Chapter 8

Facebook and Moodle as Classroom Extensions: Integrating Digital Technologies in the Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses how autonomy, collaboration, and cooperation are built in a class designed to use digital technologies for a teacher development syllabus. For the purpose of this chapter, data was collected using an empirical-qualitative approach through active observation in participative action, using a questionnaire and Moodle e-portfolio that addressed learning in several virtual tools including Facebook. The final analysis demonstrates that it is possible to understand the autonomous and collaborative teaching and learning process when online tools such as social networks are used, and it is also possible to determine students' participation through authorship. However, such acknowledgment requires that participants be prepared in terms of methodology, including teachers, and have the means to consider accepting new ways of teaching through the cooperation enabled by social networks and virtual learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

Communication and information technologies, especially collaborative software available on the web, are part of the young generation’s routine (Patrício & Gonçalves, 2010). According to Capobianco (2010), such tools offer resources to enhance educational processes, thus opening new possibilities to improve traditional education. Some college students already use social network sites (SNS), as reported in national and international research (Patrício & Gonçalves, 2010).
2010; Capobianco, 2010; Cain, 2008; Muñoz & Towner, 2011). Even when students do not want to mix studies and virtual spaces used for leisure, they have a way of using such tools for learning, thus facilitating the exploration of their resources (Patrício & Gonçalves, 2010) in the classroom.

Many studies show that simply accessing the web does not mean using its sites, nor does reading webpages mean their readers learn, question, or even share what they learned, including getting to develop authorship skills (Camas, 2008; 2012; Costa, 2012). This study agrees with these findings, and aims to develop a dialogue with 35 college students enrolled in the undergraduate education program at the Federal University of Paraná, located in Curitiba, Brazil. This study, developed throughout 2012, was about the use of different tools available on the web, such as YouTube, Wikipedia, blogs, SNSs, and their association with Learning Management Systems (LMS) at graduate level education.

In Brazil there are relatively few studies that address the need to analyse such tools in the pedagogical process, since many teachers and students are still inhibited to use them for a lack of a better understanding of their features.

There is a need to have a pedagogical framework to help include these users in the digital culture, as well as to guide students who are enrolled in the education program to become teachers so that the critical use of current and future digital technologies can be part of the curricular narrative (Goodson, 2005: 2007).

In education, we understand that for a teacher to include his students in the cyberculture and be enabled to reflect upon cybersociety, first there is the need to be prepared in advance by understanding that simply accessing a social network or LMS to perform an assigned task will not change any educational system nor will it be considered educational innovation. Access to web tools must be linked to pedagogical goals, or else the methodologies which employ technology will not meet the class objectives and enable the students’ education (Costa, 2012).

The Ministry of Education in Brazil introduced, as part of the process to transform national educational bases, the PCN (National Curricular Parameters, in English) to guide syllabi selection and pedagogical procedures for teachers’ classroom goals. In the PCN, there is a chapter dedicated to the use of technologies in the book “References of Languages, Codes and their Technologies”.

A closer look into the Brazilian syllabi matrix reveals that technology was included to transform the teachers’ perception of languages and how they can be used, enabling educators to experience new possibilities, which go beyond the traditional oral and written forms provided that teachers are trained to use technology and move from functional literacy to world awareness.

Essentially, this means that the role of universities to train future teachers has occasionally neglected the critical training of undergraduate students in education regarding the use of technology.

As other studies have proposed (Camas 2008; 2012; Camas & Mengali, 2011), it is essential in our country that technology is a subject in undergraduate courses so that teachers can understand and include new technologies as classroom tools, promoting debates about the impact caused by their use in the structure of our cognitive activity.

Given the possibilities provided by digital technologies, and the search for conscious, collaborative and autonomous professional and social development for educators, a few questions can be raised. First, are we teaching and learning with the mediation of digital tools (LMS, SNS, among others), which are characterized by the Web 2.0 convergence and mobility? If so, does such learning use digital media and their cybercultural aspects, i.e., are students the creators and co-creators in the learning process? And, do students use social software as a support for educational activities at undergraduate level?