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& counting**

**School Practitioner
Listserv**

**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**



August 22, 2016

Concern
>Social media: Is it an added distraction & barrier to learning?

- Center Response
- Responses from Colleagues in the Field
- Responses from University Students

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Set of Center Resources
>About benefits and cautions for schools related to technology

**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>
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Note: In keeping with the *National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*,* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

Concern: "... Social media pressures seem to be a barrier to learning as students are not engaged in learning as social media has become distracting. ... It seems students are gathering their globalized information from social media sources and with that comes a myriad of comments associated with the feed(s) which can indirectly become barriers to learning and healthy social and emotional development."

Center Response: Clearly, computers, tablets, and smartphones are embedded into most students' lives. And schools want to promote positive use, and they need to work against potential problems. As frequency of use increases, it is essential to enhance understanding of why and how use becomes overuse and abuse. Here are a few thoughts about overuse: Start by thinking in terms of both proactive and reactive reasons for use and potential overuse. Stated simply, there is considerable proactive attraction to the opportunities provided by the technology. Involvement is encouraged and modeled by significant others (e.g., peers, family, teachers). Social media enhances connectivity and can be used to garner social-emotional supports and attachments. Psychologically, use of the various devices often enhances feelings of pleasure, competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others. In contrast, some individuals seem to use the technology as a reactive escape defense when facets of their life feel particularly stressful and unpleasant and no better alternatives for coping with circumstances are perceived. Personal characteristics also can play into this. For example, some students (e.g., those who are introverted and shy, those with poor social skills) may find it easier to relate to others on a social network than in face-to-face contacts. Motivation for internet overuse may range from meeting simple needs and interests (e.g., distracting oneself, contacting a supportive friend) to complex compulsions (e.g., gambling and sexual addictions). Overuse is more likely when the internet is easily accessed and in the absence of attractive alternative ways to meet one's interests and needs. From a neuroscience perspective, researchers are studying how all this relates to central nervous system structures and functions.

Schools Can Help Counter Overuse. Besides what we have highlighted, there, of course, are additional learning, behavior, and emotional problems that arise from overuse and other internet related experiences (e.g., cyberbullying, unsavory encounters, negative personal comparisons with others on social media platforms). Schools have a role to play in all this. Currently, schools tend to teach internet use, with too little attention to addressing concerns about abuse and overuse. However, with the increasing political attention to internet downsides, special initiative projects are likely to emerge to deal with the concerns. It is essential to resist "project mentality." Projects exacerbate the marginalization, fragmentation, counterproductive competition, and overspecialization that characterizes efforts to address student problems. Rather than pursuing yet another discrete set of interventions, it is essential for schools to use specific problem-focused initiatives as golden opportunities to catalyze and leverage systemic change. In particular, we suggest that the aim should be to take the next step toward transforming student and learning supports. This means proceeding in ways that embed all separate initiatives into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supports so that each school can address a broad range barriers to student learning effectively.

Addressing the Problems as Part of a Student and Learning Supports System. In developing the learning supports system, include plans to

- enhance staff, student, and family awareness and understanding of internet use and abuse
- make institutional/environmental changes that can reduce problem use (e.g., supporting appropriate use, working with students to establish guidelines and as necessary rules for using devices at school, providing attractive alternative activities to counter overuse)
- embed a focus on social and emotional learning and moral development (e.g., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) related to use of technology into appropriate facets of curricula
- use natural opportunities to enhance knowledge, skills, and attitudes about use of

technology

- provide peer mentoring for appropriate use of technology
- call on and enable all school personnel to play a role in modeling appropriate use of devices and explaining, monitoring, and enforcing behavior expectations and consequences for misuses •• inform parents of how to model appropriate use and explain, monitor, and enforce behavior expectations and consequences for misuses
- engage students and families when serious misuse occurs at school
- account for legalities (e.g., investigating and reporting incidents such as cyberbullying)
- provide intensive special assistance (including counseling when needed) for individuals who manifest chronic and severe problems related to using the internet

Excerpted from: *Is Internet Use Interfering with Youngsters' Well-being?* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/internet.pdf>

Responses from Colleagues in the Field: We forwarded this concern to a range of colleagues working in schools and here is a couple of initial responses:

(1) “I agree that social media plays a huge part in pressures. Learning happens in so many more places than just in a classroom. Take the current political climate and social climate in our country. Students learn confidence in addressing these issues from the home environment to how their ‘social media acquaintances’ handle conflict. I believe this is much bigger than we adults can fathom because most of us are not in those circles....”

(2) “Cyberbullying is a huge concern in middle school and high school, in addition to the unvetted sources of information students access by smart phones. Many kids have their own ‘vines’ and all kinds of crazy stuff is viewing beyond the eyes of supervision. Many kids are sleep deprived from phone/video game use at night due to lack of supervision (or possibly parental awareness). Sleep deprivation, lack of physical activity, cyberbullying, and general distractions are having a major impact on learning. Schools need strong policies about cell phone use and parents need education on this topic. However, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders/ADHD, domestic violence, poverty, lack of adult support or interest, large class sizes, lack of activity/poor diets are much more pressing.”

Responses from University Students: We also shared the concern with a number of students who have worked at the Center. Not surprisingly, they had a lot to say about this. Here is what they shared:

(1) “Thank you for sharing this question with me. I believe that adding how societal pressures affect student learning would be a good idea considering that students take in plenty of information from various societal outlets, especially with today's technology. In terms of social media having negative effects (e.g. being a distraction, bullying), I think it is also important to mention the potential positive effects that can benefit students' education (e.g., social media as a tool to spread awareness of relevant topics/social issues). I think it's great to mention how the comments of the feed(s) can affect the emotional and social development of children/students (possibly see what the short-term and long-term effects are?). Other than that I think this makes for a good research question! “

(2) “I feel like social media, specifically, can be a positive AND negative influence when it comes to learning. Although social media at times portrays societal pressures (which can hinder a students emotional well-being), I feel that social media can be a useful gateway to information. It helps inform students of contemporary events that they might not get elsewhere. For example, students (of all ages) don't normally have time to watch the news. Social media can become a quick and easy, on-the-go outlet to information. Although some information may be biased or one-sided, students have access to numerous views of a particular stance. With enough individual research, they can become quickly informed about a certain event and have both sides considered. I do not completely support social media outlets, (I do feel like these mediums

contribute to cyber bullying, emotional toil, neglected social skills) but it could be a good way of communication for emotional support amongst one's peers. With that said, education is quickly turning toward more modern and technological approaches (especially with rising STEM schools). Social media, used appropriately, helps gain a student's interest in the classroom. “

(3) “I definitely agree that social media is a distraction for some students. I personally don't have that problem because I rarely use social media but I do know some people who can't do something for an hour without checking their facebook or twitter every ten minutes. I think for some it becomes an obsession to know what others are doing and to keep up with every little detail about every popular celebrity. I think it can be harmful to students' emotional development because they may receive certain messages on social media (e.g., standards of beauty) and then feel bad about themselves or try to change who they are to fit in. Social media can be a way to meet new people and connect with others, which is great, but I have noticed that people have less face to face conversations because of this. It seems like if you do not have a facebook or other form of social media then you have lost connection with others. I think this is why students feel the need to be constantly checking their Facebook. I can see how this can get distracting or even overwhelming for some.”

(4) “As a student, I definitely did find social media a big distraction even though compared to other students I had far fewer accounts. I also gathered information and news from social media. Additionally, I believe as technology and smart phones become more advance, the distraction becomes greater. During my freshman and sophomore years smart phones were not as advanced as they are now, therefore I did not use them as much and was not dependent on them for majority of tasks and communication. I feel that concentration and focusing was much easier back then.”

(5) “Social media is a form of learning and although it's unstructured and often unsupervised, I think it's great that students are exposed to the voices of those on the Internet. The Internet provides space for people to freely express, advocate, and inform others about their personal perspectives on an issue. But the key word is 'personal' and that's what I think students often find themselves not understanding - that what we just read is one person's perspective and a potential for bias. Therefore when students passively take information in from social media, it can become a barrier to learning and I have seen both adults and youth becoming fixated on an issue without taking careful consideration of its complexities. This is where we need guided conversations and curriculums that incorporate social media because it's easy to see something and deem it as fact. I recall my high school teacher telling us that what we learn in textbooks and in school is limited to the knowledge of the person who wrote it. What's included or not included in our curriculums is subjective and social media is the same, but in a different format. Just like how we're taught critical thinking skills in our classrooms, it's important to go beyond that and use it to understand social media. A couple years back, Burn book was an app that advertised itself as an anonymous way to express your thoughts. Negative and hurtful comments well exceeded the positive and neutral ones, and it became a concern at the high school I worked at. Students were exposed to nasty comments that their peers wrote about and the quick fix solution was unanimously, 'just don't use the app.' A student even went as far as threatening the safety of the school, and it became clear that something needed to be done. We need more than just a 'don't do that' and include our students in the conversation on how social media affects us. We need to educate and inform our students of the consequences of the Internet and that 'anonymous' isn't as anonymous as it appears. Challenges like these are opportunities for learning if we make it a conversation. But if we allow our youth to become passive consumers of social media, it can be more than just a barrier to learning. Bottom line is, we should educate our youth about the pros and cons of social media and use it as a supplement to our learning.”

(6) “I would argue **yes**, social media should be considered a barrier to learning **BUT**, not necessarily in all cases and for everyone.

(A) *Social Media as a Distraction:* For starters, there are MANY different kinds of social media. The more popular ones are Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, but you also have Tumblr, Tinder, and honestly the list goes on. So the begin with, if the student is someone that subscribes to all or even multiple forms of social media, they're going to be checking in on social

media at least periodically, which will indefinitely take some time away from studying. Oftentimes, we go online precisely because we want a distraction from studying. I've done it myself and have witnessed many people do it to procrastinate. Social media is fun and easy to use. You scroll and look at pictures, funny memes, interesting statuses. It's an easy go to way to take your mind off studying for an exam and to push back responsibilities. Social media can be dangerous when you become dependent on it as an escape. Essentially, it can become an addiction, and no longer just a mere distraction. Personally, I have not seen people carried away to the point where all they do is stay online. It's not that extreme but it's more like teenagers will become removed from reality a bit too much and in doing so can lose themselves and lose touch with others. Examples of this is someone starts out thinking, 'I'll take a brief break from studying,' but before they know it, they've spent the entire night online because they were so unwilling to face what they needed to do in reality. The repercussions of this is perhaps not turning in one's best work, pulling allnighters to compensate, cheating/plagiarizing. Another instance is people start feeling defined by their online versions of themselves such that (especially for teenage girls), people will go to huge lengths to get the perfect photo, prioritizing the amount of likes and praising comments they'll receive over the actual experience. It's instances like this where teenagers prioritize social media/online selves over their reality where things can become problematic. And in fact, this is something that is NOT ignored by us adolescents. It's not that we don't notice it. We ourselves get turned off if we are out eating with a friend and they spend the entire time trying to take a perfect photo of our food or facebook messaging some other friend while they are sitting right across from us. Having all grown up in this social media frenzied age, we all understand and empathize every now and then having to respond to an urgent message or perhaps taking a few photos to post online. But I emphasize that there needs to be a balance and it should be a balance in the sense that online life does not overshadow real life. Online life should MIRROR and reflect reality. You post a photo of you and your friend at the beach BECAUSE you and your friend had a good time at the beach. And if you want to edit the photo a little and enhance it so that's it prettier, that's okay as long as you do not completely edit it so that it is unrecognizable and alters the entire real life experience. Because then you're posting a photo of something that didn't exist. It is an imagined version of a reality you want to have happened. Putting on make-up can be an analogy to this.

(B) Social Media Encouraging Peer Pressure: I see this happening in the sense that teenagers feel pressured to appear as though they're having the time of their life. Negative thoughts and opinions get shut out. Social media can be very emotionally damaging because it only promotes a certain kind of emotion and asks that anxious, depressive, cynical, angry, or anything non-lighthearted is kept private and not shared. The nature of social media is to be fun. It's so much easier to scroll down a page and see happy, bright photos than to read messages about how tough something is for someone (unless...they write how they overcome it, then it becomes fun again). This is how social media can be peer pressuring most of the time, but I want to note something unique that I've witnessed: Popular individuals (those that always consistently receive the most likes, the most comments, etc.) get away with posting anything. For these people, they CAN post something about Donald Trump, about Black Lives Matter, about suicide. They can post deeper matters and they will still be praised for it. They just don't tend to. Every now and then you encounter an adolescent who does so and then they spark some discussion about their viewpoint and it's usually viewed positively as well. However, if you are an individual who is not well-liked, there's little chance of this happening for you. Social media, with its name containing the word 'social' is all about sharing. It's all about judgment, reputation, perception, popularity, likability, etc. Because of this, it can be extremely damaging to one's self-esteem if a picture or post doesn't receive a lot of confirmation (through likes or comments). Again, there is a confusion with balancing priorities when it comes to posting on social media. There should be a careful balance between posting what is important to you as well as hoping that others approve as well. Examples where this doesn't happen, where people become too dependent on what others think can be seen in the following quotes that I've heard said so many times I can't count: 'Should I post this picture or that one? Which one do you think will get me the most likes?' 'Do you think my comment is funny enough? I don't want to post it

if people won't get it.' 'Don't post your picture just yet!! Wait for the right time, like wait until 9 PM because everyone's online then and then you can get the most likes.' You can see how people lose sight of themselves in these cases. They no longer post pictures that they like, but ones that they feel will garner the most praise. And in this sense, people are pressured into posting what will sell. Things that no one will like won't get posted, and this feeds into part C.

(C) *Social media isn't well-rounded.* It perpetuates and reinforces a certain kind of information and unless students work hard to check other avenues for information, they will unknowingly be constantly exposed to a very limited perspective of the world. Instagram and Facebook are two notable social media sites that use algorithms to present a feed to the user that confirms this. Based off things you have liked previously or have commented on, they show you new pictures that are similar to the ones you liked. This then becomes cyclical and doesn't offer teenagers the chance to see and be exposed to truly new material. What it does do is help with a sense of coherence, a sense of uniformity. It may help the adolescent find their passion, their identity, because everything they're exposed to all lines up together. You can get an idea of what you like if Instagram keeps recommending you photos of New York City and you keep liking them. It gives you a clue about yourself. But...where does one draw the line? Is it okay to have a sense of cohesion knowing that this is because contradictory information is hidden from you?

(D) *Positive attributes to social media.* All of the above are ways to demonstrate how social media can be a barrier to an adolescent's learning and development, but I would like to emphasize that there are positive attributes to social media. Going back to what I said about yes, social media can be a barrier, I want to highlight the word 'can.' I think of social media as an outlet or a tool, and it can be harmful or beneficial, depending on you choose to use it. If students use it as a distraction, yes it's going to take away from real life. If you use it for approval of oneself, you're never going to build up your own self-esteem if it's always determined by others. If you use it for news, know that you're most likely going to get a liberal account of things, because Republican perspectives are almost always shut out. But the filtering aspect of social media is hugely beneficial. If you're self-aware, or if students put more thought into how social media works, it gives you huge clues as to who you are and who your true friends are. If you find that you're filtering what you want to post, it's important to ask yourself why. Why do you feel guilty or ashamed about this one photo you want to post but don't? Who matters to you? Whose likes matter to you? What celebrities or politicians or authors do you follow on social media? Whose online style do you try to emulate in your posts? Who do you talk to and message online the most? Social media helps to situate a developing adult in the world, and because it's online, it allows a teenager to situate oneself with individuals that the adolescent might not have access to in real life. When is a teenager ever going to encounter Taylor Swift on a day to day basis in real life? Or Obama? But through their online social media accounts, an adolescent can do so. As long as the adolescent remains evaluative about what/how they're using social media, it'll hopefully remind the adolescent not to lose sight of reality or themselves over to what others think. I hope this sheds some light on social media!! I tried to be as unbiased as possible, and there's lots more to say on this subject, but hopefully this answers some questions."

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Invitation to listserv participants: *What's your take on all this?*

Any experiences related to social media/internet as a distraction?

Any lessons learned you can share? Comments?

Recommendations? What's happening locally?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Set of Center Resources

>About benefits and cautions for schools related to technology

For links to a range of resources from our Center and elsewhere, use the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on

>Technology as an Intervention Tool –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/techschool.htm>

For example, the following topics are covered in our resource on

>Youth and Socially Interactive Technologies –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/socint.pdf>

- Use of Socially Interactive Technologies
- Some Data on Youth Use of Technology to Connect
- What's Good About Using Technology to Facilitate Social Networking?
- What are the Concerns?
- How Do Current Policies and Practices Address the Concerns?
- Implications of Socially Interactive Technologies for Schools

And the following topics are highlighted in our resource on

>Social Networking and Peer Relationships: the Benefits and Drawbacks of Children (Ages 9-12) Using Online Social Networking Sites
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/socialnet.pdf>

- What are the benefits of social networking sites?
- What are the drawbacks of social networking sites?
- How can school personnel and parents help maximize good outcomes and minimize those that are unwanted?

*For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports,
see

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

And note that our new book detailing the prototypes and related resources is now in press.

For a preview, contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!

Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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