

## Social media and science

**S**ocial media is an increasing part of everyday life for many of us. I know that I use it both for work and personally (and how much I wish my actual life was the ideal of the glamorous highlights portrayed on *Facebook* – the kids never fall out on *Facebook*!). In the last 18 months, I have used *Twitter* with some enthusiasm and now feel part of a community within science education that I didn't know existed before. At the Association for Science Education Annual Conference in January 2017 there was a gathering of 'science enthusiasts', many of whom had never met until that evening other than virtually. That specific network has grown into a close-knit support and friendship group. Support available professionally through social media and other specific online groups is remarkable. And with smartphones at our fingertips, there is access to these communities almost 24/7. As teachers and science teacher educators there has never been as much help, literally, at hand.

As a parent, however, there is perhaps a different perspective, as we resist buying gadgetry for our children as long as possible in order to preserve their childhood for that little bit longer. But perhaps, as the alien 'Borg' race in *StarTrek* would suggest (yes, showing my age!), 'resistance is futile'. Technology, social media, phones and tablets are integral parts of children's lives today. With the increased security of knowing you can call your child to see where they are, comes the increased concern that you don't know who they are talking to or texting, a concern that needs to be carefully managed both at home and within the school setting. E-safety is paramount and underpins each of the articles here advocating use of social media – use it safely.

This issue focuses on how social media is being used to support teaching and learning. A number of perspectives are expressed – teacher, parent, teacher educator – and we hope that, from reading these, you will see the benefits of accessing this virtual world and engaging children in learning through various media. Is it possible that this is a means for

collaborating more closely with parents and carers? Can we engage children further with science through social media? Our authors' examples would suggest so.

To complement the social media theme, *Science Swap Shop* focuses on communication and offers a very flexible set of activities for children aged 3–11. Emma Vanstone (author of the *Science Sparks* website and a member of our editorial board) compiles *Swap Shop* and would be delighted to hear your thoughts on the activities she offers; please feel free to follow her on *Twitter* (@ScienceSparks)! We also have articles from Sarah Earle on how her project TAPS can support different ways of moderating and Clarysly Deller describing a working scientifically challenge she set for her class.

**What will your next steps into the virtual world be? Which groups will you join? Who will you 'follow'? What will you search for to improve your teaching and the pupils' learning?**

So, on social media I am torn. It offers so much that is good and is part of what life is about these days. Another part of me, however, wants to resist the changes and make the world wider again rather than having it all in my living room – the irony is that the World Wide Web makes the world anything but wide. What I do know is that when I use it for teaching purposes I want the impact to be positive in terms of learning and engagement, and I want to teach well. As well as the knowledge of what is out there and how to use it, I need to know how to teach using social media effectively. I guess my next step then is finding the pedagogy for social media group on *Facebook* – although it could be a group for one!



When thinking about using social media within your teaching, as with any other strategy, don't simply accept that it will work: think about not just *what* works but *why*. Dig a little deeper into establishing sound pedagogical practice as well as embracing technological advances that are part of our lives.