expecting students to share and regularly provide feedback on each other's work.

Idea and lesson-plan sharing. And you thought Pinterest was just for recipes and Halloween costume ideas. Teachers are pinning ideas for classroom science experiments, desk arrangements, and even back-to-school outfits on boards that they share with the world. Other websites, like Teachers Pay Teachers, have popped up allowing teachers to buy, sell, and share their lesson plans.

Virtual teaching. Taking a cue from online course creators like Khan Academy, teachers are creating and posting their own online videos so that their students can hear a friendly voice when they need to go online to get help with particular concepts. Teachers are also using programs like Poll Everywhere to keep cellphone-obsessed students engaged in their lessons.

Creating blogs. There's a joke that one of the defining characteristics of Millennials will be that they've all written a blog; and lots of teachers are ensuring that will be the case. Blogging not only teaches writing, it also shows students how to create hyperlinks and embed images. Students can even use tools like Storify to tell their own accounts of events online.

Connecting with parents. Teachers, campus administrators, and parent-teacher organizations are using various tools, such as Volunteer Spot to let parents get more involved in the classroom. These websites help parents know what a teacher may need in the classroom or organize who's bringing what for the school fundraiser.

Digital Classrooms. Websites like Coursesites and Edmoto allow teachers to post assignments and calendars, take quizzes, and send messages to students. Teachers can also have a little fun with features like classroom polling, which allows students to make decisions, such as selecting a class mascot or whether they want cupcakes or cookies at the next class party.

Do you know of any other ways teachers and students are using social media? Let us know in the comments section below.