Chapter 6
Digital Media and Social Network in the Training of Pre–Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The use of Web 2.0 environments and social media in teaching and learning facilitates the provision of participatory and creative, learner-oriented teaching. The proposed chapter describes the role of social media in teaching and learning in colleges of higher education and suggests possible uses and applications for a variety of social media environments in education, especially the environments of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Social networks facilitate activities that promote involvement, collaboration and engagement. Modeling of best practices using social networks enhances its usage by students, increases student confidence as to its implementation and creates a paradigm shift to a more personalized, participatory and collaborative learning and a more positive attitude towards its implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have witnessed a technological revolution influencing the ways in which we create knowledge, communicate, learn and teach. The Internet is 45 years old, and for almost half that time has been available to the general public. Already in 1998, the British scientist Timothy Berners-Lee (2000), who was considered the inventor of the Internet, predicted that the Internet would be a space where anyone could have immediate access not only to surf but also to create contents. In the era of Web 1.0 (1992-2000) it was possible to consume information but only a very few could publish contents, the division between those who created, distributed and consumed information was clear.

During this era, Web 2.0 - also known as “Reading-Writing Internet” - evolved (Price, 2006; Richardson, 2006). Bruns (2008) a social media researcher called this the Produsage era, combining the concepts of production and usage. This new era produced Cloud-based technology making information accessible
and available in any time and place, changing the way people transmit information and allowing social media to flourish (Johnson, Adams & Cummins, 2012; Siemens, 2005). Although social media were not initially intended for use in education, educators saw the media as having immense potential to implement and advance constructivist learning theory that promotes collective wisdom, allowing access to a wide range of data, sharing surfers’ content, and promoting self-expression and a sense of ownership of written materials (Reilly, 2005). King (1993) noted that the perception of the lecturer changed, instead of being the “sage on the stage” he became a guide and the teacher-focused teaching paradigm was replaced by a paradigm of teaching focused on the learning process (Barr & Tagg, 1995); the learner became involved in the construction of knowledge and contributed to it being remembered (Mayer, 1984). Social media anchored in the Web 2.0 world, offers a teaching model involving collaboration, interactions on the web between participants, allowing learners to be independent and using a variety of types of communication and cooperation (Rogers et al., 2007; Sheely, 2006). The Internet is no longer one-directional and controlled by a limited number of content creators, rather it is open and democratic and anyone with Internet and a browser can participate, create, work in collaboration, manage and share knowledge.

The social network characteristics necessitate renewed thinking about interactions between teachers, learners and learning materials and innovative methods should be explored to harness technological means in favor of meaningful teaching and learning processes. As someone who has worked for more than a decade in the implementation of Web 2.0 environments and social media in teaching and learning, I have experienced rich collaborative and creative learner-oriented teaching practices that enable the learners to become engaged and involved through the learning process (Seifert, 2015).

THE WORLD OF WEB 2.0: SOCIAL MEDIA, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social media tools bring about profound changes in educational settings, supporting a social-constructivist paradigm of learning by promoting creative and collaborative engagement of learners with the digital content and tools (Măţă, 2013). Several scholars have theorized the pedagogical potential of using social media, such as social network sites for learning and emphasized the technology’s potential for supporting collaborative knowledge construction (Dede 2008; Greenhow 2011; Siemens, 2005). Yet, pre-service students performing practicum in schools saw little evidence of teaching with SNSs in their classes; where this was reported, they perceived these efforts as primarily reinforcing traditional pedagogies and assessments (Greenhow & Askari, 2017). The various digital media tools that can be employed in school classes can be sorted into four categories: (1) tools for experiential writing and shared resources (blog, Twitter); (2) tools for sharing media and tagging (Flicker, Instagram and Youtube); (3) social media applications that permit creation of a semantic network (Facebook and LinkedIn). (4) Synchronic and a-synchronic communication tools (electronic mail, Skype and WhatsApp) (Dabbagh & Reo, 2011).

The Horizon 2014 report summarizes research identifying and describing trends and technologies that will have a greater influence on education teaching and research in the future, the authors note changes in interpersonal communication means in recent years (Johnson, Adams, Becker, Estrada & Freeman, 2014). Among the facts identified: more than 1.2 billion people use Facebook regularly, 2.7 billion people (almost 40% of world population) use social networks, and on 25 leading social media platforms, 6.3 billion people have accounts (including teachers, students, pupils, scientists etc.).
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