

Social media for Web-based Learning Communities

Dr. Piet Kommers

Associate Professor

University of Twente, Netherlands

This lecture opens the discussion on “Social Media in Education”: How can Social Media help the learning and teaching process? My approach of finding answers is to accept that even in the context of centrally-defined curricula, learning is quite a diverse process. The main thesis of my keynote is that learning processes are even more diverse than choosing food, fashion, music etc. (Kommers, 2011). Scientific traditions like learning psychology and pedagogical theories tend to search for “the essence” of learning and thus tends to narrow the full spectrum of various learning processes. The most revolutionary notion in learning theories the last century (Vygotsky, 1986) is that cognitive learning builds upon social awareness and social development: If you know what other persons know and don't know, it becomes easier for you to understand a certain topic and you get more skills to discuss critical boundaries of your own knowledge. This is exactly what social media do: It makes you aware what your friends are worrying about. So, if a teacher does not clearly explain a certain topic, the classmates start using twitter and Facebook to find out how this topic should be understood. Good example of on how Social Media can help education:

- Some teachers open their Skype and Facebook between 7 and 8 pm for questions that arise during homework.
- Students tend to poll their friends via Facebook on how to manage pressure and find confidence back
- Teachers tend to exchange success stories on how to capture students' attention and save time in correction work etc.
- Learning between professionals in any field as they tend to ask for advice rather than studying the background theories.

What methodology do we need the coming years? A number of new notions have penetrated our schools:

- The first fact is that the variety of learning gets wider; we accept that besides memorization, rule-learning, problem solving there is creativity, personality development and developing character and confidence are all important elements for effective learning.

- The use of tablets, rather than books and desktop PCs is growing. It implies that teachers make the classroom as atelier (laboratory) rather than lecture hall (flipped classroom).
- More explicit attention for the low and the highly talented learners; Instead of education as “mainstream delivery” it becomes normal that teachers think in terms of “adaptation” and “differentiation”.

As overall paradigm it becomes more and more common that in secondary and higher education it is not sufficient that learners absorb and remember the taught topics; The real learning is that students need to show that they can apply knowledge in new contexts. A good example is the project work that each secondary student needs to demonstrate in the 5th grade of secondary school. In fact the assignment is to make a scientific contribution in the field of a unique topic, even if the needed knowledge is unavailable. Through scientific research the student needs to conquer the unstructured field and make evidence that was never shown before. Teachers get a completely different role: convey the individual student in the exploration and experimentation; coaching, mentoring and methodology advice become crucial.

What is the role of Social Media in these evolutions in education? The main role of social media is to allow education to learn; teachers, school leaders, parents and curricular developers need to share common understanding quicker and more transparent. The big advantage is that teachers feel themselves as learners again and can better understand the typical hurdles and pitfalls that learning brings to each of us. Tough problem is that parents and test developers need to be convinced that learning is a diverse process that implies risk taking and existential reorientation. Social Media are the best traverse between educational stakeholders to understand what needs to be changed. For this purpose Communities of Practice (CoP) need to be developed further (Wenger 1998). This keynote presentation will show the best examples of how social media can stimulate the learning among students, teachers and among student and teachers.

References

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