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SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION – PEDAGOGICAL BACKGROUND

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Abstract: *In the last few years, social networks have revolutionized the way in which many people relate to each other, but their use is still very limited in the academic field. The purpose of this article is to propose the idea of using the social network sites and media for education.*

Key words: social media, networking, education

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of social media phenomena over the past decade has transformed the ways in which the internet is experienced by most of users. From a one-way broadcast delivery system (small numbers of content providers vs. numerous users download produced data), the internet became a place driven by the activities of its regular users. Internet use now became a participatory and collective activity. Social media use is often described in terms of collaboration, conviviality and creativity.

But what is social media? According to Wikipedia, “social media is the media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible scalable techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue”.

Now, more than ever, online learning environments provide opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The expansion of social networking echoes around the world, as more and more people enter MySpace, Facebook, ELGG and other social networking sites.

Ubiquitous nature of social media and networks (especially Facebook) has the attention of educators. In fact, Facebook has primarily been created for educational purposes, only later it was further developed and it became a platform that has achieved today's popularity. However, Facebook has retained its primary characteristics so, it can be freely said that Facebook is an application that has educational implications.

Amidst these technological developments, many education institutions (and teachers, educators, too) find themselves expected to catch up with this world of social media applications and social media users [1].

One may challenge the value of using social network applications for educational purposes; however, before doing so it is important to consider your students first. Today's students have grown up with social media (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, different blogs etc.), so they are comfortable using them in their everyday lives.

Despite most discussions of social media tending to focus either on the very banal or the very profound, growing numbers of educationalists are beginning to consider the possible significance and expected implications of social media for education practice [1]. First it is very important to consider what the key features of social media are and just what is their significance to contemporary education?

2. WHAT EDUCATIONAL USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BRINGS?

We are all witness that social media already had a great impact on society, and therefore to education as an integral part of society. The most direct significance of social media for education is the apparently changing nature of the students who are entering school [2]. In a practical sense, the highly connected, collective and creative qualities of social media applications are seen to reflect more flexible, fluid and accelerated ways of being. Social media are therefore associated with an increased tendency for young people to multitask, to rely on a ‘digital juggling’ of daily activities and commitments [3]. Social media brings new type of learners, who ‘are

not content to be passive consumers, and increasingly satisfy their desire for choice, convenience, customization, and control by designing, producing, and distributing products themselves' [4].

Another major educational implication of social media is the apparently changing nature of learners' relationships with information and knowledge [2]. Social media support forms of knowledge consumption and knowledge construction that are very different to the epistemological principles of formal education and individualized instruction. Social networking introduced new type of learning - learning that is based around principles of collective exploration, cooperation and innovation rather than individualized instruction [2].

It is clear that social media networks and applications present a challenge to the concept of the formal, already established, education. In this sense, social media are also significant in terms of their implications for the nature and form of education provision [2].

To conclude, social media brings new types of learners, as well as new types of learning, so as a result, is quite normal that social media brings new forms of education provision. The sustained growth of social media presents a set of clear challenges to the future nature of education provision and practice [2].

3. PEDAGOGICAL BACKGROUND

Usage of internet and computer technology in education purpose isn't new idea. Over past years and decades educational software (as example one of the first educational ICT usage) evolved into learning management systems, with numerous administrative and teaching facilities for education (e.g. Blackboard and/or Moodle). Learning management systems, organized into courses with school and students in password-protected environments, combined the four essential tools of online courses: discussion boards, chat, online quizzes, and file upload. Refinements included additional management tools like grade-books and facilities adapted from social media such as wikis and RSS feeds.

Parallel with LMS progress we witnessed to social media development (e.g. Facebook and/or YouTube) for public internet users. In contrast to LMS, social media is wide open to the public. It is self-organized by individuals adding their own accounts and friends and groups. Instead of only producing and sharing text discussions, social media allow users to upload, share, and comment on media such as image, audio, and video files. With greater functionality than LMSs, it was expected that educational organizations would begin to experiment with these free online tools in their teaching [5].

There has been a general trend in the past decades to ask students to be more active in their own learning. This is encouraged by advances in educational theories like social constructivism, experiential learning, and problem-based learning among others. Constructivism emphasizes the individual as the constructor of reality based on former experience and new self-produced learning [1]. The former model of education (that sees students as products stocked with memorized data) is changing to a new model, where knowledge is a shared, global experience. The nature of social media is to encourage active media production and global commentary on those productions, so rather than a fad, social media is well positioned as a technological metaphor for this new model of education.

Social media includes several functional categories:

- Social networking focuses on networking with friends and associates as its major function, as in Facebook, although there also may be media possibilities. Facebook is excellent for role-playing activities, such as having students construct their page as an historical character and interacting through status updates and photo or URL postings with other „friends” in the class in that role.
- Multimedia sites, such as YouTube, concentrate on the user-generated media side of social media. Students are beginning to find video creation assigned as often as paper writing, and YouTube is the typical destination for display. Real world distribution often intensifies student efforts.
- Synchronous tools like Skype offer video connection online in real-time as immediate as face-to-face communication. Skype and other live video-conferencing software allow traditional teaching methods such as real-time lecture/discussion and sharing of one's desktop to illustrate software, PowerPoints, and a whiteboard, while also viewing, chatting, and texting one another.
- Virtual worlds like Second Life allow inhabitants to take a cartoon like persona or avatar and socialize, build, walk, or fly about a three-dimensional geographical landscape.
- Blogs or the micro-blog (Twitter), allow one to follow the words of any other person in a more public manner than social networks. Twitter is particularly useful for quick announcements or updates from fieldtrips when used on smart phones.

4. BENEFITS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN EDUCATION

A basic problem is whether or not specific social media applications will promote student engagement and learning. Critics and opponents would say that there is no proof that using social media for educational purpose

(teaching/learning) works. Because social media's popularity is so recent, teaching methods that use specific software applications are, still, items of numerous researches.

Based on the results of most studies conducted on the educational use of social networks, follows advantages of their educational use can be defined as:

- *Student perception surveys show positive feedback.* For example, use of YouTube assignments for video creation and reflection, gives good results, because students appreciated the opportunity for interacting with the well-known video platform (during the assignments which include making of video clips), the intentional development of a public persona, and the verbal and nonverbal communication opportunities for analysis and critical thinking [6].

- *Increased quality of student work.* Using two types of blogs for course learning – the individual student blog for creating their own writing voice and a common course blog for developing community, has showed as good practice. The importance of blogs depends upon their public nature and the assistance they give the student to construct knowledge over time, becoming subject matter experts. Public comments on a student's writing and posting on blog encourage re-evaluation and highlight writing as a process of making meaning jointly with one's audience [6].

- *Increased motivation.* Using Facebook for specific role-playing assignments can produce high enthusiasm for the assignment motivated students to tackle the challenge of more difficult theoretical material [6].

- *Enhanced course content.* Students could build a location-based web-service. Using a small grant, the database of content was put into the open source content management system, as the students outgrew their wiki. This can be demanding and advanced project in which students create their own learning environment and developed their own social media application for others [6].

- *Better grades and learning outcomes.* Using avatar in Second Life (a virtual world) students can overcome some of their fear and problems. For example, the fear of public speaking is one of the most commonly known fears. It would be a benefit for students to acclimatize to public speaking by practicing first in a virtual world and then in real life. Those who are nervous about speaking to a live audience, who doesn't generally relate to their audience for prompts, can found speaking in a virtual world a less threatening and excellent place to practice. Exercises in this virtual world could systematically desensitize the apprehension of those students [6].

Concluding the findings above, four main functions (or possibilities) of social network usage in education may be distinguished:

1. Academic service support;
2. Student support;
3. Social and cooperate learning;
4. Achievement representation [1].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Social media allows for student learning through collaboration whether with text or other media. Adapting learning in higher education from former lecture methodologies is not without problems, such as finding relevant assignments, taking the time for students to learn the software interfaces, and finding the right hardware solutions. But the possibilities of high student engagement and active learning through doing or constructivist learning validate the extra effort and time required to experiment with new pedagogies.

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