Chapter 38

Communities of Communication:
Using Social Media as Medium for Supporting Teacher Interpersonal Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the potential of social media use as an access to interpersonal relationships for teachers. Society has been forever altered by the shifts in the intellectual landscapes of learning and knowing through the Internet. By utilizing mobile communication technologies, Internet pathways allow growth in personal and professional relationships in real time, providing opportunity for open and profound dialogues, learning, and global perspectives. Yet even with the strong social presence of Internet communications in today's society, our teachers continue to struggle with building interpersonal relationships with colleagues. Drawing from the literature as well as from personal experiences and relationships, this chapter explores some of the interpersonal challenges teachers face at work due to physical and abstract barriers, as well as the possible solution found in social media. This perspective hopefully adds to understanding regarding the interpersonal challenges teachers may experience at work, the importance of meeting those challenges, and the potential inter-relational benefits resulting from social media use.

INTRODUCTION

The setting of social computing has changed strikingly in the last 20 years. "Not only has the technology environment changed–the analytical environment has changed at the same time" (Goodson, Knobel, Lankshear, & Mangan, 2002). The postmodern and constructivist turn of reflec-

tive life applications has altered the intellectual landscape (see Lyotard, 1984). As a result, the kinds of questions and answers that many educational researchers deal with have been profoundly altered. Power relations and ideological forms that underlie important cultural phenomena are receiving greater attention. In other words, how and why we do things and have done things for

hundreds of years, is dramatically changing; a "paradigm shift," if there ever was one.

The use of Internet-based communications is part of a larger cultural shift that is becoming an increasingly complex and multi-faceted process; a process in which patterns of globalizing control collide with new opportunities for individual expression (Haughey, 2000). In order to begin to answer the deeper questions, educational research must deepen its examination and assessment of alternative forms of technology-rich instruction, and the contexts in which they are situated (Haughey, 2000).

This Chapter presents two learning theories situated in today's schools, traditional vs. constructivism, simultaneously creating both potential tensions and possibilities for the development of collaborative relationships among teachers. Fundamental and unquestioned in our educational institutions, the traditional model of "get an education" has prevailed. One goes to the teacher to get the knowledge. In this design explained by Gadamer (1975), knowledge is separate from individual knowers and is certain, static, and depersonalized; received and accumulated. The truth of this knowledge is testable and prove-able, thus causing the need for testing and assessment. To "get an education" one goes to the school of experts, and "gets" it. This methodological split between mind and body has led to the belief that knowledge gained by rational objectivism is superior to that gained by personal experience.

But the cyber technology phenomenon is changing the knowledge landscape. Meaning, some believe technology lends itself to the learning construct as proposed by Dewey in 1938, "becoming more experienced" (Dewey, 1938). In this concept, knowledge is seen as personalized, constructed and reconstructed through transactions with others. Knowledge is built from experience and is always in interaction between persons. Here, we generate our knowledge through socially constructed interactions with our social and natural environment.

The dualism of traditional schooling, contrasting with postmodern thought of learning through experiences of self and others (Jenlink, 2010), points to different beliefs about what counts as authorized knowledge, the procedures for constructing knowledge, and the relationship between the knower and the known. We are each unique and separate beings, isolated in our own continuity of experience with our own unique biographies. At the same time, being part of the world places us in an interactive relationship that constitutes a sharing of experience. When getting an education is structured around going to the experts for an accumulation of knowledge, knowing becomes hierarchically structured. Relationships become situated according to those who know and those who don't. On the other hand, knowledge gained through experience involves narrative collaboration. Because we each experience the world differently, there is great potential for infinite ways of knowing, and it is this infinite, experiential learning that is taking place on the Internet, in the sharing dialogues on social media sites.

As schools are still more or less practicing "getting an education" instead of exchanging knowledge through "experiencing," the experiential learning potential of the Internet could be one of the hidden determents to its successful implementation in our schools. The learning through knowledge exchange offered by mobile pedagogy, such as using social media, challenges the orthodox methodology of traditional education. And yet, our journey toward meaningful learning must begin to include digital pathways, so that our students' education is relevant and sustaining.

The pressure for schools to increase academic achievement for all students and to hold schools accountable to standards and expectations have never been greater (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Parry, 2007). Over the past 15 years, a growing body of literature suggests that the classroom teacher can have the single most impact on a student's learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002). Supporting this premise, fund-

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