

Blogs & Social Media Blending the social and academic world..

Social Networking, defined by Gunawardena et al (2009) as the “practice of expanding knowledge by making connections with individuals of similar interests” is a potentially powerful tool for both Post-Secondary Faculty and the K-12 classroom teacher. Through this networking, students are afforded the opportunity to co-create knowledge within a Community of Practice (Wenger et al, 2002). Further, a recent study conducted by Junco et al (2013) found that “the design of teaching strategies and practices related to virtual engagement and collaboration is instrumental to achieving positive educational outcomes (when using Twitter)” (p.285) and that instructor participation was one key to successful implementation and an increase in student engagement.

An increasing segment of society is getting involved in social media and Faculty at the University level is no exception. Faculty use of social media mirrors that of the general population and Faculty are increasingly using social media for personal and professional purposes, according to a recent survey by [Pearson](#). The gap, however, appears with respect to the use of social media in teaching. Many respondents stated concerns about the ‘distraction’ social media provides students and the potential for increased working hours. The top concern of faculty, however, was student privacy.

While these concerns are certainly valid, so too are the potential benefits of social media. Blogs and wiki’s, as well as other forms of social media, have the potential to allow students to become ‘true intellectuals’ by blending their social and academic lives according to Dr. Benjamin Balak, professor of economics at Rollins College in an interview with [CityTownInfo](#). Like Dr. Balak, increasingly Professors in the social and applied sciences, arts and humanities are recognizing the value of social media and using wiki’s and blogs (and even Twitter and Facebook) in the classroom. This co-construction of knowledge and the potential for a wider audience than typical pen and paper tasks can positively affect student learning.

The modeling and teaching of [Digital Citizenship](#), [Tattoo](#) and [Footprint](#) can help to mitigate privacy concerns. Further, it can be argued that such teaching is necessary in an increasingly digital world. It has been my experience that when students post reflections to a blog that can be read by classmates and, potentially, the world, they are more likely to take care in their posts and model academic writing.

Through a [gradual release model of instruction](#), teachers can support students in developing a writing voice that is both appropriate for the venue and effective from a communication of concept, content or context standpoint. Beginning any blogging ‘experiment’ by keeping privacy settings fairly high and ‘releasing’ them only when the instructor has confidence that the students are able to moderate their own posts is key. At some levels and with some groups, full ‘release’ of moderation may never occur. This of course, adds ‘time’ to the instructor’s load that may necessitate a shift in the organization of the course.

References:

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., Snyder, W.M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice. A guide to managing knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Gawardena, C.N., Hermans, M.B., Sanchez, D., Richmond, C., Bohley, M., & Tuttle, R. (2009). A theoretical framework for building online communities of practice with social networking tools. *Educational Media International*, 46(1), 3-16.

Junco, R., Elavsky, C.M., & Heiderger, G. (2013). Putting twitter to the test: Assessing outcomes for student collaboration, engagement and success. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44(2), 273-287.

RESEARCH

SCARFE Digital Sandbox - Come Play!

PRACTICE

Web 2.0 Social Tools (as categorized in Gawardena et al, 2009)

Social Networking

Users set up a profile, make 'formal' connections with others, communicate and share preferences and interests. (Facebook, Personal or Professional Blog, LinkedIn, Second Life etc)

Social Publishing:

Sharing of artifacts, images, video (Youtube, Pinterest, Flickr etc)

Social Bookmarking: (Del.icio.us, Zotero etc)

Collective Intelligence Tools: Allow co-creation of content, co-editing, (Wikis, GoogleDocs, etc)

Questions to consider:

What is the purpose for your use of social networking technologies?

Are you wishing to moderate a discussion?

Do you plan to infuse it into various aspects of class?

Student sharing of their insights, reflections

Co-creation of content or ideas?

Sharing of links to content, references, resources

Connection with the greater community? Experts?

How involved do you wish to be?

What affordances and level of control do you need or require?

How public or private do you wish this space to be?

Can you adjust privacy settings of your chosen digital technology?

Will students want or need access to this space after the course is complete?

Blog

Consider setting up a classroom blog where students can reflect on discussion questions, key concepts or images.

Consider providing students with their own blog space within the classroom space where they can extend their learning, upload assignments, share their own ideas, thoughts, creations.

[UBC Blogs - Wordpress](#)

Wiki

- Online encyclopedia
- Crowd-sourced information and content co-creation
- Constant evolution/revision
- May have 'editors' to verify content

[UBC Wiki](#)

[Wikipedia](#)

Micro-blog

- Traditionally shorter entries than a typical blog
- Most micro-blogging platforms have word count or character limits
- Often sharing quick snapshot, link or image

[Twitter](#)

Discussion Forum

- Group discussion forum
- Often 'closed' or invite only
- Threaded discussion on a topic(s)

Test out the Discussion feature of your LMS - [Connect](#)

Sandbox Session - November 2013 @yvonedtechtalk

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