**Mental Health in Schools**
**UCLA**
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**A Series of Information Resources on**

*Youth Subcultures:*
*Understanding Subgroups to Better*
*Address Barriers to Learning*
*& Improve Schools*

As calls for addressing barriers to student learning and improving schools increase, better understanding of youth subculture is essential. This series is intended to stimulate thinking about the implications for policy and practice of the complex, multifaceted subgroups with which youth come to be identified and/or assigned by peers.

Public health and education policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and educators need to know as much as they can about the factors that lead youth to manifest behaviors stemming from group defined values, beliefs, attitudes, and interests. Such understanding is basic to promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems arise, and enhancing intervention impact on severe and chronic problems.

To these ends, the Center is producing a series of resources, such as this one, as aids for policy and practice analyses, research, education, and school and community improvement planning.

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## Youth and Socially Interactive Technologies*

Our focus here is on briefly highlighting:

(1) Use of Socially Interactive Technologies

(2) Some Data on Youth Use of Technology to Connect

(3) What's Good About Using Technology to Facilitate Social Networking?

(4) What are the Concerns?

(5) How Do Current Policies and Practices Address the Concerns?

(6) Implications of Socially Interactive Technologies for Schools

*Since this area is changing so rapidly, for updates see our online clearinghouse Quick Find on Social Media. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/socialnetworks.html

Recent Center resources include:
> Social networks and peer relationships (2013)
          http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/socialnet.pdf
>Is Internet Use Interfering with Youngsters' Well-being? (2016)
          http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/internet.pdf

# Youth and Socially Interactive Technologies

> "For teenagers, the online realm may be adopted enthusiastically because it
> represents 'their'space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance,
> an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task
> of adolescence – to construct, experiment with and present a reflexive project of
> the self in a social context, as well as, for some, for flouting communicative
> norms and other risk-taking behaviors. ... Yet the public response tends to be one
> of puzzled dismay regarding a generation that, supposedly, has many friends but
> little sense of privacy and a narcissistic fascination with self-display." "
>
> Livingstone (2008)

Clearly there has been a virtual explosion of the use of technology in making interpersonal connections. This is particularly the case for young people. As early as elementary school, many students are carrying cell phones. With ready access to the internet and mobile phone technology, "social networking" has become a phenomenon of unprecedented proportions and is expanding the concept of a social network.

As Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, and Smallwood (2006) stress:

> "Socially interactive technologies (SITs), such as instant messaging and text messaging,
> are beginning to redefine the social networks of today's youth. By offering fast-paced,
> inexpensive, online communication, SITs allow for new online youth social networks to
> form and evolve. ... New text-based technologies are picking up where phones left off.
> Email and text messaging allow for rapid, asynchronous communication within one's
> peer network: IM allows for synchronous communication among many friends at once."

Because so much of the discussion about the use of technology for connecting interpersonally uses the term social networking, we need to begin by looking at the concept of a social network. A traditional definition is given in Wikipedia. "A social network is a social structure made of individuals (or organizations) called 'nodes,' which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network ).

Personal and organizational social networks are common among those who have shared interests, attitudes, beliefs, kinships, and needs. Youth subculture groups in neighborhoods and on school campuses provide long-standing examples of social networks.

Today, open and restricted access "social sites" are burgeoning on the internet. Most establish networks of diverse members from a wide geographic spectrum who learn about each other and about a variety of topics and have numerous interchanges. Sites allow members to design personal profiles, blogs, and forums that reflect direct expression of images and statements they want to convey. As described by Livingstone (2008):

> "Social networking sites enable communication among ever-widening circles of contacts,
> inviting convergence among the hitherto separate activities of email, messaging, website
> creation, diaries, photo albums and music or video uploading and downloading. From the
> user's viewpoint, more than ever before, using media means creating as well as receiving,
> with user control extending far beyond selecting ready-made, mass-produced content."

As youth culture assimilates communication technology, the rapid pace of change makes it difficult to grasp the nature and scope of what is happening, never mind appreciating all the positive and negative implications. There are suggestions that the changes are fundamentally transforming the concept of community. These and a host of other matters related to youth and social networking through new technologies are topics for ongoing exploration and discussion. Our intent in this brief resource simply is to provide a snapshot of how youth are connecting through the latest technology, the major benefits and concerns currently being discussed, and some implications for schools.

# Use of Socially Interactive Technologies

In 2006, Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, and Smallwood reported that the main findings related to youth use of socially interactive technologies were:

> "Youth are using socially interactive technologies (SITs) to enhance communication among friends and family, to make plans with one another, and to maintain social contact outside of their day-to-day face-to-face conversations."

> "These technologies have been adopted by teens relatively quickly because IMing and text messaging are more convenient, less expensive, and faster than traditional technologies."

> "Research in this arena has shown that although preference for using SITs to communicate is definitely on the rise, and the use of SITs has surpassed that of email..., youth still tend to hold in-depth, important conversations offline."

## About Social Network Sites

Social network sites across the world are growing at dizzying rate. For example, a July 2010 report in the *New York Times* indicates that Facebook has surged from 200 million to nearly 500 million users in the last 15 months.

Available evidence suggests that most internet users probably visit social network sites daily or at least every other day (Ofcom, 2008). And young people lead the pack. In 2008, Livingstone emphasized that 31% of MySpace and 54% of Bebo users in the U.S. were under 18 years. She also noted that to some degree social networking has displaced other forms of online communication (email, chatrooms, website creation); at the same time, it incorporates other forms (instant messaging, blogging, music downloading).

As defined by boyd and Ellison (2007), social network sites are

> "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site."

These researchers go on to emphasize that while the terms "social network site" and "social networking sites" often are used interchangeably, they differ in emphasis and scope. They stress that:

> "'Networking' emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication. What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal. ... On many of the large social network sites, participants are not necessarily 'networking' or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network."

For further discussion of terminology and a historical perspective on social network sites, see boyd and Ellison (2007) and the entry for "social network service" in Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service ).

**Accessing Social Network Sites**

Lists of social network sites are available at
>http://webtrends.about.com/od/socialnetworks/Social_Network_Database_A_List_of_Social_Networks.htm
>http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

In addition, many blogging sites include social network features.

Reviews of the top social network sites can be found at:
>http://social-networking-websites-review.toptenreviews.com/
>http://webtrends.about.com/od/socialnetworking/a/social_network.htm
>http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites

The 2010 review on the *Top Ten Reviews* site names the following in order: (1) Facebook, (2) MySpace, (3) Bebo, (4) Friendster, (5) hi5, (6) Orkut, (7) PerfSpot, (8) Yahoo! 360, (9) Zorpia, and (10) Netlog.

Structurally, social network sites encourage individuals to create personal profiles, add pictures of themselves, post blog entries, search for others with similar interests, and compile and share contacts. Profiles often have a section dedicated to comments from friends and other users. To protect privacy, features usually are available that enable controlling who can view a profile, make contact, and so on. Some social networks also promote establishment of groups that have common interests for purposes of sharing (e.g., discussing topics, streaming live videos). Also noteworthy are efforts by representatives of special populations to create social network sites. For example, the National Alliance on Mental Illness has established a new online community for young adults living with mental illness called *strengthofus* – http://www.strengthofus.org/ . Beyond individual users, many organizations are creating profiles to market products and services.

Increasingly, social network sites are offering real time and location based activity. "Real time allows users to contribute content, which is then broadcasted as it is being uploaded - the concept is similar to live television broadcasts. Twitter set the trend for 'real time' services, where users can broadcast to the world what they are doing, or what is on their minds within a 140 character limit. Facebook followed suit with their 'Live Feed' where users' activities are streamed as soon as it happens. While Twitter focuses on words, Clixtr, another real time service, focuses on group photo sharing where users can update their photo streams with photos while at an event" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service ).

**About Mobile Phones and Texting**

Teens with mobile phones are everywhere. They talk and they text.

Advances in mobile phone technology (i.e., smartphones) have contributed significantly to the burgeoning of electronically-mediated communication for social networking. And, with each new generation of product, more and more applications (apps) are available (e.g., text-to-screen). "In most mobile communities, mobile phone users can now create their own profiles, make friends, participate in chat rooms, create chat rooms, hold private conversations, share photos, videos, and blogs by using their mobile phone. Mobile phone users are basically open to every option that someone sitting at the computer has. Some companies provide wireless services which allow their customers to build their own mobile community and brand it, but one of the most popular wireless services for social networking in North America is Facebook Mobile. Other companies provide new innovative features which extend the social networking experience into the real world" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service ).

In an analysis of mobile phones, the Nielsen company concludes that teens in the U.S. are sending or receiving 3,146 messages a month, "which translates into more than 10 messages every hour of the month that they are not sleeping or in school. Even the under 12 segment are sending 1,146 messages per month, which is almost four text messages per waking hour that they are not at school" (http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/under-aged-texting-usage-and-actual-cost/ ).

In contrast to the many facets (including longer chats) available by using a internet connection and computer to Instant Message (IM), the transmission of text messages on mobile phones is limited to sending a few hundred characters (and pictures if the phone has a camera). However, mobile phone chats and texting provide young people fast and ready communication with multiple persons in a variety of situations and settings. One of these settings, of course, is school. And, as we will discuss, many school staff see mobile phone texting and the use of text lingo in general as a problem.

Because of the rise of "text chat lingo" with so many groups using different abbreviations, guides have been developed to help learn the vernacular. See, for example, *A Guide to Understanding Text Messages, Chat Abbreviations, and Twitter Messages* (http://www.webopedia.com/quick_ref/textmessageabbreviations.asp ).

**About Skype**

Skype has further opened up social networking. Skype is a software application that allows users to communicate via voice, video and IM over the Internet. Calls to other users within the Skype service are free, while calls to both traditional landline telephones and mobile phones can be made at a lower cost than traditional methods.

Sutter (2008) reports that young children now are using Skype to play with each other via remote conferencing on laptops and TVs. Video playdates are described as "a way for friends to stay in touch when their parents can't drive them to each other's houses."

## Some Data on Youth Use of Technology to Connect

In part because use is growing exponentially, up-to-date and valid data are limited. At the same time, given business sector, government, and researcher interests in who uses the internet, a considerable amount of data are being gathered. Here are some 2009 data on use reported by researchers from the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Lenhart, 2010; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010):

> 93% of teens 12-17 go online (as do 93% of young adults aged18-29)
> 73% of wired American teens used social network sites (55% of 12 and 13 year olds, 82% of 14-17)
> 91% of teens in the U.S. who used social network sites did so to connect with their friends
> 75% of teens own cell phones (as do 93% of young adults)
> 75% of teens used IM on a regular basis (girls more than boys) to maintain or build friendships
> high school age girls (13%) were more likely to use Twitter than boys (7%); young adults led in using Twitter (33% of 18-29 year old post or read daily)
> 48% of wired teens have bought things online

The Pew project also reports that a typical teen sends about 50 texts a day, the majority of messages are for friends. In addition, they make 1-5 cell phone calls per day to friends and parents. Among teens of driving age, one in four state they have texted while driving and half of all teens ages 12-17

say they've been a passenger while a driver has texted.

With respect to cell phones at school, Pew reports:

> 62% are allowed to have phones at school but not in class; another 12% can have them at school at all times; 24% are forbidden to have them at school
> 31% send text messages everyday during class time
> 51% of those forbidden report sending text messages during class

With respect to parental supervision and monitoring, Pew reports:

> 64% of parents look at the contents of their child's cell phone
> 62% have taken phones away
> 46% of parents limit the number of minutes their children may talk

Lenhart (2009) summarizes texting trends as follows:

> Most teen text friends daily – cell phone texting has become the preferred channel of basic communication between teens and their friends (88% of teen cell phone users are text-messagers; 54% of all teens text message friends on a daily basis; 38% call on cell phone; 33% talk face to face).
> One in three teens sends more than 100 text messages a day, or 3000 texts a month (boys typically send and receive 30 texts a day; girls send and receive 80 messages per day; 12-13 year old texters send and receive 20 texts a day; 14-17 year old texters typically send and receive 60 text messages a day;14-17 year old girls who text typically send 100 or more messages a day).
> Calling is still a central function of the cell phone for teens; teens typically make or receive five calls a day (50% of girls call friends on their cell phone every day; 42% of boys call friends daily on cells).
> Cell phones help bridge the digital divide by providing internet access to less privileged teens (41% of teens from households earning less than $30,000 annually say they go online with their cell phones; 44% of black teens and 35% of Hispanic teens use their cell phones to go online).
> Of teens who have Multi-purpose phones with extra features, 83% take pictures; 64% share pictures; 60% play music; 46% play games, 32% exchange videos; 31% exchange instant messages; 27% go online for general purposes; 23% access social networks sites; 21% use email; 11% purchase things via their phones.
> Limiting a child's text messaging does relate to lower levels of various texting behaviors among teens (e.g., sending sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images by text, also known as "sexting").

## What's Good About Using Technology to Facilitate Social Networking?

Social networking is described by many as among the potential goods arising from technologically advanced mechanisms for interpersonally connecting. Social networking provides outlets for communication, participation, creativity, expression and entertainment (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). Heim, Brandtzaeg, Kaare, Endestad, & Torgersen (2007) note that qualitative studies suggest that the opportunities for playing, communication, social support and learning may increase psychosocial well-being. Livingstone (2008) suggests that "it seems that for many creating and networking online content is becoming an integral means of managing one's identity, lifestyle and social relations." And Barbur and Plough (2009) stress that social networking can make online learning less isolating. Below we highlight matters related to enhancing learning, safety, and sense of self.

**Social Network Sites Can Enhance Learning and Safety**

The Pew Internet & American Life Project (Lenhart, 2009) found that:

> > 62% of online teens get news about current events and politics online
> > 31% of online teens get health, dieting or physical fitness information from the internet.
> > 17% of online teens access health topics that are hard to discuss with others such as drug use and sexual health topics
> > 98% of parents of cell-owning teens say a major reason their child has the phone is that they can be in touch

In discussing the benefits of social networking for schools and students, researchers are underscoring that the expanded range of interactions has potential for enhancing communication skills and social development, broadening participation, social engagement, and collaboration, and increasing motivation toward school (Barbour & Plough, 2009; Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, & Chew, 2010).

**Enhanced Connectedness Enables Affirmation of Self, Inclusion, and Status**

Researchers have emphasized a range of potential psychosocial benefits. Here is a sampling:

Livingstone (2009) emphasizes that "at the heart of the explosion in online communication is the desire to construct valued representation of onself which affirms and is affirmed by one's peers."

Survey data indicate that "48% of youth said that they use the Internet to improve their relationships with friends, and 32% said that they use the Internet to make new friends" (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, & Smallwood, 2006).

Research by Valkenburg and Peter (2007) suggests that:

"Internet communication is positively related to the time spent with friends and the quality of existing adolescent friendships, and via this route, to their well-being. These positive effects may be attributed to two important structural characteristics of online communication: its controllability and its reduced cues. ... These characteristics ... may encourage intimate self-disclosure. ... Because intimate self-disclosure is an important predictor of reciprocal liking, caring, and trust, Internet-enhanced intimate self-disclosure may be responsible for a potential increase in the quality of adolescents' friendships.

And Lee (2009) reports that "those who had established strong social relationships at earlier ages were more likely to use online communication, which in turn predicted more cohesive friendships and better connectedness to school."

Notley (2009) stresses that "it is clear from the research that participants' online network use provided them with opportunities to participate in society in ways that were social, economic, cultural, civic, and educational. In this way online network use had supported all of the participants' social inclusion."

Hundley and Shyles (2010) conclude that "In terms of socializing and staying connected with peers with digital devices, particularly social network sites, a large 'friends' list is a pride object with many teenagers. ... the number of people on their 'friends' list equates to popularity and perceptions of likeability."

# What are the Concerns?

"As I'm sure you're aware, there are dangers associated with social networking including data theft and viruses, which are on the rise. The most prevalent danger though often involves online predators or individuals who claim to be someone that they are not."

From *What is Social Networking*
http://www.whatissocialnetworking.com/

A range of concerns have been discussed about young peoples' use of social network sites and mobile phones (e.g., Erdur-Baker, 2010; Fortunati, 2002; Livingstone & Helsper, 2010; Home Office, 2008; Madden & Lenhart, 2009; National Cancer Institute, 2010; Olsen, 2010; O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Ship, 2010; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). And, of course, concerns are intensified because of the propensities of youth for exploration and risk-taking.

The most prominently discussed concerns all revolve around personal risks such as

> *exposure to and contact with inappropriate content and people* (e.g., pornography; violent, racist/hate-filled material; sexual predators; cyberbullies, "happy slapping")

> *risky disclosure of personal information* (e.g., unguarded sharing of private data with unknown people)

> *negative impact on social and emotional development* (e.g., interacting beyond one's level of maturity and ability to be responsible; increased exposure to peer pressure to keep up and conform; use of technological communication to avoid face-to-face interactions; use of mobiles phones as an inappropriate symbol to gain status [Katz & Sugiyama, 2006]; contamination of values)

> *texting while driving increases risk of accidents*

> *computer contamination* (e.g., virus invasions)

> *cell phone health risks* (e.g., a few research studies [National Cancer Society, 2010; Science Daily, 2008] have suggested that heavy cell phone use may increase the risk of cancer)

In addition to the above, teachers are raising concerns about a negative impact on writing skills. Students are integrating texting or instant messaging lingo into school work. More generally, schools are in a dither about how to control use of cell phones and texting during school hours and how to counter their use as a device to aid cheating.

Concerns, of course, often are in the eye of the beholder. That is, actor and observer have different perceptions. As Livingstone (2008) notes:

'What for an adult observer may seem risky, is for a teenager often precisely the opportunity that they seek; this complicates straightforward policy attempts to maximize the former while minimizing the later. ... Teenagers may disclose personal information with up to several hundred people known only casually. This is in part because social networking sites typically display as standard precisely the personal information that previous generations often have regarded as private."

## About Cyberbulling and "Flaming"

"Cyberbullying is defined as hurtful and intended communication activity using any form of technological device such as the Internet or mobile phones. ... Online environment are a place where children and adolescents are less likely to inhibit their emotion, including negative ones such as anger. ...Since people can hide behind fake screen names and/or use someone else's screen name, the cyber-environment might be a more appealing environment for bullies, and a safe environment for victims of traditional bullying to seek revenge. ... In an online survey, respondents younger than 18 reported: 11% bullied online; 29% were victims; 47% witnessed online bullying. The most often reported forms of cyberbullying were being ignored (60%); disrespected (50%); called names (30%); threatened (21%); picked on (20%); made fun of 19%); and having bad rumors spread about them 19%). ... In the case of cyberbullying, the identitify of the cyberbully is often unknown ... a factor that makes cyberbullying a 'unique phenomenon' resulting in different challenges to traditional bullying. ... In traditional bullying power is associated with physical or social characteristics such as popularity, cyberbullying power is associated with computer literacy. This power is exerted in multiple ways such as controlling topics for discussions, flaming, posting inflammatory messages and kicking someone out of a bulletin board. ... The same adolescents who are victims are also bullies in cyber environments. This is an important result due to it implications for targeting youngsters at risk and planning for prevention and intervention programs."

<div align="right">Erdur-Baker (2010)</div>

"Youngsters who have bullied someone via the Internet or mobile phone...are younger, and are more often victims and bystanders of bullying via the Internet or mobile phone, and are more often the perpetrators of traditional bullying. Youngsters who have been bullied via the Internet or mobile phone...are more dependent upon the Internet, feel less popular, take more Internet-related risks, are more often a bystander and perpetrator of Internet and mobile phone bullying, and are less often a perpetrator, and more often a victim of traditional bullying. ... Cyberbullying includes sending a virus-infected file; using the Internet or mobile phone to insult or threaten; sending threatening or obscene pictures or illustrations; excluding someone from an online group; 'outing' of email entrusted information; masquerading (e.g., deceiving someone by pretending to be someone else); spreading gossip by mobile phone, email or chat; taking part in voting on a defamatory polling website."

<div align="right">Vandebosch & Van Cleemput (2009)</div>

"'Flaming' as a concept emerged ... to describe aggressive, hostile, or profanity-laced interactions via email and in online discussion groups. ... 'Flames' are intentional negative violations of interactional norms. ... A 'true flame' is a message in which the creator/sender intentionally violated interactional norms and is perceived as violating those norms by the receiver as well as by third-party observers. 'True flames' can be distinguished from 'missed flames' (e.g., too subtle), 'failed flames' (e.g., receiver doesn't perceive the message as a violation of social norms), and 'inside flames' (e. g. an third party or 'outsider' doesn't perceive the violation)."

<div align="right">O'Sullivan & Flanagin (2003)</div>

**How Do Current Policies and Practices Address the Concerns**?

The policy and practice emphasis in addressing concerns has included:

> *Federal and State Internet-Related Laws* (e.g., the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, which seeks to protect children's privacy and bars most children under 13 from participating in many websites; the Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 requires schools and public libraries use Internet filters to prevent access by students to offensive content as a condition for receiving certain federal funding; many states have laws pending related to cyberbullying [Willard, 2007]; Nevada has passed a law making cyberbullying a misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor with student enforcement involving in school discipline or suspension; states are considering laws about "sexting;" Congress is currently considering how to "ensure student cyber safety")

> *Laws Restricting Cell Phone Use and Texting While Driving* (e.g., data from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety [2010] indicates that "a jurisdiction-wide ban on driving while talking on a hand held cellphone is in place in 8 states and DC. ... The use of all cellphones by novice drivers is restricted in 28 states and DC. Text messaging is banned for all drivers in 28 states and DC. In addition, novice drivers are banned from texting in 9 states.)

> *Practices for Generally Educating Youth and Supervising Use* (e.g., teaching ethical, responsible, and safe use with respect to social network sites and mobile phones; limiting and controlling use; checking content -- including use of software that sends a copy of a young person's texts or photos to the parent's phone; just emerging are subscription services that offer to help parents monitor their child's activities on social networks)

> *Protecting Vulnerable Youth and Increasing Vigilance for Danger* (e.g., youth who are especially "at risk" because of the lack of satisfactory relationships at home and at school; countering threats to users; protecting the rights of users -- including child rights)

> *School District Policies and Practices* (e.g., many schools use internet filtering and blocking; policies clarify acceptable use of the district's technological resources; practices to supervise and monitor students' online activity; some have policies designed to stop teachers and students from "friending" each other through social network technologies; specifically related to responding to and preventing cyberbullying are practices for educating parents, schools, mental health professionals and others about the phenomenon; schools also are being asked to incorporate into safe school planning strategies for addressing cyberbullying and related online risks -- including developing mechanisms for assessing, reporting, investigating, and responding to cyberbullying; some schools ask parents to bar their children's use of social network sites to prevent cyberbullying)

> *Site Design and Personal Practices* (e.g., calls for service providers to increase safety by building it into the interface; in terms of personal caution, the Pew project data indicates that about two-thirds of social network site users age 12-17 restrict access wholly or partially to their profiles and much of what is made public is false or non-revealing)

> *Youth Voice* (e.g., those concerned with positive youth development and children's rights suggest that social network sites can be used as a powerful tool for youth expression and participation in decision making)

**Example of Social Network Site Policy**

O'Sullivan & Flanagin (2003) note that "the emergence of computer based interactions has given rise to relatively codified rules of online conduct. For example, netiquette guides provide standards for acceptable interactional practices when conversing on the web, and are intended to establish the bounds of what is and is not appropriate in a variety of online interactions." Below are excerpts from *The Official School Administrator's Guide to Understanding MySpace and resolving Social Networking Issues* –
http://cms.myspacecdn.com/cms/SafetySite/documents/SchoolAdministratorGuide.pdf

"MySpace is committed to addressing any problems that school administrators may have regarding this site, as soon as these concerns are brought to our attention. MySpace has created a hotline and e-mail address for the exclusive use of school administrators and employees. ...

The MySpace policy allows individuals who are 14 years of age and older to register for the site. ... MySpace deletes thousands of underage users every month. ...

If you hear about any kind of threat posted on MySpace.com, please gather as much information as possible on the threat and contact your local law enforcement agency immediately. ...

Cyberbullying, usually defined as sending or posting cruel, vicious, and sometimes threatening messages, on the Internet, is an issue that MySpace takes seriously. MySpace's Terms of Use specifically prohibit cyberbullying and other similar conduct, and MySpace attempts to respond quickly and decisively to any instances of such conduct that it discovers ... and has created a rapid response team to respond to cyberbullying complaints. Appropriate remedial action taken by MySpace in response to cyberbullying includes, but is not limited to, recommending that the user block the cyberbully from contacting them, and permanently removing the account of the cyberbully. ...We also encourage you to work with the students involved in order to resolve the issue. ...

Please inform parents that they can contact MySpace with questions and concerns...click on "Contact MySpace" located on every page. ... Please also instruct parents to click on "Parent Safety Tips" located at the bottom of every page. ..."
http://cms.myspacecdn.com/cms/SafetySite/documents/SchoolAdministratorGuide.pdf

**Also see:** the Internet Safety Technical Task Force's (2009) report on *Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies* – http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/isttf/ ; the guidance from the U.K. Home Office (2008) – http://www.ifap.ru/library/book293.pdf ; Childnet International's digizen site – http://www.digizen.org./socialnetworking/ ; and the Federal Trade Commission's (2009) web entry about *Social networking sites: Safety tips for tweens and teens* – http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec14.shtm .
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## Implications of Socially Interactive Technologies for Schools

Clearly there are real concerns about social network sites. But does that mean schools should be against their use? As Tynes (2007) states:

> "We may do adolescents a disservice when we curtail their participation in these spaces, because the educational and psychosocial benefits of this type of communication can far outweigh the potential dangers. These benefits include developing cognitive skills that are consistent with those required in educational settings and perspective-taking skills that are necessary for citizenship in an increasingly multiracial society."

The implications for schools of students using socially interactive technologies are twofold: (1) the technologies provide significant opportunities to enhance learning and other positive outcomes, and (2) they also present significant challenges as reflected in the concerns discussed above.

### Use for Enhancing Learning and Psychosocial Development

The latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that only 40 percent of teachers report that they or their students often use computers in the classroom during instructional time (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, 2010). Ironically, according to the National School Boards Association, almost 60 percent of students who use social network sites talk about education topics; more than 50 percent talk specifically about schoolwork.

Many schools and colleges are embracing social network sites and other internet and computer tools to enhance instruction, collaboration, and professional development (Davis, 2010; Ito, Horst, Bittanti, boyd, Herr-Stephenson, Lange, Pascow, & Robinson, 2008; Patchin and Hinduja, 2010; SafeTeens.com). Educational institutions are using social network sites (along with Skype) to create chat-room forums and groups to discuss and clarify, provide a range of extra supports for learning, and facilitate communication with families (especially those for whom face-to-face meetings are difficult). Some schools are using smartphones to enable students to instant-message peers and teachers with questions related to homework and to clarify difficult material.

Social interactions through technology also can be an aid for students and families who are shy or overly anxious in social situations (Pierce, 2009). More generally, social site networks may be of use in enhancing relationships between teachers and students (Mazer, Murphy, Simonds, 2007).

With respect to psychosocial development, researchers have suggested that participation on social network sites influences such matters as identity formation and social skill development. A recent study suggests such participation may have positive effects with respect to how youth cope with emotional distress such as grieving following someone's death (Williams & Merten, 2009).

For older students preparing for the workplace, the sites offer opportunities to enhance technical skills and enable networking with professionals for internship and job opportunities. Moreover, a recent study suggests a relationship between use of Facebook and staying in school (Morris, Reese, Beck, & Mattis, 2010).

And school professionals are creating learning communities and communities of practice for sharing and continuing education (e.g., Ning for teachers, Learn Central, TeachStreet, and other sites include educational blogs, eportfolios, formal and ad hoc communities, chats, discussion threads, and synchronous forums). For teachers, social network sites are another avenue to open the classroom door and end the traditional isolation (and often alienation) many experience.

**Challenges for Schools to Meet**

Schools, however, are just beginning to cope with challenges stemming from the concerns that accompany such use (see above examples of school district policies and practices). A first impulse for many has been to establish controls against personal use of social communication technologies during the school day. Increasingly, the trend is to focus in on specific areas of concern. For example, as the California Schools Boards Association (2007) notes:

> "Students are using new technologies to bully their peers and sometimes to harass school staff. The challenge for schools is not only in identifying and stopping such conduct so that students and staff feel safe at school, but determining the limits of their authority when the so-called 'cyberbullying' is initiated outside of school and during non-school hours."

Others have raised the concern that overreliance on technological communication can interfere with developing effective face-to-face interactions (Pierce, 2009).

For staff who are ready to capitalize on social network technologies, another challenge is the wholesale internet filtering and blocking that so many schools still do.

Models for creating safe social network sites to enhance learning are emerging. For example, in May 2010, *Togetherville* was opened to the public (see http://togetherville.com/ ). This site is for children 6 to 10 and their parents. It allows parents to build a social circle for their children based on the parents' own collection of Facebook friends. Children can have a variety of vetted learning and recreational interactions (e.g., play games, create art projects, share videos, have a controlled interchange). They also learn good practices in using social network sites. Such efforts provide schools with relevant models to emulate.

### A Perspective on What Schools Should Do Based on the Work of our Center at UCLA

Schools experience many overlapping concerns related to youth subgroups, youth subculture, and the use of socially interactive technologies. Of special concern is addressing any negative impact (e.g., criminal acts, bullying, sexual harassment, mental health problems). But, more essential is supporting learning, promoting healthy development, and enhancing a positive school climate.

As always, the more we understand about subgroups and individual differences, the more effective our interventions can be. But to counter the tendency to focus on each concern as if it is discrete, schools need to work in a new way.

Given the complexity of problems that arise in relation to youth subgroups and misuse of technology, a comprehensive and cohesive approach is needed, and this calls for those in the school, district, and community need to work collaboratively. The *immediate objectives* are to (1) educate others about motivational and behavioral factors associated with a particular concern, (2) counter the trend in policy and practice to establish initiatives in terms of separate concerns that lead to a host of fragmented and too often ineffective programs and services, and (3) facilitate opportunities on campus for youth to engage positively in subculture activity and connect positively with peers.

By working collaboratively and differentiating the causes of observed problems, school staff and community stakeholders can integrate fragmented and marginalized initiatives for promoting positive youth development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems are identified, and providing effective ways to respond to pervasive, chronic, and serious problems. *Longer-term*, the aim is to help develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports that (a) addresses a wide range of barriers to learning, teaching, parenting, and development and (b) re-engages disconnected youth and their families. Such a system encompasses a continuum of integrated school-community intervention systems that are fully integrated into the improvement agenda for schools and communities (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b).

Toward these ends, schools must reach out to the community and establish a collaborative mechanism where those with specialized knowledge not only bring that knowledge to the table, but also work to build the needed comprehensive system of student and learning supports (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). And it is essential to remember that those with specialized knowledge include youth themselves (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2009).

Moving forward requires fully integrating a comprehensive and systemic continuum of interventions into the improvement agenda for schools and communities. To guide development of a systemic approach, we have suggested using a continuum of integrated school-community intervention systems as a unifying framework. This includes school-community systems for promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible, and addressing chronic and severe problems.

Policy that helps schools and communities develop the full continuum of interventions is essential to moving forward in enhancing equity of opportunity. Such policy must effectively establish a *comprehensive intervention framework* that can be used to map, analyze, and set priorities. It must guide fundamental *reworking of operational infrastructure* so that there is leadership and mechanisms for building integrated intervention systems at schools and connecting school and community resources. And, policy must provide guidance for the difficulties inherent in facilitating major *systemic changes*. By working in this way, we can counter the trend in policy and practice to establish initiatives in terms of separate categories that lead to a host of fragmented, unsustainable, and too often ineffective programs and services.

For resource aids related to policy examples, intervention frameworks and related mapping tools, examples of ways to rework the operational infrastructure and develop key mechanisms such as a *Learning Support Resource Team*, guides for facilitating systemic change, and much more, see the Center's Toolkit at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm

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**Others are in development**

\*Many of the terms used by youth in referring to subgroups often are pejorative and offensive. We do not condone such language. We do, however, recognize the need to go beyond adultcentric definitions and descriptions of youth subgroups if we are to understand youth perceptions and perspectives. So the *Information Resource* documents reflect the terms used by youth.