Chapter 5

Using Facebook in Teaching

Ioana Boghian

“Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău, Romania

ABSTRACT

Educators have started to turn to social networking sites as they began to recognize the assistance that such sites may provide in information dissemination, creation and cooperation activities, and also in receiving feedback. As promoter of personality, individuality, self-expression, self-assertion, and communication, Facebook responds well to the particularities and requirements of the student-centered approach to teaching and learning. By critically analyzing certain pedagogic approaches to Facebook and by highlighting the common denominator of Facebook and student-centered strategies in terms of didactic benefits, this paper intends to answer the following questions: Can Facebook be regarded and used as an effective and efficient educational tool? If yes, in what way(s)?

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook or Bebo have been increasing in popularity ever since they were invented. The number of people using social networking sites has grown to such an extent that their power of communication, of establishing and maintaining connections has drawn the attention of academics and industry researchers. With an alleged – credible and increasing – number of over 900 million users (it seems that about 100 million users joined Facebook in the course of the last nine or ten months since at the moment that I started working on this article the number of Facebook users reported by various Internet sources was 800 million users), we consider that Facebook deserves particular attention in terms of the educational opportunities it may provide for both students and teachers. Studies
Using Facebook in Teaching

on pedagogic approaches to Facebook and social networking sites have already been carried out and their results have already been published and disseminated (Matthews, 2006; Hewitt and Forte, 2006; Mazer, Murphy and Simonds, 2007; Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis, 2007; Selwyn, 2009; Towner and VanHorn, 2007). A concern for training educators on how to use social networking sites in their didactic activities has also been increasingly visible in recent years (Rego, 2009; Munoz and Towner, 2009; Ragupathi, 2011).

The student-centered approach to education focuses on the needs of the students rather than on the needs of the other actors involved in the educational process. Classroom activities involve students particularly in group-work, also encouraging initiative and decision-taking from the part of the student. In the student-centered class, teacher talk has diminished drastically to give way to student talk, student-student interaction and student assertion. In this way students are encouraged to create and develop their own learning style. The teacher’s role has shifted from that of main source of information to that of mediator and guide. Besides promoting peer communication, collaboration and active learning or learning through discovery, student-centeredness also aims at turning students into independent, autonomous learners by creating and developing self-motivation and self-regulation skills. Such skills may serve them in future self-educating initiatives (McCombs and Whistler, 1997; O’Neil and MacMahon, 2010; Cojocariu, 2012; Arends, 2012).

As promoter of personality, individuality, self-expression, self-assertion and communication, Facebook responds well to the particularities and requirements of the student-centered approach to teaching and learning. On Facebook, students have been found to take pieces of information and repeat or “share” them to their groups of friends, thus performing mentoring and advising activities. Educational cooperative activities are also carried out on Facebook as, for example, when groups of students move their teamwork projects on the level of the virtual ‘chat room’. Moreover, Facebook also complies with each learner’s unique style of learning, which constitutes another basic principle of student-centered education. Instant feedback is also provided through Facebook so that one piece of information posted by some student gets several responses almost instantaneously.

Taking into consideration the ideas presented above, the main objectives of our paper are: a theoretical approach to using Facebook in teaching and to student-centered educational strategies, with the specification of the pros and cons for using Facebook in the didactic process and also the identification of the common points between Facebook and student-centered strategies in terms of students’ learning benefits and advantages; the identification and formulation of best practice recommendations for teachers on how to use Facebook in teaching of the type dos and don’ts; providing illustrative examples on how to use Facebook in teaching for various educational subjects and educational levels; our attempt to propose an experimental future project of using Facebook in teaching with the purpose of identifying the impact of using Facebook in learning and particularly in distance learning. Thus, one section of the paper will focus on defining the key concepts underpinning our paper, the following section will constitute an attempt at approaching Facebook as an educational tool from the perspective of student-centeredness and the last section will be concerned with providing some concrete examples on how to combine the use of Facebook and student-centered strategies for educational purposes.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Facebook is a social networking site, the most popular online social networking site among university students (Cheung et al., 2011, p. 1337) that was originally designed for college students but is now open to anyone 13 years of age or older. A