Chapter 35
Social Media Tools in Initial Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the current context of integrating and exploiting social media tools in initial teacher education. The theoretical part highlights the latest approaches of social media on an international level from the perspective of the following elements: a) the concept of social media, b) the categories of tools, c) the implications of integrating social media technologies in the field of teacher education, and d) the configuration of innovative model of social media in the context of teacher training. The methodological part presents the results of a content analysis research of the way in which new social media tools may be used in initial teacher training. The research results contribute to establishing the main issues in this field as well as new solutions and directions for improving initial training programmes for teachers by means of social media tools.

INTRODUCTION

The preparation of teachers to use social media instruments continues to be a new concern of teachers' educators on the international level. Learning to teach with social media has become an important direction, and it is clear that social media needs to be integrated in the teacher education programmes.

While many members of the profession will continue to provide instruction in traditional, closed environments, an increasing number of them will teach in open, collaborative, Internet-based learning spaces (Stevens, 2010). Despite the development of new technologies, many teachers suffer from a lack of access to training and development programs and the increased delivery of training through social media tools will have direct benefits for them. Kennedy and Archambault (2012, p. 186) appreciate that "teacher education programs will need to consider creating relevant coursework and practica to prepare teachers entering 21st century classrooms, a growing number of which will not have walls".

There are consistent arguments that sustain the need to exploit new technologies in the field

of teacher training. Firstly, there are the obvious *pedagogical arguments*. Teacher preparation can be enhanced by creating opportunities for teachers in training to see, experience, and effectively model lessons learned by different social media tools in their future classrooms. Policy-makers, practitioners and researchers are interested in using social media tools in teacher education to facilitate the education of large numbers of effective and efficient teachers. Networked learning offers the opportunity to deliver training programs in a flexible and learner centred way. Secondly, the *psycho-social arguments* are implied. It is essential for future teachers to understand and use social networks, develop their professional identity through online communities, and question and criticize 'social' aspects of such networks. The use of social media tools develops opportunities to communicate and promotes exchanges, connections, and collaboration among people who share common ideas and interests. Social media tools bring about profound changes in open educational settings that are based on a social re-constructivist paradigm of learning, by promoting a creative and collaborative engagement of learners with digital media content, tools, and services in education. Thirdly, there are, clearly, the *technological arguments*. Networked computing and communications technologies open new information delivery possibilities for teacher education. According to Stevens (2010), students and teachers interact in new forms, eventually building knowledge through digital technologies, which thus requires teacher education, systems and pedagogies to be aligned with a networked, digital society. Improvements in telecommunications networks, the decreasing cost of access and the ubiquity of mobile phones as potential tools for mobile learning represent areas for further development in online, blended and mobile learning as tools of teacher education. Teacher education programs may consider adopting such campus-based social networking sites as safer and more convenient options to free access sites. By resorting to teaching techniques

that incorporate social media, teachers are able to increase students' engagement in their own education, enhance technological proficiency, contribute to a greater sense of collaboration in the classroom, and build better communication skills.

This chapter discusses, on the one hand, the current approaches to social media taking into account the triple foundation (pedagogical, psycho-social, technological) and, on the other hand, analyzes the latest research on integrating different social media tools in the initial training programmes of teachers.

CURRENT APPROACHES TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Conceptual Delimitations

Most of the definitions of social media are unsatisfactory in that many of the characteristics of social media that require certain economic, technical, sociological or psychological explanations are part of the given definition. Solis (apud Malita, 2011) mention that there is a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologue (one to many) into dialogue (many to many). From perspective of teacher education, there is introduced a new variable, the pedagogy, focusing on the aspects referring to the teacher training.

We have identified three dimensions of definitions for social media in correlation with the particularities of the educational process (Figure 1): the technical dimension, which is the basic component; the psycho-social dimension, that implies the interactions and communication aspects; the pedagogical dimension, which represents the specific component of this study, with the purpose of highlighting ways of integrating new technological tools in teacher training programmes. Each dimension of social media results from the main aim or characteristics of using social media.

The definitions fall into two categories according to the following dimensions of the social

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