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**So Social**

**Should children younger than 13 be on Facebook? Absolutely**

**Opening the platform to kids, if done correctly, is brilliant – and here's why**

By Scott Kleinberg, Tribune Newspapers

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The recent [report in The Wall Street Journal](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303506404577444711741019238.html) about Facebook wanting to give children younger than 13 access to the platform is blowing up my feeds.  
  
Sources in the article talk about strict parental controls. Advocacy group A is comparing Facebook's methods of attracting youngsters to those of Big Tobacco, while group B says there's no proof Facebook has any meaningful value to kids of such a young age.  
  
Blah, blah, blah.  
  
We're missing the bigger picture (and I hope Facebook has been working on this long before they read it in my column):  
  
Facebook + kids = The homework social network.  
  
Yes, homework. Of course 10-year-olds shouldn't be playing Farmville and slot machines and watching R-rated movie trailers. That's common sense and that's why parents exist.  
  
But the magic word is *homework*. Facebook should use its social networking monster of a platform as a way to get kids excited about homework and in a way that makes Facebook as necessary as a textbook. It should be the de facto place for teachers, parents and kids to go to learn with and from each other.  
  
Apple is successful because it creates things we all have to have. This is Facebook's Apple moment.  
  
On Facebook for grown-ups, we have groups for everything. Why not groups on Facebook where kids can upload their math problems and crowdsource responses? What a great way to learn. And while math is a natural, the idea works just as well for science and history and grammar. But don't stop there. Let's have 5th graders in Barcelona teach proper Spanish to the 5th graders in Mississippi. All of this properly administered by Facebook and supervised by parents.  
  
Bueno, right? I know.  
  
As for the rest of the Facebook experience? There's no reason children can't talk to friends as long as proper supervision is in place. Perhaps family connections play a bigger role in this version.  
  
And then, let's reward the kids for all their hard work in a very social way.  
  
Create an educational game platform.  
  
Launch a music platform for age-appropriate music and let Britney Spears fans connect with other fans around the world.  
  
Harness the new power of Instagram to create a fun photo network. I'm sure plenty of 11-year-olds can take beautiful photos.  
  
Also interesting is an [article last week in the L.A. Times](http://articles.latimes.com/2012/may/30/business/la-fi-facebook-teens-20120531) about teens losing interest in Facebook and turning to Twitter and Tumblr. That's data that I'm sure isn't lost on Facebook, and probably one of the forces behind this pre-teen push. As with almost anything else, if you get people involved early they tend to want to stay involved.  
  
Done right, I think there's a lot to "Like."  
  
*So Social is a social media tips column by The Tribune Media Group's*[*Amy Guth*](http://bio.tribune.com/amyguth)*and Scott Kleinberg. Tweet them at @amyguth and @scottkleinberg.*

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