

# Paradigm Shift: Introduction of a Social Media Network and Web 2.0 Technology into a College Classroom Environment

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*In order to meet the demands of an overcrowded computer lab, a technology instructor designs a plan that is outside the paradigm of what is considered to be "standard operating procedure" for implementing and integrating technology into a course in a teacher education program. To accommodate 125 students in a computer classroom that only has 20 seats and computers, portable media devices with Web 2.0 technology, micro-blogging and a social media network were incorporated as part of the course curriculum. These solutions were chosen because most social media networks are easily accessible via portable media devices and virtually every college-aged student already knows how to use them with little-to-no training. Additionally, Web 2.0 allows for on-line collaboration and sharing, and website interfaces behave like software, thus enabling students to work and communicate easily outside of class. Although the use of technology did facilitate innovation in course activities, there were many challenges throughout the semester and suggestions for improvement in the future.*

*Keywords:* Computer, Computer Lab, Students, Technology Instructor, Web 2.0

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## ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The current project took place in a teacher preparation program at a small, public college in upstate New York. In total, the campus hosts approximately 6,000 students, including in-state enrollment, transfer students, students from out

of state and international students. The ratio of male to female attendees is 44.6% to 55.4%.

The course instructor is a part time, or adjunct professor, in teacher education who has worked for the institution for eight years. He holds a Masters degree in Educational Technology and has practiced in the field for

over 20 years. Primarily, his job at the college was to teach courses about the ways to integrate technological components, such as Smart Boards, web design, 3D animation, etc. into teaching practices.

Approximately four years prior to the start of the project, the teacher preparation program was significantly revised in order to meet new state regulations and become current in educational practices. The premise of the new program focuses on tightly interweaving the various subject areas taught by an elementary school teacher. Whereas subjects such as social studies, math, science, literacy and special education, for example, were once taught as isolated pedagogical courses, the new program interweaves them all in a cross-disciplinary approach. Not only do students learn the various pedagogies in a connected way, but the instructors model it in their own teaching.

Within the design of new program in childhood education, student cohorts were created. The cohorts were essentially learning communities, consisting of approximately 125 students who progressed through the program together through all four years of college. The 125 would sometimes be together for large group lessons, and very often broken out into groups of approximately 25 for activities. Interestingly, faculty teaching this group of students were also in a cohort. They taught together for four years – co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing the student groups. Students took many classes

outside of teacher education to fulfill their liberal arts and academic concentration requirements, but their education courses were all taught by the same group of teachers. Figure 1 illustrates the organization of students and instructors into small groups.

## SETTING THE STAGE

Over the past 10-15 years, as technologies and online teaching platforms have developed, more web-based learning environments have emerged. While some students consider online learning easier than attending a traditional on-site class and some instructors find using an electronic platform to be less rigorous academically, research indicates that there is no significant difference in learning gains between technology-based instruction and traditional instruction (Russell, 1999). However, web-based learning can be considered increasingly valuable for the community of learners that can be created (Crook, 2000). Simard and Schnackenberg (2006) describe best practices for online learning using frameworks that evoke social interaction, such as Laurillard’s Conversation Framework (2002). Simard (2003) places the Conversation Framework in the context of an online learning community and suggests communication and interaction strategies for students and facilitators. Preece (2000) particularly supports the interactive role of facilitators, thus making them

Figure 1. Small group organization of student cohorts and instructors

Instructor 1	25 students
Instructor 2	25 students
Instructor 3	25 students
Instructor 4	25 students
Instructor 5	25 students
Total Cohort	125 students

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