Understanding young people’s use of social media:
Difference and diversity

• Policy regarding social media use in educational settings should not assume that all students are familiar with a range of different media, that they use them all equally or that they are proficient users.
• Many students use social networking sites to varying degrees, but they are less familiar with other forms of social media, in particular, blogs, microblogs and wikis.
• Contrary to some depictions of students’ use of social media, the majority ‘consume’ rather than ‘produce and publish’.
• There is a significant gap in rich and deep Australian research which investigates the nature of students’ use of social media.

Teaching and learning with social media

• There is an inherent tension when we adapt students’ use of social media in their everyday lives for educational purposes.
• There is a paucity of studies relating to social media used independently of teachers, for educational purposes.
• Most studies relating to social media in schools have been small-scale over a limited period of time.

Teachers, social media and pedagogy

• Higher-order thinking can be facilitated through teachers asking questions and thereby stimulating further enquiry.
• Collaboration does not just happen. The teacher needs to encourage students to see their role as not just reactive or responding to the teacher, but as contributing to the learning community.
• Students benefit from the way social media can facilitate diverse and timely feedback. Students can gain feedback from teachers, students and others without having to wait until the next lesson. Students can also evaluate their own progress as they interact with the contributions of other students.
• Students and teachers need to negotiate a shared understanding of how collaborative work can be edited.

• Social media can be used to ensure all students get an opportunity to contribute, even if they do not normally do so in class.

• Student engagement can be heightened through breaking the class into small groups and the teacher actively participating in stimulating their enquiry.

• Social media provide a record of student participation and consequently can enable teachers to gain greater understanding of students’ knowledge and needs.

• The use of social media can increase the workload of the teachers, especially outside of school hours.

• Teacher participation online is essential to legitimise the space for educational purposes.

• Teachers need to allow time for students to interact socially in online discussion as a way of building trust.

• Building trusting relationships is critical to the success of online collaborations using social media.

• Working with social media requires establishing new norms of social behaviour. Like group work in classrooms, the process of collaborating online needs to be explicitly taught, modelled and reinforced.

• Teachers need to consider how they can assess collaborative activity in social media (e.g. a collectively authored text) when school culture and assessment is usually focused on individual work.

• Before students enter a wiki they need to be prepared for working collaboratively: learning to collaborate through talk; working on text in pairs; and groups of pairs coming together to work in the wiki.

• Students collaborate more readily when they gain confidence in working with others and within the wiki.

• When giving feedback to students collaborating online it may be useful to consider the nature of their contributions other than simply the length, for instance, contributing a new idea, elaborating on an idea, synthesising ideas, editing work.

• Activities using social media in which students add to each other’s work can take considerable time. However, the process of revision and editing is valuable and the quality of the product is improved.

• Students need to be given explicit instruction in how to use a blogging platform.

• The use of peer feedback such as comments in blogs can be a powerful learning aid.
• If collaboration through social media is a goal, then it needs to be meaningfully integrated into the lesson design.

• Making student participation in social media a compulsory part of an assessment does not guarantee high levels of engagement. The task needs to be purposefully and clearly integrated with the learning goals.

• Statements of belief or the construction of a vision may be too individual to be easily constructed collaboratively. Students are hesitant to edit each other’s opinions.

• Unless prepared, students may consider editing each other’s work as transgressing the norms of individual assessment.

• Experiential learning through using the application for an authentic task builds skills and confidence for future use of the technologies.

Social media use and the impact on professional practice

• Effective pedagogical integration of social media requires preparation and ongoing facilitation, often outside of school hours.

• Student-centred approaches can alleviate teacher workload by legitimising peer feedback and support and reducing the expectation of teacher interactions. However, teacher participation is still essential to guide and stimulate deeper thinking.

• Effective online collaborative practices have a genesis in collaborative practices developed within classrooms.

• Teachers need to consider their own ICT competence and that of their students when considering social media options as part of their professional practice.

• Teachers need to allow time to develop their own skills, their students’ skills and to complete the task which is likely to take longer as students meaningfully engage with each other’s contributions.

• To manage workload teachers need to consider establishing boundaries around the out of school times when they communicate with students.

• Social media, e.g. blogs, allow teachers to provide feedback during an activity not just after the final submission.

• Social media is best utilised in small groups and student-centred activities.

• Teachers require a school culture that supports the pedagogical integration of social media through the allocation of time and human resources to enhance their use of technologies.

• Teachers can connect with others through social media such as online forums, reducing isolation and enabling them to gain support from others in the profession.

• Social media can provide professional learning opportunities and enhance professional relationships for teachers working in the same school.
• Teachers’ use of social media for professional learning can lead to enhanced skills, confidence and greater understanding of ways technologies can be used with students.

• The role of the principal in supporting and participating in online professional learning communities is important.

• The inclusion of others through social media can sustain teachers' professional learning.

• Online professional learning with social media may provide teachers with a cost efficient, timely and flexible option for their needs.

• Online professional learning opportunities need to be balanced against risks to professional reputation, depending on the degree of privacy of the online environment.

Social learning

• Social media allows teachers to participate in interactions with students in ways that build on their existing practices.

• Involvement of mentors in social learning is crucial to encouraging students to link participation to learning.

• Social media can be used in international collaborations with students and teachers recording, sharing and co-constructing together.

• International collaborations using social media need to consider the different curricula to ensure that the activity is meaningful.

• Students need longer to complete tasks when social media is involved. At the same time, the task should be spread over time in shorter sessions.

• Social media needs to be implemented in relation to the curriculum or else it will be ‘useful-in-principle but useless-in-practice’.

• There could be a powerful role for social media - students can support their peers and offer encouragement.

• Social media can facilitate a sense of student ownership or control over learning.

• At least three things are required: clear links between the learning activity and the curriculum; careful attention to planning by teachers; and clarity about the assessment tasks in relation to the activity.

• If teachers are the primary audience or collaborator, they can only provide a limited amount of time to each student. A student-centred, collaborative environment counters this problem.

• Students working together in small groups rather than large ones is conducive to social learning because students form trusting relationships which facilitate risk taking.