

Chapter 49

Examining the Benefits of Integrating Social Media into the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Technology is ever-changing in the society we live in. Social media is one of the most popular technologies used fervently among our youth. Educators must recognize the opportunity to utilize familiar resources to engage our students in the learning process. In addition, social media can enhance collaboration, communication, research, discussion, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, social media can provide educators the opportunity to model and teach the importance of digital citizenship. This chapter supports the benefits of integrating social media into the classroom as well as provides information on how to overcome concerns associated with implementing social media.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a phenomenon of the 21st century. Students in every classroom across the world are utilizing technology tools as a means of communication in their personal life. As educators, it is essential to recognize the influence this technology has on our youth. Students graduating high school need to understand the functionality and

usability of social media in their personal, educational, and career pathways. The importance of face-to-face interaction within the classroom is a necessary component in increasing students' knowledge and skill; however, teaching students' to succeed in a virtual environment and promoting digital literacy is vital in today's society as well (Taranto, Dalbon, & Gaetano, 2011). According to Redecker, Ala-Mutka, Bacigalupo, Ferrari, and

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Punie (2009), integrating social media and Web 2.0 technologies within the educational classroom “are at the core of education and training, as they promote the competencies needed for future jobs and enable new tools for education institutions to transform themselves into places that support the competencies needed for participation in the 21st century” (p. 14). Not only is social media needed to prepare students for the afterlife of secondary education, but it is also a familiar resource that students can use to enhance the learning environment. The key elements of social media are collaboration, discussion, and critical thinking. These are extremely important skills that we should be teaching our youth within every classroom.

BACKGROUND

Social media is defined by Bryer and Zavattaro (2011) as “technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders. The technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds” (p. 327). Sistik-Chandler (2012) acknowledged that Web 2.0 technologies, social media, and social networking are often terminology used interchangeably in reference to the online exchanges within cyberspace. Many teenagers and young adults are referred to as digital natives and being in the Net Generation, meaning they were born into a technology driven society and are embedded with highly sophisticated technical skills and learning preferences, in which traditional education is unprepared (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008). Eshet (2004) defined digital literacy as “more than the mere ability to use software or operate a digital device; it includes a large variety of complex cognitive, motor, sociological, and emotional skills, which users need in order to function effectively in digital environments” (p. 93). Yuen, Yaoyuneyong, and Yuen (2011)

conducted a study which resulted in the following findings: teachers are utilizing social media, specifically social networking sites and social video tools; teachers view social video, social networking, and podcasts as a positive technology resource; teachers have a positive perception of the importance of social media and the implications for pedagogical benefits for teaching and learning; and teachers express interest in participating in professional development to effectively integrate social media into the classroom.

The theories supporting social learning in the classroom range as early as Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism to Siemens’ more modern theory of connectivism. Vygotsky theorized that cooperative learning was a fundamental part of the classroom. More specifically, Vygotsky (1978) explained the concept of the zone of proximal development, one of the core concepts within his model of social constructivism, as being “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The social constructivist classroom combines collaboration and social interaction among peers to create a deeper understanding of subject material.

Siemens (2005) suggested behaviorism, cognitivism, and even constructivism are the most frequently utilized learning theories in the creation of instructional environments; however, these theories were developed prior to the digital age in which technology has a significant impact on the learning environment. The digital age began the revolution of having technologically advanced hardware to produce information in a digital format. Most all secondary students have smart phones and/or other technology that allow them to access information in a digital format with a simple click. Siemens’ connectivism theory takes into consideration learning trends, the use of technology in education, and the fading half-life of knowledge. “Connectivism is the integration

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