EXE734 Week 3 Response

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Teaching with Facebook

Guidance in the pedagogical use of Facebook was hard to find. There has been little time for evolution of Facebook use as the product has only existed since 2004 (Facebook.com, 2010b) Until recently, Facebook was restricted to College students, and its popularity was partly based on that differentiation (Neff 2009). Facebook's terms exclude children under 13 years (Facebook.com, 2010a). Teachers have been advised by unions to shun Facebook, to protect their professional reputations, even though this cannot prevent students misrepresenting them online (Topsfield, 2010).

However, t is likely to become important. The Facebook population is growing and includes millions of secondary students. Recent developments enabling Facebook to aggregate content from other social networking services could make Facebook the most convenient portal to most online communities, for most people.

Below, I summarise one advisory, and several scenarios in which Facebook could be used in high schools.

How to convey immediacy

Teacher communication research has shown that student motivation to learn is associated with non-verbal "immediacy" (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and Richmond, 1986, cited in Cayanus, 2002). Robinson and Whitemarsh (2010) report ten strategies that can be used foster immediacy in classes that have an online component.

1. Use student names in all interactions.
2. Respond to students quickly, and be available frequently.
3. Give thoughtful, personally relevant feedback.
4. Use a variety of communication technology, including some synchronous (such as voice) contact.
5. Include diverse resources and experiences; enrich courses with non-text interactions.
6. "Tell personal stories - online students need self disclosure too".
7. Have a personally unique, media and information-rich web-space (such as a Facebook profile).
8. Cultivate an informal online voice.
9. Solicit and respond to student feedback and critique.
10. Share and respond on extracurricular matters.

The theoretical base is reputable but was developed in traditional classrooms; the evidence base is anecdotal, but the strategies include adaptation in response to student feedback. The strategies were developed in college hybrid/online courses by two lecturers over three annual cycles. It remains to be tested whether these strategies can be used within current time-allocations in NSW secondary schools.

The following scenarios demonstrate some of the arguments proposed for Facebook use in educational contexts.

1. Life skills

Johnson (2010) makes four arguments for developing children's Social Networking habits in school:

- Responsible civic behaviour increasingly includes social networking.
- Increasingly, people get 'first impressions' via online presence, before a physical meeting.
- "Connected, community based learning is important."
- "In five years, the filters will be gone whether you like it or not."

An intention to prepare children to implement and exploit social change is ethical, but could be problematic. Facebook will facilitate bypassing rather than following the lines of accountability currently at work in schools, as it does not privilege any category of user (Facebook, 2010, "Facebook Principles").

The criticism that this activity teaches children how to use Technology merely to enable them to use Technology, would seem inevitable, but it would miss Johnson's key point: the task is to teach students how to relate to people, and the technology is the medium in which they will require competence.

2. Discussions

Kitsis (2008) described use of Facebook to sustain class discussions into homework time.

Any Facebook user can post a statement and picture or link on her "wall". She can restrict visibility to a specific group of friends, or allow unknown friends of her friends to see it. Anyone who can see a post can endorse it with one click ('Like'), or add a comment and view other comments. No comments are anonymous, and all comments are collected together. Users can choose to have updates emailed to them automatically.

- Select topics that have intrinsic interest and some controversy.
- Model helpful criticism.
- Give feedback on their responses to other students.
- Guide attention to neglected students, as "feeling short-changed in feedback from their peers" can hurt.
- Aim for students to "[take] ownership of their own learning by taking responsibility for that of the people around them." (Kitsis 2008)

3. Character studies

A group of students can explore their understanding of characters from literature (or history) by creating a Facebook profile for the fictitious character. There is rich stimulus for discussion in consideration of the reduction of a complex literary character to Facebook's relationship categories, and in speculations about a character's preference for privacy settings and Friending behaviour. Students can role-play an interaction with a character and explore alternative directions in which the literature or events might have developed.

The public domain in which Facebook identities exist introduces the possibility of interactions with 'real' people. One (college) class were shocked when their character (14, female, it's complicated, suggestive profile pic – based on Nabokov's Lolita) received Friend requests from an older, married man. The question of reporting a possible predator, despite the fictitious nature of the interaction, was fraught. (Skerrett, 2010).

The creation of fictitious People will breach Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. (Different, less restrictive, policies apply to Pages.)

> Facebook users provide their real names and information, and we need your help to keep it that way. Here are some commitments you make to us relating to registering and maintaining the security of your account:
>
> 1. You will not provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission.

The use of identifiable material, perhaps even as little as a character name, from literature could be stopped by a trademark or copyright claim.

> 8. If you select a username for your account we reserve the right to remove or reclaim it if we believe appropriate (such as when a trademark owner complains about a username that does not closely relate to a user's actual name).

As a result, although the learning opportunity seems profound, schools cannot select Facebook for this purpose.

4. Dissemination

Many of the affordances of a blog and a discussion forum are provided by Facebook (O'Brien 2009). A Group eases the task of finding other learners with similar tasks and concerns, facilitating collaborative learning and democratising the selection of material that is shared in the group. Mislove et al reported that online social networks tend to self-organise around "high degree nodes" - people with many links - who are able to rapidly distribute information. Personal credibility is rapidly corrected by loss of connections if someone distributes unwelcome material (cited in Maranto & Barton 2010).

Facebook should not be considered a 'reliable' delivery medium. Students may ignore status updates due to the sheer volume that Facebook generates (Neff, 2009).

> According to high schoolers, Facebook is for sharing jokes and stupid things with your friends. It's not for serious communication; that's what email is for. One girl adds, "My Mom posts about things she cares about; I think it's a generational gap."
>
> Surprisingly, they don't read, share, or "like" status updates. "Only if I'm really bored, I read my news feed," one guy says, and the rest of the group laughs in agreement.
>
> (O'Brien, 2009)

The opportunity this creates for teachers, recognising that some students already collaborate through Facebook, is to endorse and assist distribution and feedback through students who are most active in responding to course content. However, I found no research into the efficacy of this strategy in a real high-school.

5. Mentoring

Traditional concepts of mentoring favoured closed, long meetings and projects between two people, but substantial effect has been reported from brief mentoring episodes. Future professional-level mentoring may be based on brief contacts utilising social media, and extended to bring students into contact with potential future employers (Brummelhuis, 2009; Hendry, 2009).

Some academic advisors at college level have found Facebook allows them to:

- model responsible online behaviour

- deliver information, appointments, invitations
- connect to students, build trust, and test relevance
- intervene discretely (private message) in social or ethical conflicts (Espoito, 2007).

It is easy to imagine a place for Facebook in each part of Bloom's academic advisor role. ((Bloom 2008, p. 11, quoted in Pou, 2010)

Advisers intentionally use positive, active, and attentive listening and questioning strategies to build trust and rapport with students (**Disarm**);
uncover students' strengths and skills based on their past successes (**Discover**)
encourage and be inspired by students' stories and dreams (**Dream**);
co-construct action plans with students to make their goals a reality (**Design**)
support students as they carry out their plans (**Deliver**);
and challenge both themselves and their students to do and become even better (**Don't Settle**).

Case 5 - Affective effects

Affective learning is enhanced by teacher disclosure, and experiment indicates that some students are predisposed favourably to teachers with more 'human' profiles on Facebook. In a 2007 study, college students were asked to form an impression of a teacher by looking at her Facebook post. Attitudes varied, generally being more favourable when the teacher's profile disclosed more of a social and emotional life, although subsequent interviews uncovered some reservations.

"Teachers decide what information they want to reveal to their students in an effort to create a comfortable classroom environment that fosters student learning." Nevertheless, teachers appropriately conceal information which would compromise the learning process (Mazer et al, 2007). For example, communities may expect, and some schools stipulate, that students should not discover teachers espousing extreme political or social views, disparaging the school, using drugs, or naked (Marshall, 2005).

Questions

General guidelines for technology introduction are available (Jones, 2009) but I was unable to discover a published plan or advice specific to social networking.

When I started looking for pedagogical Best Practice regarding high-school use of Facebook, I expected to find certain ethical and technical guidelines, even if evidence for curriculum-alignment was weak.

Considering other discussion methods, I expected to see ethical recommendations like:

- Agree before starting on the rules of engagement.
- Explicitly require conduct consistent with school values, laws, cultural norms.
- Assure students that contributing is voluntary; disclosure is a choice.
- Help students recognise the feeling of being bullied, and guide them to withdraw from hostile environments and lean on friends.
- Clarify what will be assessed.
- Pre-announce how assessment be reported.

Considering other internet activities, I expected teachers to announce:

- Using someone's account is a breach of trust (and Terms Of Use and law).
- If sharing computer profiles, use Private browsing. Alternately, in One-to-one computing, Save password, Keep me logged in.
- You can delete your posts, but think about the meaning of what is left.
- Don't feed the trolls. (Ignore provocative nuisances.)
- Rule 34: (Don't look for stuff you don't want to see.)
- Link rot: (Download anything you want to keep forever.)
- Celebrity feels great but Privacy cannot be recovered.
- Almost everything is an ad.
- Recognise the risk of being exploited, and enlist allies if you are not safe.
- Teachers/Parents/Outsiders are/are not allowed to participate/watch/review later.

I expect that prudent technical preparation would include:

- Prove the reliability and stability of the service.
- Ensure that everyone has adequate broadband access.
- Exempt legitimate use from filters and security blocks.
- Test the lag for on-site and off-site users.
- Log transactions.
- Pay the subscription costs.
- Pre-enrol participants (if user-management is needed).
- Configure monitoring (if monitoring is needed).

Perhaps these considerations will only be documented when Facebook is more widely trialed in secondary schools.

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