Social Media Use in the Classroom: Pedagogy & Practice (Paper 14-108)

Thomas G. Ryan
Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario,
100 College Drive, Canada,
thomasr@nipissingu.ca

Abstract: *Herein the argument that there are advantages and disadvantages to social media usage in schools is advanced. Benefits outweigh drawbacks thus the use of social media continues to seep into curricula and curriculum at ever increasing rates. As educators, part of our responsibility is to prepare students for life. For this reason, considering the increasing prominence of social media in today's society, it should also be our responsibility to help students learn how to use social media in an appropriate manner. To do this we need to connect as educators and find ways and means to authentically use this technology within the many guidelines, and policies surfacing in educational organizations.*

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Pedagogy, Instruction

Introduction

A recent study of 800 teen-agers found social media use was widespread and over 95 (*n*=760) percent of teens studied used the Internet, while 81 (*n* = 650) percent used social media sites (Madden et al., 2013). Other researchers have revealed, "96 percent of youth in this age range have used social networking tools at some time, with their average engagement with them rivaling time spent watching TV at nine hours a week" (Klopfer, Osterweil, Groff, & Haas, 2007, p.12). Rios-Aguilar (2012) and other researchers confirmed the upswing in social media usage in post-secondary institutions, as well as advantages and disadvantages of social media use on college and university campuses (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Dame, 2013; Freidman & Freidman, 2013). In spite of this widespread and increasing usage of social media nominal research currently exists examining the current state of social media use in schools (Tomaszewski, 2012). This need to look into student social media use is acute, pressing and omnipresent. Levin (2013) suggests social media is a "cultural phenomenon, enhancing interpersonal communication and changing the nature of relationship between the individual and a society" (p. 11). With this change comes concern, especially from educators. Yet, most concerns are not really how many students use the Internet or how many use social media tools; it is more about how the internet and social media tools are handled and used, and really, why they are used given the inherent benefits and drawbacks.

Social Media: Popularity

We know the internet is widely used and that social media tools essentially present more ways to connect, so when a recent report found 94 percent of 12 to 17 year old participants had Facebook accounts, 26 percent had used Twitter and 11 percent used Instagram (Sterling, 2013), the public should not be surprised. What is surprising is that Facebook, while popular is currently only ranked nine in a recent global survey of the top 100 social media sites. Facebook was founded on February 4, 2004 "by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students" (Wikipedia, 2013).

Despite the popularity of social media tools the majority of teachers are hesitant to utilize social media in their classrooms (Lin, Homman, & Borengasser, 2013). Many sense hazards within social media and are apprehensive that inappropriate student actions and possible online bullying may outweigh the positives: Other educators indicate a lack of understanding and/or familiarity with social media resulting in a lack of effort to employ it within their classrooms (Stevens, 2013; Lin et al., 2013).

We know that some educators currently believe that the use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, Google Docs, Google, blogs, Tumblr, Vine, Snapchat, Instagram, and Wattpad, provide students with a wider audience with whom they can connect and share their ideas (European Schoolnet, 2013). However, would the ideas shared be the same ones shared in a face-to-face classroom situation, possibly not according to Collier (2012) who has advanced the notion of online disinhibition. Online disinhibition suggests students may act differently online due to the online distance perception, its virtuality and student naiveté. Students may be digital natives but they can lack the maturity to make good decisions online regarding how it should be used. Therefore, we need to ask: What sites are ok and at what age? Who should the student share with? How much should they share and does age impact these guidelines if any are in place? These are difficult questions in fast changing times since too much oversight and restrictive policy could eliminate the possibility of using some of these useful learning tools.

Oversight of Social Media

The Ontario Council of Directors of Education (CODE) has "identified the effective use of Technology as an important area for supervisory officers' professional development, leadership and dialogue" (CODE, 2011, p. 4). In step with this important decision, the Ontario College of Teachers who certifies and oversees teachers in the largest province in Canada concludes:

> Electronic communication and social media can be effective when used cautiously and professionally. They serve a range of purposes, from helping students and parents/guardians access assignments and resources related to classroom studies to connecting with classrooms in other communities and countries.
> (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014)

However, the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario cautions it members and explains that they continue to support the responsible use of "social media as an excellent teaching tool, provided it adheres to professional standards. ETFO warns its members that anything they post can be: forwarded, taken out of context, copied, manipulated and impossible to remove from cyberspace" (ETFO, 2014, p. 1). Most Ontario education stakeholders have policy and stances on the use of social media for example one secondary school offers this expectation: "At all times, students are expected to use the social media tools in a responsible manner and in support of the curriculum expectations being addressed" (Thames Valley District School Board, 2014). What about staff, teacher aids, school volunteers, custodians, school councils, trustees and others. Each stakeholder requires directions and guidance concerning social media, yet this is beyond the scope of this paper.

Nonetheless, there is a need to focus on all stakeholders and not so much on the technology or is this unwise? If we focus on the social media sites and direct our attention towards, "technocentric instruction, our teaching [is focused] on technology rather than the learners who are using it" (Murphy, 2013, p. 6). This can cause us to ask: does the technology drive the vision or does the vision drive technology? Again, the reality that Facebook was born in 2004 with many other social media tools following this gives us an idea of how quickly technology can outpace law, policy and guideline development. Even our own Canadian government Institute of Public Administration of Canada (2010) has reported how the pressures to use social media "are as irresistible as the tides. Government is recruiting thousands of young new professionals for whom social media are the way they live, work and think. Even without a business case, there would be a strong cultural one" (Fyfe & Crookall, 2010, p. 9). Governments are admittedly slow and steady forces in most countries and to have our own Federal Canadian government report that social media is something they need to observe and respond to is evidence of the impact the internet phenomena is having on our society.

Obviously, it has only been a few years since the arrival of Facebook and there have been issues, conflict and new problems. It is estimated that globally over one billion people visit Facebook each day for five minutes and it is still only ranked only #9 in terms of popularity in 2013 (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Considered in another light, "the digital age information is used by citizens and companies as a resource that can provide economic and social value, increasing a country's innovative capacity and competitiveness" (Fyfe & Crookall, 2010, p. 5). Canada's leaders of tomorrow are the very students using this social media hence Canada's innovative capacity and competitiveness is in the secondary classroom today.

Most Popular Social Media

"Countries around the world are taking initiatives to manage and benefit from social media" (Fyfe & Crookall, 2010, p. 12). The question could be asked which social media should we attend to as there are new applications, programs and services being introduced daily. Luckily there are people who feel the need to rank social media tools in terms of their popularity for instance, the top 100 Tools for Learning 2013 are linked to the results of "the 7th Annual Learning Tools Survey. The list was compiled from votes of 500+ learning professionals from 48 countries worldwide" (Hart, 2014). "A learning tool is a tool for your own personal or professional learning or one you use for teaching or training" (Hart, 2014). Once aware of the rankings we can examine the ranked list, for example,

#1 - Twitter was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass and by July 2006, the site was launched. The creators explained: ...we came across the word 'twitter', and it was just perfect. The definition was 'a short burst of inconsequential information,' and 'chirps from birds'. And that's exactly what the product was (Wikipedia, 2013).

#2 - Google Docs is a free web-based word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, form and data storage service from Google where one can work alone or collaboratively. One can also import documents from MS Office and Open Office. It is also referred to as Google Drive. (Wikipedia, 2013).

#3 - YouTube is a video-sharing website, created by three former PayPal employees in February 2005 and owned by Google since late 2006, on which users can upload, view and share videos (Wikipedia, 2013). Typical recreational user?
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fqlzXBc7Eo

#4 - Google is a powerful search engine. It is often described as the only e-learning tool you'll ever need (Wikipedia, 2013).

#5 - PowerPoint, presentation software is part of the Microsoft Office suite. PowerPoint is now back to its 2007 ranking (Wikipedia, 2013).

#8 - WordPress is a blogging platform that is free and easy to use. It can also be used to create a fully-functional website. Wordpress.com is the, hosted version. WordPress.org is free open source software that can be downloaded and used to build a website or blog (Wikipedia, 2013). Another popular social media tool is one developed by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger who launched Wikipedia on January 15, 2001, the latter creating its name, a portmanteau of ***wiki*** (the name of a type of collaborative website, from the Hawaiian word for "quick") and *encyclo**pedia*** (Wikipedia, 2013).

#65 - Tumblr - Development of Tumblr began in 2006 during a two-week gap between contracts at David Karp's software consulting company, Davidville (housed at Karp's former internship with producer/incubator Fred Seibert's Frederator Studios which was located a block from Tumblr's current headquarters) (Wikipedia, 2013).

Perhaps, a ranking effort such as this is flawed since it is actually the number of users that may be the critical indicators and not the opinions of experts. The European Schoolnet (2013) recently completed an action research effort entitled Social Media in Education and Learning (SMILE) which illuminated educational efforts to utilize social media in European classrooms. The European Schoolnet (2013) found that even a simple, "writing, re-writing or editing an article about your school in Wikipedia can become the output of a well-researched cross-curricular project . . ." (p. 24). The European Schoolnet (2013) then concluded how "social media can also be used to collect information and data from students and other key stakeholders. Tools like SurveyMonkey and Facebook Polls provide a great and easy-to-use platform" (p.24), as long as ethical approval and permissions are in place before these social media efforts commence. "Social media tools can be used to encourage collaboration. Google Apps for Education and Google Plus provide some great (and free) collaboration tools to assist with learning and teaching" (European Schoolnet, 2013, p. 23). Whatever and wherever social media used it is likely students will respond positively as many are using these tools in their everyday life (Stevens, 2013)

Secondary School: Social Media

An Ontario Secondary School recently declared:

> When students are able to safely share their ideas with an audience broader than just our classroom, they can often discover their voice and become even more motivated to learn, communicate, and share their ideas effectively with others. An additional outcome of our use of electronic communication and social media is to help students learn through experience, ways to safely use the Internet to share information and to collaborate. To protect student privacy I will:

- Use only first names of students, if names are used at all, identifying student work and ideas.
- Ensure that release forms have been signed if any pictures or videos are posted of your son/daughter as part of the work we are doing with the social media site.

- Engage students in a conversation about the importance of maintaining their own privacy and being aware of the risks and responsibilities when posting names and information related to other students.
- Familiarize myself with the provider's Terms of Service. (Thames Valley District School Board, 2014)

Much of this has grown out of a series of issues, problems, and research in classrooms, schools and Board endorsed investigations.

Consider the claims from Palak and Walls (2009) who investigated technology use in the secondary classroom and concluded that an educator's attitude toward technology was the strongest predictor of whether or not they would integrate technology into their classrooms. Technology integration is a measured and multifaceted process influenced by many factors, and requires a large amount of support (Inan & Lowther, 2010). However, despite inherent unease many educators do infuse social media. One instance is a social media pilot program in Portland, Oregon where a grade seven teacher reported a 50% increase in student grades as well as a reduction in chronic absenteeism by more than one third (Kessler, 2010). Social media in this case seemed to have "deepened academic dialogue" within online learning communities (Stevens, 2013), increased student engagement and authenticity (Renfro, 2011). In a recent national Canadian report Roberts (2013) concluded that "students have authentic learning opportunities with the integration of social media. . . experiencing the integration of social networks and tools into formal learning opportunities, students described deeper and more meaningful understanding" (p. 23).

Benefits

Current research into the use of social media in secondary schools illuminates many benefits (Renfro, 2011). "Social networking media engages the user in the content and allows them to be included as an active participant as they construct a *learning landscape* rooted in social interaction, knowledge exchange, and optimum cognitive development with their peers" (Baird & Fisher, 2006, p.24). Social media has been found to increase collaboration in schools, enhance participation and improve communication (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Kassorla, 2013; Lin et al., 2013).

The use of social media tools improves collaboration through increased connectivity as online classrooms become teaching and learning communities (Casey & Evans, 2011; Fewkes & McCabe, 2012), offering students fresh and thought-provoking means to connect (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Renfro, 2011). Social media usage also challenges traditional teaching and learning models, providing formal and informal learning opportunities (Casey & Evans, 2011; Kassorla, 2013). For example, instead of conveying a "finished and complete packet of information" (Casey & Evans, 2011, p. 3) to students, online participants learn "together online, with the students acting as facilitators" (Casey & Evans, 2011, p. 21). Collaboration with a global audience and building community via social media is also a motivational force (Kassorla, 2013; Renfro, 2011). Imagine for a moment being able to book the virtual expert speaker, take a virtual field-trip and/or stage virtual presentations for others globally; this gets the attention of students (Dame, 2013), while keeping costs down as they appear on Skype, and Twitter. Research can be completed online via survey monkey and/or Kwiksurvey, obviously after ethics approval via the school Administration, School Board or Community Group. Virtual field trips

via YouTube (Schachter, 2011) prove motivating for all and engages a digital generation. Admittedly "when used effectively, new technologies have the potential to allow students to 'speak' to a world far beyond their local community" (Casey & Evans, 2011, p. 1).

Social Media usage has demonstrated positive side effects such as improved collaboration, greater participation and increased student engagement (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Schachter, 2011; Tomaszewski, 2012). The authenticity of social media attracts students (Tomaszewski, 2012). Social media moves from distraction to motivator, attracting attention to curricula (Abe & Nickolas, 2013). Social Media usage leads to alternative participation (Elavsky et al., 2011), enhancing inclusion (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Dame, 2013).

"Evidence shows that social media are already affecting the ways in which people find, create, share and learn knowledge, through rich media opportunities and in collaboration with each other" (Redecker, Ala-Mutka, & Punie, 2010, p.11). This enhanced communication can be viewed as a benefit as all humans are social beings. Schools communicate more with parents via social media (Devitt, 2010). Schools are able to reach parents more often in an economical manner (Schachter, 2011). Administrators can tweet, Skype, instant message and create Facebook pages to contact staff, faculty, and members of the community (Freidman & Freidman, 2013). Pages include updates, news, announcements, pictures and links (Schachter, 2011). In doing this each school appears current, connected and a part of the digital culture. This is important since,

> there's a sharp disconnect between the way students are taught in school and the way the outside world approaches socialization, meaning-making, and accomplishment. It is critical that education not only seek to mitigate this disconnect in order to make these two 'worlds' more seamless, but of course also to leverage the power of these emerging technologies for instructional gain. (Klopfer et al., 2007, p.3)

Social media tools decrease any disconnect as the social world of the student merges with school communication, making education more authentic, meaningful and available (Casey & Evans, 2011). Early in this rising social media economy it was Baird & Fisher, 2006 who suggested:

> The current generation of learners is 'hardwired' to simultaneously utilize multiple types of Web-based participatory media. This is a technologically savvy generation of learners who have no concept of using the 26-volume set of encyclopedias. They have grown up with the Web, are 'always-on,' and expect to utilize technology in their learning. (p. 10)

The benefit of social media lay in its ability to boost student connections and interaction outside of the school and curriculum (Abe & Nickolas, 2013). All students can be involved regardless of ability for instance those with special needs where, "alternative tools can be chosen that accommodate for these differences and mediate the inclusion of learners with special needs" (Redecker et al., 2010, p.10). Social media is often asynchronous as it is ready when you are and tutelage (extra help) and homework chat rooms/bulletin boards can be located online when the student needs those (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Over ten years ago an astute researcher saw the potential suggesting, "the use of technology-based interventions shows great promise for improving the academic performance of students with LD on general education expectations" (Maccini, 2002, p.260).

The popularity and growth of social media use continues to surge for example, "WordPress 3.3 has been downloaded over 12 million times. This latest version of the software was released on 12 December 2011, making that an average figure of 105,263 downloads per day" (Bowers, 2012). WordPress is a global social media tool and "has been translated and localized into at least 73 different languages. This has been achieved entirely on a volunteer basis, by passionate WordPress users in all parts of the world" (Bowers, 2012). These statistics demonstrate the growth and movement of social media globally not to mention the impact it has on digital literacy which some believe is still within an educator's current job description (Casey & Evans, 2011).

Drawbacks

From the onset of this section it is necessary to introduce the notion of negativity within change and suggest those who fear it develop reasons why it is wrongheaded, problematic and threatening. Alternatively, many struggle to "define success and how to assess value in social media initiatives. . . [as] the tools are relatively new and many are still in the experimentation stage, and second, social media initiatives are generally part of a broader communication strategy" (Fyfe & Crookall, 2010, p. 35). Communication in education is something that is controlled, filtered and measured; yet social media takes that control away from the adults in the school and presents uncertainty through new communication pathways. As well, unwelcome outcomes can be linked to the use of social media in schools which result in increased time on tasks, diminished quality of work, privacy (security) concerns and several studies have shown that digital literacy has no impact on achievement scores (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Dame, 2013; Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; O'Brien & Torres, 2012; Vigdor and Ladd 2010; Malamud and Pop-Eleches 2011).

Numerous researchers agree that an overwhelming disadvantage of social media tools in the classroom is the additional time commitment (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; European Commission, 2013; Freidman & Freidman, 2013). In order to effectively incorporate today's social media technology into class routines and curriculum; teachers need to spend time learning and implementing the various components (Lin et al., 2013). Also, it is imperative that teachers provide students with adequate time and support to become familiar with the forms of social media being utilized (Dame, 2013). Teachers also need to locate additional time to monitor online behaviour (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Casey & Evans, 2011; Dame, 2013). However, a recent European Commission (2013) survey found teachers could not access and navigate online due to sluggish downloads (narrow bandwidth) and time-consuming (old) processing hardware. This same survey revealed that some teachers required computer literacy, practical support and lacked or misplaced resources. With time in short supply in a teaching day the technology (social media) must be available, supported and ready for use at the same pace as a low-tech normal day without social media (Web 2.0) usage.

Aside from the added time commitment, researchers identify disadvantages such as deficiencies in the quality and integrity of student work (Dame, 2013; Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Lin et al., 2013). Social media challenges the traditional models of teaching and learning (Casey & Evans, 2011); instead of information moving from teachers to students, social media creates alternative pathways as students facilitate their own learning (Casey & Evans, 2011). Despite

student centred independence (active learners), some educators are concerned about distracting 'edutainment' within social media tools (Renfro, 2011). But, if you want a student to read and they are, only online; is there really an issue? Researchers respond and recommend teachers' focus on positive outcomes of social media use (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012).

Researchers draw attention to privacy concerns as spyware and hacking surfaces via social media use in the classroom (O'Brien & Torres, 2012). There is potential for student information (security) and online activity to lead to adult sites, predators and essentially unlawful activity causing concern for teachers (Dame, 2013; Lin et al., 2013). It is a global concern for educators' hence Australian teachers are trying private social media tools (smart approach) in their classrooms, such as Ning (Casey & Evans, 2011; Renfro, 2011).

Endorsements

Researchers urge and agree that school administrators must create school-wide guidelines and policies to deal social media in schools (Devitt, 2010; Schachter, 2011; Tomaszewski, 2012). These guidelines and policies need to include the issue of confidentiality, the role of teachers as representatives of the school and school board, and the enforcement practices in the event of a problematic situation (Devitt, 2010; Renfro, 2011). With appropriate guidelines in place, school and school board administrators need to train staff on the types of social media tools being used in the classroom (Freidman & Freidman, 2013). Once teachers are competent in the basic skills necessary to use the technology, it is important that they stay up-to-date with the social media tools being developed and published (Kassorla, 2013). Finally, in order to ensure the appropriate use of social media in the classroom, teachers need to be responsible for monitoring and controlling online activity for their classes (Schachter, 2011). The problem remains constant however; where will the necessary time required to do this be taken from, in an already full and busy school day, semester and year?

We have recent articles to turn to which offer potential guidance and recommendations for stakeholders to ensure students get the most out of social media use in the classroom. Just as administrators must create school-wide guidelines and policies concerning use, teachers need to communicate such guidelines to students at the beginning of the semester via the course syllabus (Kassorla, 2013). Teachers should also establish and communicate a purpose for social media use in their classrooms (Lin et al., 2013). Instead of simply using the technology because it is current, teachers need to consider the logistics behind its implementation. Before using the technology, teachers need to address privacy concerns before they become problems (O'Brien & Torres, 2012). In this sense, teachers must demand a separation between the student's use of social media as entertainment and for academic purposes (Lin et al., 2013). In other words, teachers should have students create entirely separate social media accounts for academic use, which will help to ensure that their individual information remains private while online. Once a class starts using social media tools chosen, it is imperative that teachers model appropriate online behaviour, while scaffolding students as they adjust to the technology (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Lin et al., 2013). Lastly, teachers need to see the use of social media as a way to improve classroom communication, not as a replacement for past (print/media) modes (Schachter, 2011).

Conclusions

Clearly, there are advantages and disadvantages when using social media in schools. Benefits appear to outweigh drawbacks thus the use of social media continues to seep into curricula and curriculum. Facebook researchers claim that, "the experience with communication technologies that teenagers today possess must be tapped by educators and connected to pedagogy and content in order to address learning objectives in schools" (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012, p. 93). As educators, part of our responsibility is to prepare students for life (European Schoolnet, 2013). For this reason, considering the increasing prominence of social media in today's society, it should also be our responsibility to help students learn how to "leverage social media in a professional context" (Dame, 2013). As Kassorla (2013) explains:

> Every educator, from kindergarten to graduate school, should contribute to the important and significant work of teaching students to use online sources and social networks for educational and professional goals. To ignore the technology, to assume that our students already know it because they use it every day, is to participate in educational malpractice (p. 1-2).

Social Media technology is relatively new and growing in all directions globally with insignificant oversight (European Schoolnet, 2013). As a result there is a need to examine and investigate all aspects especially given the implications for students, parents, schools and classrooms (Elavsky et al., 2011; Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Current researchers recommend the use of larger sample studies as well as the examination of new and alternative social media tools (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Prospective researchers should consider specific implications of social media in secondary schools and classrooms by determining the impact of the technology on students. However, with the rapid deployment of new social media tools and the rapidly changing digital landscape, published research is outpaced by technological innovation, change and usage. We need to be digital natives and immerse ourselves within the digital world and not avoid or continue to do what we always have done.

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