Opening Facebook:
How to Use Facebook in the College Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to propose the idea of using the social network site, Facebook, for teacher education. Specifically, this research explores the advantages of this new Web 2.0 medium, and illustrates the different levels of course integration at an instructor's disposal. In addition, it provides specific instructions on how to use Facebook and a discussion of "best practice" policies that can be ethically implemented within the classroom. Specific attention is given to suggestions for creating a professional Facebook presence in which future teachers can emulate.

Introduction

Students are heavily immersed in Web 2.0 technologies (i.e. blogs, twitter, podcasts, wikis, social network sites, virtual worlds, video sharing and photo sharing). They are crafting on-line lives that seamlessly meld with their off-line world. Indeed, the internet is playing an increasingly important role in not only students' social life, but also academic. Educators are now turning to Web 2.0 tools, drawing upon their ability to assist in creating, collaborating on and sharing content. At present, little empirical research has been conducted on the value of Web 2.0 in education (Crook & Harrison, 2008). Research has begun to examine social network sites, but few studies have specifically addressed its role in pedagogy (for notable exceptions see Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis, 2007; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Mathews, 2006; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007; Selwyn, 2007; Towner & VanHorn, 2007). Teacher education literature has also started to address this area (Coutts, Dawson, Boyer, & Ferdig, 2007; Grant, 2008; Saunders, 2008).

Social network sites (also called social networking sites) are quickly becoming ubiquitous online. The most popular of these websites are Myspace, bebo, and Facebook

(Stelter, 2008). While technological differences abound, social network sites are "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Social network sites can help facilitate the meeting of strangers, however, individuals are also using social network sites to maintain and/or strengthen their current, off line social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook, specifically, has been found to be used to reinforce current offline relationships (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2006). As previous communication technologies (e.g. email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc.) have been integrated into the way we teach and administer our courses, social network sites may also have a place in our classroom. To date, the reactions of using social network sites for educational purposes are mixed. Concerns related to privacy and anxiety in interacting with professors in this environment (Hewitt & Forte, 2006), a belief that it does not serve an academic purpose (Charnigo & Barnet-Ellis 2007) and the opinion that faculty should simply avoid "educationally appropriating" these "backstage" social spaces (Selwyn, 2007) have been expressed. In fact, the expression, "creepy treehouse" has been appropriated to explain educators' use of online social spaces like Facebook (Young, 2008). Yet, other studies have supported that notion of using social network sites in education. For example, two-thirds of students surveyed in one study were "comfortable" with faculty on Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006) and another study found that 39% of college students surveyed wanted regular on-line discussions with faculty (Fischman, 2008).

Why Use Facebook in Teacher Education?: Advantages of Social Network Sites

Facebook has quickly become the social network site of choice by college students and an integral part of the "behind the scenes" college experience (Selwyn, 2007). Since its 2004

inception, virtually all colleges in the United States (and growing internationally) have designated college networks within the site. The adoption rates of Facebook in universities and colleges are remarkable; 85% of college students that have a college network within Facebook have adopted it (Arrington, 2005). Furthermore, Facebook also has a growing audience in perspective teachers' high school and middle school students. To illustrate, registration for individuals age 12-17 grew by 149% between May 2006 and May 2007 (Lipsman, 2007) and a 2007 Pew Internet and American Life Project study found that 55% of 12-17 were using social networking sites (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Not only are many teens registered on social networking sites, but they are also very active users. The 2007 Pew Internet and American Life study found that "48% of teens visit social networking websites daily or more often; 26% visit once a day, [and] 22% visit several times a day" (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

In addition to the incredible usage rate among students, there are a number of unique features that make it amenable to educational pursuits. For example, Facebook is equipped with bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, and the ability to post videos and pictures. Most notably, anyone can post information and collaborate within the system. Recently, Facebook has opened up development of downloadable applications, which can further supplement the educational functions of Facebook. While many of these technological tools mirror those found in currently employed courseware programs (e.g. blackboard, moodle, etc.), the ability and ease with which an individual (instructor or student) can upload photo and videos, the frequent and seamless updates and maintenance, the generous 1024 MB limit on videos, and the compatibility with a wide variety of web browsers are superior to some courseware options.

Beyond high usage rates and some technological advantages, social networks, such as Facebook, can provide numerous other pedagogical advantages to both teachers and students.

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Facebook is a network that connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community – a vital component of student education (Baker, 1999). Facebook provides instructors opportunities and structures by which students can help and support one another by building their courses atop the community already established by the students themselves. Hamann and Wilson (2002) found that students who participated in a web-enhanced class outperformed those students in a traditional lecture format. This suggests that Internet based learning modules actively engage students in a manner unique from the traditional class lecture.

Facebook also increases both teacher-student and student-student interaction in the form of web-based communication. Facebook helps instructors connect with their students about assignments, upcoming events, useful links, and samples of work outside of the classroom. Students can use Facebook to contact classmates about questions regarding class assignments or examinations as well as collaborate on assignments and group projects in an online environment. Building on the face-to-face, teacher-student relationship, social networks allow students to glimpse instructor profiles containing personal information, interests, background, and "friends," which can enhance student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate (see Mazer et al., 2007). Other scholars, however, find that instructor presence on Facebook has neither a positive nor a negative effect on student ratings (i.e., likeability and respect) of professors (Hewitt & Forte 2006).

Lastly, utilizing Facebook effectively in teacher education courses will help facilitate perspective teachers to model what they have learned in their own classrooms. Teacher education students will not only benefit by the classroom advantages of using Facebook, but also by learning professional Facebook etiquette (discussed in the best practices section). Previous teacher education research (Coutts, Dawson, Boyer, & Ferdig, 2007) and a number of popular

press articles provide evidence that some perspective and current teachers have much to learn in regards to privacy and professional/personal boundaries on Facebook (Helms, 2008; Shapira, 2008).

How to Use Facebook in Teacher Education

Instruction in using Facebook should be an integral part of teacher education programs, particularly with so many different types of social networks emerging. As Voithofer (2007) notes, instructing teacher education students on social networks encourages them to consider 1) the technical and pedagogical characteristics of educational technology, 2) the social aspects of educational technology, and 3) how to think about emerging technologies in relation to teaching (p.11). It is important for teacher educators to introduce students to social networks. As an optional assignment, teacher can have students create their own Facebook account and "become friends" with at least one other member of class. Then, have students post appropriate, class-related images, messages about course assignments and events, and course applications, such as "Courses 2.0" or "Courses Connection," on Facebook – persuade students to experiment with different features (See Best Practice Policies below). Teachers who engage with a technological medium are more likely to value that technological tool in their teaching (Russell et al., 2003). Teacher educators should have students implement Facebook in a currently taught course, focusing on integrating course content and objectives. When implementing Facebook, pre-service teachers must consider a pedagogical rational for using Facebook as well as suggested course applications. To further identify real and potential issues when using Facebook, teacher educators can assign articles about the educational uses of Facebook. Then, drawing from their personal experience with Facebook and the readings, pre-service students can reflect about Facebook as an educational tool in the classroom or an a course blog.

Levels of Course Integration

The following list provides an overview of the different ways that Facebook can be integrated into a course. The Profile page is the simplest option to implement, whereas the integration of Facebook applications (in conjunction with the other methods illustrated) is the most comprehensive.

1) Profile Page: An instructor can chose to create a profile page for him/herself. The profile page can be used to communicate with students via Facebook email, IM, or posting on the wall. In addition, relevant videos, images and websites can also be included. Students could also be exposed to relevant and educational Facebook groups.

2) *Creating a Group Page for a Class:* A separate page can be created specifically for a course. Students can virtually find other classmates through this page, learn about their classmates, communicate with their classmates and professor, and post/discuss relevant class information. Professors can send an announcement to the entire group, set up and remind students about events.

3) *Replacing/Duplicating webcourse functions on Facebook:* Discussions that traditionally have taken place on webcourse boards can also occur on Facebook discussion boards. Instant messaging functions are also available online. Instructors can post information and websites on their profile and group page for students to download and use for class.

4) *Integration of Facebook Applications:* There are a number of useful applications that will expand the functionality of Facebook for class. However, using these applications requires that students download them as well.

Best Practice Policies

  As instructors create their profile and course functions in Facebook, what are some best practices for using it effectively as a teaching tool? And how can teacher educators teach Facebook professional etiquette? First, an instructor should create an additional Facebook profile for professional use only. This profile should be entirely separate to their social/personal profile, where privacy settings need to be implemented. The professional profile should contain contact information, specifically an email address, office address, and phone number. The profile allows students to learn about the instructor on a personal level, so it is important to include a few photos, post items or web links, or list favorite quotes. While these tidbits of personal information can lead to positive teacher-student interactions, it is important to maintain a level of professionalism that does not cross the boundary of the teaching-student relationship. Considering the latter, for instance, instructors should carefully screen personal photos and items they post to their profile. In addition, instructors should refrain from talking about their students, other teachers, administrators, and their institution on Facebook regardless of whether they are professionally or socially using Facebook. Second, to connect with students, instructors must inform students that they have a Facebook profile. It is not recommended that instructors invite students as their friends on Facebook, as students may perceive this as an invasion of privacy as well as intimidating. Instead, keep your profile "open" to the public rather than "private." This allows students to comfortably peruse an instructor's profile without asking the instructor to be their friend. Then, instructors can simply list the web link to their Facebook profile in their course syllabus, email signatures or other course management software. In addition, instructors can simply display their Facebook profile during class, inviting students to look at their profile. It is also recommended that instructors mention that they will not be viewing their students'

profiles and encourage students to designate them on their "limited profile" list (i.e. instructors will not be exposed to all of the student's Facebook activities). Instructors should demonstrate how to use Facebook privacy settings. Third, to get students started on Facebook, instructors should create an icebreaker activity on Facebook, such as a posting a topic to solicit student discussion or inserting a video accompanied with study questions, to help develop a classroom community and establish positive relationships. Fourth, when integrating Facebook into their courses, instructors should designate student involvement on Facebook as an option, as not all students are registered users, and provide students other alternatives. Lastly, if using the site as a course tool, it is suggested that instructors post podcosts, websites, and videos on Facebook, and, using Google Documents, link students to study guides, powerpoints, assignments, and tutorials. Instructors can contact students via Facebook by sending messages, posting comments on "the wall" or chatting with students during virtual office hours. By increasing student involvement through communication and community, instructors can tailor their courses towards a variety of learning styles.

Conclusions

It is our conjecture that the benefits of Facebook's networking and social communication capabilities can benefit both the instructor and the student by tapping into a greater number of learning styles, providing an alternative to the traditional lecture format, creating an online classroom community, and increasing teacher-student and student-student interaction. Efforts should be made by instructors to expand their pedagogical portfolio, promote active learning through a learning community, and to test the effectiveness of on-line learning communities through social networks such as Facebook. Scholars should continue their investigations into these alternative teaching tools to determine if the benefit of creating cyber learning communities

to complement the traditional classroom experience is worth the cost of retooling and restructuring. Furthermore, teacher preparation can be enhanced by creating opportunities for teachers in training to see, experience, and effectively model lessons learned on Facebook in their future classrooms.

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