Chapter 15
The Integration of Social Networking in Creating Collaborative Partnerships in Education

Larry S. Tinnerman
Indiana State University, USA

James Johnson
Indiana State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Technological communication advancements in recent years, including, but not limited to, the Internet, cell phones, PDAs and texting, have changed communication, accessing information, and doing business. Unfortunately, education has often lagged behind in the effective implementation of these technological advances. This chapter examines one technological development that has the potential to change the higher educational landscape. The use of online social networking tools can be used to help establish connections student to student, student to faculty, faculty to student and faculty to faculty. These tools can be used to encourage scholarly collaboration in a constructivist manner that builds upon the social learning theories of Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotski.

INTRODUCTION

'There will be no social networking during school hours' are words that may be heard echoing down the halls of too many public schools across this nation. Each year new teachers leave the hallowed halls of higher education with a fresh optimism about the future and a backpack filled with new technology-based teaching pedagogy. Within weeks, their attempts to implement these skills will often be met with the limiting attitudes that began this section. The fact that public education is one of the most conservative entities on the planet makes change slow at best and impossible at worst. The fact is the world is changing. The way that people, particularly young people, communicate, collaborate and learn is evolving at an increasingly rapid pace while monolithic educational systems are falling further behind day by day.

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In the genesis of social, economic, educational, or technological change … there are often two major forces at play, limiters and drivers. Limiter forces are often those elements that tend to slow or restrict the progress of change, while driver forces have the general effect of accelerating change. One unique aspect of both limiters and drivers is that they have the ability to reverse roles over time. As we look at the various technical innovations emerging in classroom pedagogy, we will consider the impact of both drivers and limiters and their versatile nature.

By federal regulation, all public schools in this nation employ filters on their networks. The motivation behind these filters is quite sound. Network administrators and school administration take the role of network security very seriously. However, these security precautions usually reach beyond the realm of data and information in an attempt to assure the safety of student users. The school interprets this responsibility as the power to limit student access to potentially dubious entities and materials. However, in the quest to filter out the "undesirable", most network administrators have limited access to virtually all-possible avenues of social collaboration. Blocked areas include social networking sites, even those whose prime focus is that of education, blog sites, discussion forums, external email sites, and even some basic internet sites that contain streaming media. This action is often reactionary in nature and the secondary consequences are rarely considered.

Research is hinting at a change in the manner in which people process information. The older generation (40 plus) has been referred by Prensky (2001) as digital immigrants. This designation indicated that the older generation lacked the technology emergence that members of the younger generation seemed to enjoy from birth. It was thought that the ease with which people could access technology would have a profound effect on their willingness to adopt new uses of said technology. However, as the tech bubble has continued to expand, all Americans are touched one way or another by this revolution. One example is the use of cell phones and texting. The American Psychological Association may be well advised to consider the inclusion of a new diagnosis in the DSM desk reference. The may be classified as "Technology Withdrawal Anxiety Syndrome". What science is finding is that people, particularly the younger generation, are somehow tied to their technology in a very real manner. The situation alludes to the fact that people have become dependent upon technology for communication, scheduling and information retrieval. Where once an individual had to make a trip to the library or consult the all knowing encyclopedia for their source of information, today's citizen is just a few clicks away from a source of information, news, stocks, blogs, podcasts, live feeds, recipes... the list just goes on and on. In addition, rather than waiting until one gets home to make a phone call, people make multiple calls to individuals, often in the same day or even the same hour. Parents appear to be in constant contact with their college students and vice versa. All this instant technology has caused people to expect instant gratification in regards to any situation that may arise in life. What is interesting is that there even appears to be a change in how individuals process and distribute information. Due to limited resources, individuals of the older generation gathered information using the "Expert" model, which employed a broadcast system. School classrooms were generally lecture format where the expert broadcast information to the students. Entertainment was largely movies and limited TV choices where entertainment was broadcast to the audience. It was not uncommon for a family spending "quality time" together as meaning watching a TV program or movie. The dynamic change that has occurred in today's culture is more akin to a "collective" mentality. Today, individuals gather information from a wide variety of sources and individuals. The role of the expert has been diminished in many ways being often replaced by YouTube and other media outlets. Cable news is available 24 hours a day and