Chapter 6.10

Social Networking and Schools:
Early Responses and Implications for Practice

Chris Abbott
Reader in e-Inclusion, King's College London, UK

William Alder
Sixth Form Student, Trinity School, UK

ABSTRACT

Although social networking has been enthusiastically embraced by large numbers of children and young people, their schools and colleges have been more cautious, and often concerned about the implications for online safety. Social networking used by young people is considered here as part of a trajectory of online practices which began with personal Web sites in the mid 1990s and continued through the use of interactive services to the networking sites familiar today. The response of the education system is examined through interview and anecdotal evidence, and with reference to a growing body of research in this and allied areas. It is concluded that social networking has initiated a series of practices which cannot now be abandoned, and that the challenge for the education system is not control or abolition but the inclusion of social networking appropriately within teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

If the placing of a research tender can be seen as indicative of the maturity of a topic for study, then the recent award of a contract by Becta, the UK government agency for ICT in education, to research current in-school and out-of-school Web 2.0 experience is an indication that social networking is a relevant area of study for those seeking to understand educational practices in the UK. The researchers at the three Universities involved

(www.lsri.nottingham.ac.uk) will be faced with a range of responses from the education system to the social networking sites that form a key part of current Web 2.0 practice.

Young people of school age frequently use social networking sites in the way that their counterparts of ten years ago used personal Websites: to provide an online representation of themselves and their views and interests, and to communicate with others who may share these preoccupations. Schools and other educational institutions have responded in different ways to this; often by banning such activity but occasionally in a more enlightened way. This chapter will describe how this has happened, outline the positive affordances of social networking for education, and will then suggest a more constructive response from schools and colleges.

SOCIAL NETWORKING AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Social networking has developed rapidly since 2003 and its use by young people has been characterised by successive waves of enthusiasm and ever-changing allegiances. Early alliances with MySpace have given way, for the most part, to institutionally-based networks such as Bebo or culturally-marked sites such as Facebook. At the time of writing, MySpace is seen by many young people in the UK as being more appropriate for younger children, with Bebo having a strong presence within youth in educational institutions and Facebook mostly catering for the late teen and young adult middle class user. This breakdown should be seen as a snapshot in time, however, and, during the period in which this chapter was written, the increasing take-up of Facebook by young professionals has led to a slowing down of its adoption by school-age youth.

It is interesting to note the differing degrees of anonymity in these systems, with the early and largely-anonymised MySpace giving way to

Facebook and its supposed use of real names at all times. The youngest children of all have only recently begun to use social networking through systems such as Club Penguin, recently purchased by Disney in a sign of the financial potential of this area of the online market.

Making assumptions about the relative standing of different social networking sites can be a difficult process. Sites which are seen as of great importance and are sought-after one year can then be demoted the next, as is to be expected with a medium which is closely linked with other areas of youth interest such as music and fashion. One of us is an experienced social networking user and explains further, taking issue with some of the assumptions in the popular and academic press.

I'd say MySpace has a particular type of teenage interest, not younger. Also, it focuses on more arty people to a certain extent – …[there is a] music function, and there are video and other places to display your own work. It also lets you modify your page to make it look how you like, …but personally I find that extremely annoying. I don't like how you cannot read information about people, because it's in a ridiculous font or too small, or because of the photo behind it all due to someone's bad coding. That's what I like about Facebook, you can easily read what people have written about themselves. The day that Facebook changes that is its downfall!

Also, Facebook is much more institutionalised. It used to be the case that you had to have a school, college or university email in order to have an account on it. They've changed that now. It's based around schools, colleges and Unis and where you come from, different networks. (Alder, 2008)

In addition to these wide-ranging general social networking sites, users have the opportunity to align themselves to owned social networks such as Friendlink.

Related Content

Extending Online Communities through Virtual Parrallell Systems

Chu Jongand Pruthikrai Mahatanankoon (2006). *Encyclopedia of Virtual Communities and Technologies (pp. 213-217).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/extending-online-communities-through-virtual/18073

A Virtual-Reality Approach for the Assessment and Rehabilitation of Multitasking Deficits

Otmar Bock, Uwe Drescher, Wim van Winsum, Thomas F. Kesnerusand Claudia Voelcker-Rehage (2018). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 48-58).*

www.irma-international.org/article/a-virtual-reality-approach-for-the-assessment-and-rehabilitation-of-multitasking-deficits/203067

Weblogs in Higher Education

Werner Beuschel (2009). *Handbook of Research on Social Software and Developing Community Ontologies (pp. 40-51).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/weblogs-higher-education/21363

Using Virtual Environments to Motivate Students to Pursue STEM Careers: An Expectancy-Value Model

Jason A. Chen, Nick Zapand Chris Dede (2013). *Immersive Environments, Augmented Realities, and Virtual Worlds: Assessing Future Trends in Education (pp. 42-56).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-virtual-environments-motivate-students/74045

The Effect of Augmented and Virtual Reality Interfaces in the Creative Design Process

Tilanka Chandrasekeraand So-Yeon Yoon (2018). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 1-13).*

www.irma-international.org/article/the-effect-of-augmented-and-virtual-reality-interfaces-in-the-creative-design-process/203064