

# Social Media in Music Education

## Extending Learning to Where Students “Live”

**Abstract:** Students in the United States use technology and social media platforms for both educational and noneducational purposes. Integration of social media in music education classes can help facilitate learning experiences that would be less likely to happen in a brick-and-mortar setting. However, issues such as privacy and cyberbullying continue to make educators wary of using social media in formal educational settings. This article discusses why/how to use social media in music education using select social media platforms, policy/ethical challenges with using social media in education, and how to avoid some of the potential problems of social media use in educational contexts.

**Keywords:** blog, cyberbullying, Facebook, music education, privacy, social media, technology, YouTube

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are ubiquitous in today’s technology-saturated culture. Social media allow people to maintain connections with friends and family and disseminate thoughts and information to a potentially large audience in a matter of seconds. Social media also can be used for educational purposes and facilitate learning experiences that may be cumbersome, time-consuming, or not possible in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting. Despite the potential benefits, however, music educators may be hesitant to use social media for class purposes, given concerns regarding privacy, inappropriate usage, cyberbullying, and inappropriate student-teacher communications. In this article, I discuss why music educators may wish to consider implementing social media

in traditional face-to-face music classroom practices. I also examine social media tools that have implications for music education, consider potential ethical and policy challenges with using social media in music education, and offer suggestions to mitigate these challenges.

### Social Media and the 21st-Century Student

Access to social media enables anyone with an Internet connection and the appropriate device to read, write, and upload Web content and allows for immediate commentary and interaction on material posted on the Web. Commonly used social media platforms include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Wikipedia, Google Docs, wikis, and blogs.<sup>1</sup>

*Can social media help your music students learn more—and better?*

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Statistics published by the Pew Research Center in 2013 demonstrate that the vast majority of our students are familiar with social media. Eighty-one percent of students ages 12 to 17 use social media.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 77 percent of students ages 12 to 17 use Facebook, and 24 percent of the same population use Twitter.<sup>3</sup> While statistics about technology and social media use change with the advent of new sites and platforms, this information suggests that social media use is widespread among and relevant to many students who inhabit an online “space.” Music educator John Kratus argued that “the nature of music education should reflect the cultural and social milieu in which it exists.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, integrating social media into existing music education practices allows the profession to become more congruent with children’s cultural practices.

Social media also can assist educators to create interactive learning experiences that complement existing practices in the music classroom. Thoughtful integration of social media through tasks that require engagement in higher-order cognitive activities, such as synthesis and evaluation, can enrich a child’s educational experience using technology with which one may already be familiar. Social media platforms also facilitate sharing of a myriad of online resources from which students can learn from and that they can discuss, allowing for learning to continue outside a brick-and-mortar classroom. Additionally, social media platforms can support meaningful educational activities that may be time-consuming to execute in a synchronous face-to-face class.

## Online Communities of Practice

Social media researchers and music educators have argued that social media platforms can be thought of as online communities of practice, a conceptual framework grounded in constructivist principles that include learning and creating knowledge through inquiry, experience, social interaction, and reflection.<sup>5</sup> Rather than passively receiving knowledge, individuals are active participants

in knowledge construction and the learning process. Furthermore, learning is “situated”—a function of activity, culture, and context in which it occurs.<sup>6</sup> Situated learning discussions often refer to the idea of a learning community: a group of people with common interests, values, and/or goals who actively learn with and from one another.<sup>7</sup> This form of participatory learning is consistent with Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism, which recognizes students’ contributions to and involvement in the learning trajectories of their peers.<sup>8</sup>

A community of practice constitutes a type of learning community to which social media is particularly conducive. It is comprised of three elements that are essential in distinguishing it from other groups and communities.<sup>9</sup> This framework can be used to explain how knowledge creation and sharing occur and are sustained in various social media platforms:

**The domain:** A community of practice is something more than a set of connections between acquaintances. In social media, the domain is the common ground or space where members share ideas, knowledge, and experiences, creating a sense of belonging. Individuals involved in a community of practice must share interest in a particular phenomenon or experience that lies at the center of their purposeful engagements with one another. This shared domain of interest becomes the focus of the group’s work.

**The community:** Members of the community collectively create value and knowledge through discourse.<sup>10</sup> Social media platforms can help build community by serving as forums for dialogue, discussion, and debate.<sup>11</sup>

**The practice:** Whereas the domain denotes the topic or concern that is shared, the practice is the specific knowledge base that the community cultivates and maintains. Social media platforms offer ways to learn through interactive dialogue and discovery and can involve multiple viewpoints and levels of expertise. In addition, there is negotiation of meaning as individuals refine and share their ideas and form new understandings.

These processes lead to distribution of produced knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Researchers have recently examined how students use social media to create and join online communities of practice that support music learning of various genres, such as Irish and banjo music.<sup>13</sup> Through these communities hosted by YouTube and online forums, students of all ages—adolescent through late adulthood—have been able to learn about musical performance practices at home. Students are able to upload self-generated video and audio files for feedback from other members of the online community. Reciprocal positive interactions within the online communities and feedback on self-generated video and audio files have resulted in positive music learning experiences, improved confidence, and strengthened self-concepts as musicians.<sup>14</sup>

## Social Media and Music Education

Music educators and social media experts have discussed how educators can use various social media platforms and sites to create personal learning networks<sup>15</sup> and podcasts.<sup>16</sup> There are, however, other social media platforms worthy of discussion and inclusion in a music education program. *Social networks*, arguably the most visible and well-known form of social media due to the popularity of sites such as Facebook,<sup>17</sup> connect individuals with a common interest and therefore are well suited for connecting members of ensembles or other types of music classes and facilitating group discussions and peer learning. Additionally, *blogs* allow individuals to share thoughts on topics and generate dialogue through regular entries (“posts”) and comments on a topic or a variety of topics, encouraging students to form and defend ideas through writing and critique the ideas of others.

## Social Networks

Music educators can use social networks to create online communities of practice that support student

learning within their classes and ensembles. Social networks such as Facebook Groups, Edmodo, and Google Classroom can host videos and audio files recorded by a member of an online community—a music class or ensemble—with the purpose of soliciting supportive and constructive feedback. Teachers can facilitate a discussion about what constructive feedback looks like, model it for students with a sample student video, and then have students contribute their own comments. For example, a teacher might post a video or audio clip that demonstrates a musical concept along with a writing prompt to guide students' viewing. Answers to this out-of-class activity can help teachers assess students' understanding of the concept and extend learning outside the confines of the traditional school day. Depending on the video and its subject matter, questions can direct students to use higher-order critical thinking skills, such as critique, evaluation, synthesis, and creating/defending an argument.

After participants discuss and model what constitutes appropriate comments, directions can stipulate that students respond to each other, creating the potential for rich and thought-provoking dialogue. Teachers also can have students facilitate online discussions by having them post videos or audio files with writing prompts that complement learning that is taking place in the classroom. Such online interactive activities extend the learning process outside of the classroom, give students an active role in the classroom community, and enrich the knowledge creation process.

Similar to monitoring a real-time, face-to-face class discussion, teachers will need to monitor asynchronous online discussions for possible inappropriate comments. Additionally, school districts may have social networking policies in place to deter inappropriate contact between students and staff<sup>18</sup> and to prevent both parties from placing themselves in legally precarious situations.<sup>19</sup> For example, districts may

require educators who wish to utilize Facebook for educational purposes to have a “professional” Facebook account through which *all* interaction with students and parents takes place. Therefore, an educator with an existing Facebook account for personal use would have two separate accounts with two separate e-mail addresses—a professional e-mail address and a personal e-mail address—for login purposes.

Additionally, teachers need to determine if a districtwide policy on social media and posting of student images online exists.<sup>20</sup> Some districts limit what identifying information for students may be posted. Others may stipulate that parents need to grant permission for their children's faces and/or name to be posted online or opt out of a blanket policy that allows posting of such information. Educators who wish to use social media in their classes can record video from a vantage point that does not capture students' faces. Simply using audio recordings from rehearsals for postings is another solution.

## Blogs

Blogs (the word is a truncation of “web log”) are more individualized and focus on the thoughts of one individual—the owner of the blog—with opportunities for others to comment on posts. Similar to those of social networks, posts and comments can include video and audio files, images, and links to websites. Teachers and students may host their own blogs on a number of different sites, including Kidblog.org, WordPress.com, and Blogger.com, and make them visible only to the owner and users that they choose.

What distinguishes a blog from other forms of websites is a community of learners and teachers who share mutual interests to collaboratively set objectives for discussion and learning.<sup>21</sup> Music educators can use blogs to ask students questions, share viewpoints, and encourage students to discuss issues and express their concerns. Students can also collaborate with others to establish and discuss a particular topic of mutual interest. Research suggests that learners

tend to be more active and engaged with blogs than they do in other pedagogic and web-based environments, thus producing a stronger sense of community.<sup>22</sup>

On the surface, blogs may seem like the electronic version of handwritten or typed journals. However, they are much more than that. Journals traditionally are given only to the teacher for review and feedback. Blogs have the opportunity to be read not only by teachers but also by classmates and, potentially, anyone who has Internet access. The opportunity to present an argument to an audience and have the opportunity to receive feedback from peers—classmates—may influence students to write with a higher level of quality. Arguments subjected to peer review and critique will need to be tightly constructed and reasoned. Ideas can continue to be refined over time through a constant loop of constructive peer feedback. Students who comment on blog posts will need to understand how to read blog posts with a critical lens and comment effectively. Blog posts and readers' comments can be embedded with links to other websites, video, and audio, a capacity not available to traditional journals.

## Challenges of Social Media

“Don't say anything online that you wouldn't want plastered on a billboard with your face on it.”—Erin Bury<sup>23</sup>

“The beauty of the Internet is that it connects people. The value is in the other people. If we start to believe that the Internet itself is an entity that has something to say, we're devaluing those people and making ourselves into idiots.”—Jaron Lanier<sup>24</sup>

## Cyberbullying

The previous sections depict social media in a positive light. However, there is cause for concern with the use of social media and the Internet—and rightly so. Many educators and administrators are concerned with cyberbullying,<sup>25</sup> which, defined by social media educator Megan Poole, is “any hostile

act directed towards another person that occurs using digital technology.<sup>26</sup> Social media, text messages, e-mail, instant messaging, and gaming have been used to inflict harm with consequences that, unfortunately, have resulted in student deaths.<sup>27</sup> Directly related to cyberbullying is the concern of inappropriate comments directed at students on social media sites such as Yik-Yak. Alice Mathias, a writer for *The New York Times*, wrote about the danger of allowing comments on social media sites, given the potential for one to be anonymous: "In anonymous Internet attacks, people can say things they would never mention aloud while looking their target in the eye. No one need take any personal responsibility."<sup>28</sup>

Given the dangerous consequences of cyberbullying as outlined in the previous section, teachers should discuss the concept with students and explore potential cyberbullying scenarios with them before initiating any type of social media activity. Teachers also should discuss the purpose of comments as constructive feedback in social media, compare/contrast appropriate comments with inappropriate comments, and model appropriate online behavior. Educators will need to monitor all social media behavior constantly for signs of bullying, being bullied, inappropriate comments, or inappropriate deletion of students' work. They also must investigate allegations of cyberbullying, or what may appear to be cyberbullying, immediately with the assistance of an administrator. Some states require that any allegations or appearance of bullying be reported immediately to an administrator.<sup>29</sup>

### Ethics and Privacy on Facebook

There are also important ethical implications to consider with social networking sites. For example, Facebook stores and analyzes account holders' biographical information, political views, "check-ins" at businesses, and preferred businesses via Facebook Pages.<sup>30</sup> The availability of these data and how Facebook uses it has contributed to concerns regarding the company's exploitation and

sharing of personal data with third parties for profit. Researchers have also determined that Facebook deliberately makes self-regulation of privacy settings difficult, obfuscating rather than clarifying with each redesign of privacy settings.<sup>31</sup> Confusion of privacy settings can lead to unintended sharing of students' personal data with unintended people. Efforts have been made to strengthen the Stored Communication Act (Public Law 99-508) and restrict social network sites like Facebook in sharing user data with third parties unless the account holder specifically grants permission for release of such data.<sup>32</sup> In the meantime, educators will need to weigh the ethical concerns of the use of Facebook against potential educational benefits. One possible solution would be using education-specific sites, such as Edmodo, Google Classroom, or coursesites.com, which provide a more controlled environment and have fewer risks than an open social network like Facebook.

### The Digital Divide

School administrators continue to employ measures to provide access to technology and the Internet for *all* students. Some schools are providing laptop or tablet computers to students, known as a "one-to-one" programs.<sup>33</sup> Schools also are allowing students to use their own laptops, tablets, or mobile phones in school to access the Internet for in-school assignments.<sup>34</sup> Many school districts are purchasing mobile devices, including tablets, mobile phones, and iPod Touches, for student use in a classroom. However, a digital divide based on socioeconomic status, with half of households with yearly incomes under \$30,000 not having access to the Internet in the home, still exists.<sup>35</sup> Mobile phones, a lower-cost alternative to laptops and tablets, are more likely to be found in households of low socioeconomic status than are personal computers<sup>36</sup> and can provide access to the Internet via cellular networks for those who do not have access to broadband Internet at home.<sup>37</sup> However, there are challenges with using mobile phones

in the classroom, including the lack of standardization between devices (older mobile phones with fewer capabilities than newer ones) and the possibility of the exchange of text messages during class time and testing situations. Music teachers and administrators can collaborate to create policies that regulate the use of personal devices during school hours and educate students and parents as to what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate use of mobile phones.

Furthermore, with 7 percent of students not having access to a computer,<sup>38</sup> schools and educators who wish to use social media in their teaching practices will need to develop ways for students to access a computer and the Internet. Schools can have devices for students to sign out and use in environments that have wireless Internet access, such as a library, coffee shop, or a friend's house. Libraries often have computer terminals for the public to access the Internet. Students who do not have access to technology and the Internet outside of school may need to complete assignments during class time. These suggestions, however, may not be practical for all contexts and may even be detrimental to students. For example, students may feel stigmatized using school technology resources specifically purchased for those lacking home access to technology.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, students may feel disenfranchised from a learning community if they need to use school technology resources during class time or after school to complete an assignment while others work on a different activity or participate in extracurricular activities.<sup>40</sup> Limited hours, mandatory filtering software, outdated machines, and insufficient bandwidth in libraries are barriers that those in households with unfettered access and high bandwidth do not face.<sup>41</sup> Equity and access continue to be social justice quandaries for social media usage in education.

### "Technology for Technology's Sake"

Educators also should be wary of using technology for technology's sake,

## Suggested Social Media Resources

### Books:

- Pamela Burnard and John Finney, eds., *Music Education with Digital Technology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Jay Dorfman, *Theory and Practice of Technology-Based Music Instruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- William I. Bauer, *Music Learning Today: Digital Pedagogy for Creating, Performing, and Responding to Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Thomas Rudolph and James Frankel, *YouTube in Music Education* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2009)
- Megan Poole, *Using Social Media in the Classroom: A Best Practice Guide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013).
- Gwen Solomon and Lynne Schrum, *Web 2.0: How-to for Educators* (Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education, 2010).
- Kay Kyeong-Ju Seo, ed., *Using Social Media Effectively in the Classroom: Blogs, Wikis, Twitter, and More* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- Ann Bell, *Exploring Web 2.0: Second Generation Interactive Tools—Blogs, Podcasts, Wikis, Networking, Virtual Worlds, and More* (Georgetown, TX: Katy Crossing Press, 2009).
- Christopher Shamburg, *Student-Powered Podcasting: Teaching for 21st Century Literacy* (Washington, DC: International Society of Technology in Education, 2009).
- Julia Davies and Guy Merchant, *Web 2.0 for Schools: Learning and Social Participation* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2009).
- Shaheen Shariff, *Cyber-Bullying: Issues and Solutions for the School, the Classroom, and the Home* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

### Online Resources:

- Robin Giebelhausen, "What the Tech Is Going On? Social Media and Your Music Classroom," *General Music Today* 28, no. 2 (January 2015): 39–46, doi:10.1177/1048371314552523
- Cynthia Johnson Turner, "Another Perspective: Crowdsourcing our Ensemble Rehearsals," *Music Educators Journal* 100, no. 2 (December 2013): 68–71, doi:10.1177/0027432113505839
- Evan S. Tobias, "Toward Convergence: Adapting Music Education to Contemporary Society and Participatory Culture," *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 4 (June 2013): 29–36, doi:10.1177/0027432113483318
- Kathleen Kerstetter, "Instructional Blogging in the General Music Room," *General Music Today* 24, no. 1 (October 2010): 15–18, doi:10.1177/1048371310362516
- William I. Bauer, "Your Personal Learning Network: Professional Development on Demand," *Music Educators Journal* 97, no. 2 (December 2010): 37–42, doi:10.1177/0027432110386383
- Christopher Cayari, "Using Informal Education through Music Video Creation," *General Music Today* 27, no. 3 (April 2014): 17–22, doi:10.1177/1048371313492537.
- Diane E. Sieber, "Teaching with Social Networks: Establishing a Social Contract," *ECAR Research Bulletin* 10. Available at <http://www.educause.edu/ecar>.
- Jayme Waddington, "Social Networking: The Unharnessed Educational Tool," *Undergraduate Research Journal at UCCS* 4, no. 1. Available at <http://ojs.uccs.edu/index.php/urj/article/view/113/100>.

rather than using technology to drive instruction and enhance student learning. Music educator Peter Miksza stated that simply letting students use social media platforms will not automatically lead to improved student learning.<sup>42</sup> Rather, "teachers and students make learning happen. Technology by itself does not, regardless of the technological tool involved."<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, music

technology educator Jonathan Savage implored educators not to be excessively positive or optimistic about the potential benefits of using any technology within a music education classroom, as the downsides of such technology first need to be identified and analyzed before implementation.<sup>44</sup> Educators first need to design learning units and tasks, then choose a social media platform

that best fulfills a need that may not be accomplished as effectively, or at all, through traditional, synchronous, face-to-face methods in a brick-and-mortar classroom. In other words, use of the social media platform should complement instruction and assist with student learning. Teachers, however, should be aware that some parents might be uncomfortable with their children

accessing social media and must be prepared to provide alternative activities that are suitable for students.

## Extending the Learning

Imagine an eighth-grade student in 2015 using several social media platforms that augment and enhance her in-school band experiences. How does she use social media to continue the learning outside of the brick-and-mortar classroom?

Jennifer was on Facebook and noticed that her teacher, Mr. Dunaway, just posted an announcement on her band's Edmodo page and abbreviated the announcement for a tweet on Twitter. He had just uploaded a selection from the recent Winter Concert to YouTube and asked the band students to log onto their individual blogs to give critical feedback on the performance and suggestions for improvement for the future, as well as to write a reflection on the concert preparation experience. Jennifer clicked on the YouTube link and typed her thoughts into a Google Doc (she usually did this so she could access her documents anywhere with Wi-Fi) as she listened. She then logged in to her blog and copied and pasted her blog entry from her Google Doc. Jennifer perused other band members' blogs, noting that several already posted blog entries. She soon engaged in critical conversation with two other band members who also were online. Although Jenny certainly enjoyed playing saxophone and learning about music through performing, she also enjoyed this "out-of-school" component of band, as it was another way for her to learn about music using social media—something that she uses outside of school on a daily basis.

Lee Siegel, New York writer and ardent critic of technology, acknowledged that "The Internet has penetrated our lives more deeply than any other medium . . . [it] is now a permanent part of our civilization."<sup>45</sup> The statistics at the beginning of this article demonstrated that the Internet and social media are important factors in our students' lives. It behooves educators at all levels to examine their teaching practices and determine

if inclusion of social media would be appropriate for use in their teaching context. With precautions and imagination, the inclusion of social media in the music education classroom can appeal to students and assist with making formal music education an even richer learning experience.

## NOTES

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