

Social Media in Education:
A Beginner's Guide for Implementation

by

Angela Dop

Bachelor of Science, University of British Columbia, 1999

Bachelor of Education, University of British Columbia, 2000

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Supervisory Committee

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Angela Dop
Bachelor of Science, University of British Columbia, 1999
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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Valerie Irvine, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Co-Supervisor

Dr. Tim Pelton, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Co-Supervisor

Abstract

The current landscape of teenage social interactions has changed drastically in the last decade. Since the advent and popularity of social media, students are no longer dependent upon face-to-face exchanges with peers. These platforms afford students the opportunity to connect with each other at any time of day or in nearly any location. The power of the connectivity that social media affords can be harnessed by educators within the classroom. This project is a beginner's guide to implementing social media in an educational setting. The platforms that have been presented are Facebook, Twitter, and WordPress. Each of these platforms offers different features allowing for different types of interactions between students and with the teacher. This project guides readers in the basic set-up of these three platforms and offers advice on their uses.

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Dedication

The work presented in this Masters project has been the culmination of over two years of hard work at the University of Victoria under the guidance of the program coordinator, Dr. Valerie Irvine. Her assistance, inspiration, and encouragement have made this possible.

I must also note the influence of an incredibly supportive cohort of fellow graduate students. The TIE Grad cohort, as we referred to ourselves, acted as an extended family. We offered each other support in the form of pep talks as well as information sessions. Though never meeting many face-to-face, these people became my close friends over the years. I thank them for their time and friendship!

I would also like to thank my students over the last few years. You have all allowed me to share my research with you and you have been open to trying new activities and approaches to learning. Your understanding has meant so much to me!

I would like to make a special acknowledgment to my colleague, fellow student, and dear friend, Harprit Nagra. We started this journey together and have made it through! Thank you for all of your help and advice!

Finally, I must thank my extremely strong support network: my family. To my sister, Shauna, for being able to attend my children's activities that I could not, I thank you. To my mother and father, Darlene and Tjakko, thank you for being so willing to take my children when I had class or needed some quiet time to work. I could not have completed my project without you! To my husband, Stephen, I thank you for being my sounding board and understanding the pressures that I was under. And, to my wonderful sons, Casey and Mason: thank you so much for understanding that Mommy sometimes had to do her homework instead of play. I hope that I have shown you that hard work can, and will, pay off!

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the Researcher

I have been an educator in the public school system for just over 15 years. My focus of study in university was in the biological sciences and, as such, my education degree was in secondary science education. After working as a teacher teaching on call (TTOC) for a year, I ended up at a secondary school in the Delta School District teaching mathematics. I have now been a math educator for the last 14 years and have taught each grade from grades 8 through 12. It is from this perspective that I have created my project.

The greatest issue that I have faced as a mathematics educator has been that of diversified assessment and instruction. Students, teachers, parents, and administrators have come to expect mathematics to be taught in one particular method of delivery. This has traditionally been in the form of a teacher lecturing at the front of a classroom to a passively-engaged audience of students. My goal in this Master's program has been to push myself outside of this pattern to a method of teaching that makes use of the innovative forms of technology that my district has made available to me. This process has been a real learning experience for me both as a professional and as a student once again.

I have found that many of the ideas for using technology really involve a lot of behind the scenes work on the part of the teacher. This work involves not only the development of the lesson module itself, but also a lot of time working on scaffolding and getting buy-in from the students. My hope in the creation of this project is that I will inspire teachers to be able to move outside of their comfort zones and try something new. I have been in the shoes of the novice and have included sections in this project that will

address many of the uncertainties and concerns that a beginner in the world of educational technology and social media may encounter.

Introduction to the Project

The field of education is transitioning from a more traditional teacher-centred, physical classroom-based learning experience to one that includes greater participation from the learner. Course-based learning can extend from the physical and temporal setting of a bricks and mortar school. Many educators are turning towards the educational potential of the Internet in order to extend learning for their students beyond class time. This is accomplished when an educator has the tools necessary for him to be able to create virtual learning and sharing spaces online.

Background of the Problem

I have framed this project using the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura (1989). As will be discussed in the literature review, this theory centres on the fact that people learn through the social interactions associated with modelling of a particular behaviour. In the context of social media, this model can be created by either the teachers or the students in a given virtual realm. Through social interaction and observation, the learner will begin to mimic the behaviours that bring about positive consequences and will begin to avoid the behaviours that bring about negative ones. As Bandura (1999) points out, the learner is influenced in a fluid dynamic between the environment of the learning, the behaviour of the learner, and the cognitive abilities of the learner. No one factor overbears the others; however, a change in one may have an influence on the remainders.

Using this framework, I examine three of the major influencing factors at play in the introduction of social media into the classroom – specifically, the support required from or by the teacher; the students; and the learning itself. It is important to note that the introduction of social media into the classroom should not be undertaken merely for the sake of the inclusion of technology or Web 2.0 learning: it must be grounded in some meaningful application that enhances the learning for the students.

Teachers who choose to include social media in their classes must have the resources and scaffolding necessary to educate themselves on the dynamics of online social interactions. Even though some teachers may have a perfunctory understanding of these applications as used by adults, they must still put in some effort to ensure they understand how adolescents may interact and be able to incorporate lessons surrounding Internet etiquette and decorum in framing lessons. It is also important that teachers recognize that, although the students of today are considered digital natives as described by Prensky (2001), they may not be familiar with the specific platform that the teacher has chosen to introduce for use in the classroom and so may need to be taught the actual skills required for the proper use of the specific technology.

The students who participate in a classroom in which a teacher has chosen to incorporate social media will find that they need to become highly active participants in not only their own learning, but in the learning of their peers (Casey, 2013b). As suggested by social cognitive theory, it is through interactions with others that much learning occurs (Bandura, 1999). Students will need to be ready to shed the cloaks of the passive learner and be ready to emerge as contributors and creators of content in the virtual realm. This can be a major paradigm shift for many students and will likely need

to be nurtured and prompted by the teacher in the initial stages until the self-regulated interactive behaviour that is appropriate becomes second nature.

The learning must be structured in way that makes sense for the use of social media. It is not useful to give the learner a task to complete online that could easily be completed in worksheet form. This is a common-place error in the introduction of technology into classrooms. The intent is to create learning projects that lend themselves well to being completed in the collaborative context that is afforded by social media. To achieve success, teachers need to be actively supporting and scaffolding and the students need to be fully engaged in productive, authentic activities. The learning that is accomplished online should be a seamless transition from the bricks and mortar classroom to that of the virtual one. It should be facilitated by the technology, not hindered by it. The technology should not become the sole focus of the learning, nor should it be used simply for the sake of using it. The learning that is made possible by the media should occur almost coincidentally once all of the proper scaffolding has been completed.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project is to provide interested educators a tool kit in order to help them get started in utilizing social media in their classrooms. There are many large school districts that employ coordinators at the district and school levels to facilitate the use of educational technology (especially digital technologies) by teachers; however, there are some schools and even school districts which are too small to justify such positions. As technology becomes more common-place in the lives of the students and in the classroom, a teacher may be interested in introducing it or building upon it, but may

not know how to begin to implement its use. A classroom teacher may feel uncomfortable asking for assistance with the more basic aspects of Web 2.0 programs or may be a beginning teacher may worry about asking too many questions or requiring too much help. This resource is being designed with these teachers in mind.

The second issue at play with the integration of social media into the classroom is that the students often do not view social media as a component of academic school life. Often there are Facebook pages or Twitter accounts that are created for extracurricular clubs and teams, but rarely is there an academic reason for students to access these platforms. This project will help the teachers who want to integrate social media into their classroom routines a way of modelling its usefulness to their students.

Primary Research Goals

There are two questions that are guiding the creation of this project to its goal:

- 1) What are the factors that an educator needs to consider before bringing in the use of social media in the classroom?
- 2) What types of skills need to be taught to complement social media use (not just subject-related)?

The intent of this project is to provide educators with a comprehensive user's guide to a practical selection of social media platforms. There will be step-by-step guides to setting up accounts on three common platforms. There will be a section for troubleshooting problems that teachers may encounter as they navigate the use of these tools. The project will also include a collection of scaffolds to help students as they begin to use these resources. As can be appreciated, one may not assume that all modern-day

students have all of the necessary background skills to make use of these programs. Just as teachers must learn how to properly interact with the technology, the students must as well. With this thought in mind, this project will also include activities that will allow the teachers to communicate to their students the mechanics of using these platforms as well as some guidelines on the proper etiquette that will be required.

Assumptions, Limitations and Scope (Delimitations)

The scope of this project could be greater than what has been planned. There could be sections adapting social media use to specific portions of the Ministry of Education of British Columbia's curriculum for particular subjects, but this project will not include course-specific activities. There could be studies of the districts that have specific user policies for personal devices used in the classroom (e.g., bring your own device). The project could include more forms of social media or applications that are specific to individual teachers and their professional learning networks. This study could follow the use of the social media by the teachers and could examine common-usage of the technology in schools. It could focus on collecting anecdotal evidence of the perceived acceptance of the students of the use of the social media or even a comparison of the participation of the students in a class that includes social media versus another that does not. All of these topics would be grand ideas for use in further projects and studies; however, due to the time constraints of this project, they will not be included in this paper at this time.

Definition of Terms

BYOD: BYOD is an acronym that stands for “Bring Your Own Device.” It refers to situations in which students are permitted to bring their own electronic devices that can access the Internet in a classroom setting.

Social Media: For the purposes of this project, social media will encompass platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as well as blogging websites that can be generated through WordPress.

Web 2.0: For the purposes of this project, Web 2.0 shall be defined as the websites where the content is user-generated, can be shared with the public, and may be commented upon or augmented by the public (Ehlers & Sostmann, 2013).

Summary

My goal with this project is to create a resource to assist educators interested in expanding their classes beyond the physical realm. The process of creating a safe, usable online environment can be daunting. It can be overwhelming for a teacher attempting to learn exactly what his students should know in order to successfully make use of this new resource in a courteous, efficient and meaningful manner. My hope is that this project will be a resource that will reduce anxiety in teachers who are new to adopting computer technology in their practice generally and social media in particular. My hope is to also reduce the stresses of new teachers to the profession who may feel as though they are sometimes a burden on their mentors and would like a way to experiment in this virtual realm independently.

It is important to note that the teachers who are using this resource will not be the only ones for whom this will be a change from the traditional. The students who will be

interacting using these different types of social media will also have to adapt to this new form of learning. There will be a tremendous onus placed on the students to be curators of their own learning. There will be more opportunities for peer-to-peer tutoring and there will be new forums for the student voice. As much as the classroom teacher implementing the use of social media in the classroom will need to be prepared to step away from the front of the room and the proverbial spotlight, the students of such classes need to be ready to become creators and innovators. The learning activities and opportunities that a teacher designs to make use of the technology laid out in this project must be created with the idea that the activity would not be possible without the collaboration afforded by social media and not one that could be completed in isolation.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Methods of Research

The literature that has been reviewed in support of this project has been found in a number of methods. Literature was found from the following resources:

1. Research was conducted on the University of Victoria Library website within the library's own database. Limitations used in the search included a restriction of only peer-reviewed articles with an exclusion of book reviews. The dates of the papers were restricted primarily to between 2010 to present.
2. Research was conducted using the ERIC database with the above restrictions.
3. Some of the papers used in the review were recommended by professors of the required courses leading up to the creation of this project.
4. Some papers used in this review were mined from the literature reviews of related papers that were found from methods one through three.
5. Some papers were recommended by peers within this Master's program who were researching topics that were closely related to the topic in this project.

Within search methods one and two, the following search words and phrases were used:

- "social media"
- "social media in education"
- professional development and social media
- teachers using social media
- dangers of social media in education
- Web 2.0
- social media in the classroom

Each citation has been noted within the text and curated in the bibliography section of this project using the American Psychological Association's (APA) format for references.

Introduction

In the context of education, the role of technology is becoming more interwoven in both the delivery of material and in the interactions between students and faculty. Digital technology is being heralded as the source of a revolution in the delivery and reception of education (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012). This is the basis for creating a document that will guide a technological novice in the implementation of digital technology into the classroom setting. A hybrid or blended learning environment will artfully combine face-to-face interactions between teachers and students as well as asynchronous online interactions through the use of various social media platforms. Before educators can begin investigating the processes at play in the forming of a blended classroom setting, it is best for them to look at the theoretical framework and other previous research that justifies such a shift in educational delivery.

Social Cognitive Learning Theory as the Framework

It has long been known that education is not a simple matter of supply and demand: the teachers do not simply provide the information that the students learn. There are always numerous outside influences that must be taken into account in the classroom. These can include, but are not limited to, the environment, behaviour and cognition. One theory that interweaves each of these influences is that of Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT). Within each of these facets, there will be the opportunity for classroom teachers to influence their students. The reasoning for the proposed project within this document will be explained within the scope of this theory.

Within his theory of social cognitive learning, Bandura has recognized that the basis of the psychological approach to learning was previously viewed as predominantly unidirectional or mono-causal. These earlier theories postulated that internal steps in learning would only affect the next proximal step and that learning was a linear process. Bandura proposes a new model to describe the underlying factors at play in learning in which there is a bidirectional connectivity between structures within the environment, behaviour, and cognition surrounding the individual (Bandura, 1999). It is within this model, as depicted in Figure 1, that the process of educating a learner can be affected by more than one structure of the learning experience and that the skill set of the learner himself will have a direct influence on the learning itself.

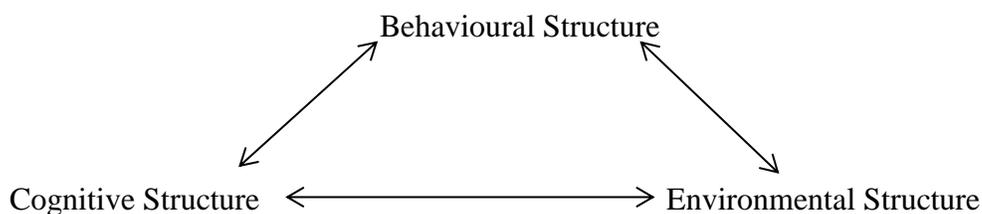


Figure 1. Realms of Influence in Social Cognitive Learning Theory adapted from Bandura (1999)

The three main influences on a student's learning are viewed as Environmental Structure, Behavioural Structure, and Cognitive Structure. As noted in the bidirectionality of the arrows in Figure 1, one structure does not have sole influence over the others. There is an interdependency of influence between each of the structures at play. For example, a change within the environment of the learner will affect the behaviour of the learner, which may in turn impact the environment. In the following passages, the three influences within this theory will be investigated with reference to how the project will impact each area.

Environmental structure. The chosen modality for the dispensing of educational knowledge can influence the level of knowledge uptake of the learners. Whether these structures are the physical classroom or a digital one, these are the structures that most educators have direct influence over. The learner may also have control over elements of this structure. With a move to the use of social media, the teacher will be expanding the realm of the classroom from the physical structure of a bricks and mortar classroom to a virtual construct created online. The use of social media drastically changes the environment of the learning. The traditional classroom is a rigid, static location that can only be accessed during school hours in which the teacher is present; however, social media affords students an opportunity to be active creators of educational dialogue and resources at any time or location which they may have access to the online realm (Buchanan, Joban, & Porter, 2014).

Behavioural structure. It is known that humans are not simply learners through direct experience (Paas & Sweller, 2014). A large amount of learning occurs through the observation of models, whether physical or virtual. Modelling is a major way in which broad-scale learning can occur in an efficient manner (Bandura, 1999). It is within the realm of virtual learning environments that learners are no longer bound to these observations occurring in the physical realm or by the schedules with which they may be constrained (Bandura, 1999). This speaks to the creation by the teacher of a blended environment that includes classroom-based, face-to-face time with the online experiential learning amongst student peer groups.

The behaviour associated with peer-moderated learning is able to continue to the virtual realm in the form of interactions occurring on the social media platforms. The

construction of the social identity is a major first step when using online technology. This creation of the identity evolves into other social behaviour in the form of the creation of virtual peer friend groups and the interactions between users (Song & Lee, 2014). The social pressures of the physical classroom will likely initially transfer over to the virtual realm; however, once there is a change in environment for the learning, there are often new social arrangements which will develop (Casey, 2013b). This change in social dynamics may decrease the level of apprehension which learners may have for sharing with other peers.

Cognitive structure. It is impossible to have a discussion about learning without acknowledging the biological factors at play within the learner. SCLT recognizes the effects of cognitive load in the learning processes of students. This theory blends the ideas of cognitive load theory with ideas surrounding personal agency. The following is a brief overview of these items.

Cognitive load theory dictates the way in which humans take new information from working memory to long-term memory stores (Paas & Sweller, 2014). The most important component of this theory as it pertains to SCLT is the fact that humans have a limited amount of storage space for new elements in the working memory. Regardless of how a learner is encountering a new idea, it must be integrated into the long-term register before it can be accessed with ease. SCLT recognizes this limitation on learning and extends the application from classroom-style pieces of recall type knowledge to actions and behaviours that may be learned through mimicry and observation of peers. In this sense, SCLT reinforces the need for learners to have time in order to process new material regardless of the format of the learning at hand.

The time required for the processing of information from the short term memory register to more long term stores is aided by the use of social media. If information is taught in the physical classroom, there is a time lapse before an individual student may be able to access the social media interface associated with the classroom in order to complete a given assignment. This will allow for the learner to be able to consciously and subconsciously engage with the material presented in the physical classroom before needing to use the information in a reflective manner online. This will lead to a deeper understanding because of the dual modalities of engagement (Orlando, 2014).

SCLT does not only deal with the cognitive processes associated with learning, remembering, and recall, but also on the peripheral processes that can play a part in the efficiency of learning. One of the main components of this is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a major determinant of human motivation, affect, and action (Bandura, 1989). The cognitive processes that will shape learners' self-efficacy beliefs are based on their own assessments of their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. It is through this self-belief that learners will be able to improve their performance. This is very similar to the greatly heralded method of visualization of success in sports. If players can visualize themselves performing successfully at a high level, they are more likely to be able to perform at said level in a game situation. In order for this to be done, learners must have a strong understanding of what they know and how to use said knowledge in some application before visualizing themselves having success in said application. Self-efficacy beliefs usually affect cognitive functions through the joint influence of motivational and information processing operations (Bandura, 1989).

Within the realm of social media, there are two factors that may have influence over self-efficacy: perceived ease of use and familiarity of the platform (Blaschke, 2014). With the perceived ease of use of the social media, students who believe accessing the technology will come easily with little conscious effort will translate this belief into actual use more often than those learners that believe that a given platform is too complicated and intricate (Buchanan, Joban, & Porter, 2014; Song & Lee, 2014). This self-belief is enhanced if the students are already familiar with the platform. Familiarity feeds into self-efficacy as the students already are aware that they are capable of using the interface chosen (Buchanan, et al., 2014). Within this project, the instructor will be given information on using some social media platforms that many of the students will already be familiar with (Facebook and Twitter); however, there will also be instructions given on introducing the use of another blogging website (e.g., WordPress) of which some students may not be aware. The teacher will be guided to give instructions that are clear and concise so as to increase the students' feelings of self-efficacy in order to find the ease of use of these platforms.

Another element of self-efficacy is that of motivation. There are conflicting reports in regard to the effects of technology on the motivation of the learner. There are some researchers who believe that the use of social media and technology may affect the way in which students can access information, but will not have any effect on the motivation to learn nor the learning processes themselves (Clark & Feldon, 2005). Others argue that the use of technology can foster a sense of excitement and increase learner motivation (Song & Lee, 2014). Whether social media in and of itself can illicit these reactions in the learners, it is important for the teacher to recognize that motivation is a

huge factor in the engagement of students in any endeavour. When encountering a novel learning situation, a learner may either embrace or reject the opportunity. Within the project, there will be some advice on ways for the teacher to affect some of the motivational factors of the students to prompt engagement in the social media platforms.

Using Social Media in the Classroom

Learning is no longer seen as a unidirectional process wherein the learner absorbs the necessary knowledge from the instructor. At this point, learners are no longer passively consuming information, but have been creators and editors of the information available (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011). Because of the evolution of the modern classroom from a solely physical construct to one that may blend traditional and virtual modalities, it is important for educators to be knowledgeable of the inner workings of the platforms available for use in their classrooms as well as the research that supports their uses.

It is not in following good practices of education for a teacher to simply adopt the use of social media in his or her classroom without understanding the reasons why it will benefit his or her students (Clark & Feldon, 2014). Social media is about the content that is being shared and produced, but it's also about building a sense of community. The social side of the constructed online community can increase camaraderie and lead to better interactions both online and face-to-face (Casey, 2013b). It is important to emphasize that the use of technology in the classroom must involve participation and active learning of the students as there are far greater gains when the learner has the opportunity to be interactive with the material rather than become a passive consumer of the material (Saleh, Prakash & Manton, 2014). It is easy for an educator to fall down a

slippery slope of using an electronic version of a lecture in lieu of a traditional in-classroom lesson and to believe that this is an effective use of digital technology. The use of digital technology must aid in the learning by either offering supplemental information or to engage the students within the classes so that learning is occurring within the peer groups. Social media should be used to enhance the learning experience, but should still be grounded in sound pedagogical practice (Blaschke, 2014).

Implementation

When employing digital technology within the classroom, the teacher should focus on three areas as identified by Casey in her 2013 action research (Casey, 2013b):

- 1) The Teacher: What demands will there be when incorporating digital technology into the classroom?
- 2) The Students: What scaffolding will the students require in order to successfully interact with the digital technology?
- 3) The Learning: What is the purpose and focus of the use of the digital technology in the classroom application?

The Teacher

The role of the teacher in the implementation of social media in the classroom is crucial to the success of the use. Implementation begins with the instructor embracing a shift in the dynamics of the classroom. Many teachers may believe that the class should be student-centric, but end up teaching following a model that is more teacher-centric (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Liu, 2011). The teacher must be willing to relinquish some of the power in the learning hierarchy in order to successfully employ digital technology.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that students have the instruction needed in order to use the digital technology in a meaningful way that is respectful to all of the learners (Joubert & Wishart, 2012). In order for there to be success, the teacher must ensure that the purpose of using the particular platform of social media is clearly communicated to the students and that all of the learners have a firm grasp as to the goals of using said technology (Joubert & Wishart, 2012). As a leader of the classroom, it is important for the teacher to be checking in with students to assess that the scaffolding that has been provided is allowing all of the learners to succeed in meeting the goals of the activities (Casey, 2013a). Though this may be time consuming, it is noted that the need for constant monitoring will decrease over time with increased practice on the part of the students (McNeil, 2014). As more learning begins to occur online, it is still important for the teacher to check-in on student activity. If a student has opted to remove him or herself from the virtual learning environment, the disengagement may cause a gap in the learning matrix of the student (Buchanan, et al., 2014). As students become more self-sufficient in the virtual learning environment, the teacher's role will not be eliminated; instead, the teacher will continue to monitor the activity on the periphery.

It is important to recognize that a classroom that utilizes social media has not moved to an entirely online format. There is still time spent on face-to-face contact between the teacher and the students. This means that the environment for learning will become what is known as a hybrid class: that is a combination of synchronous, in-person learning meshed with asynchronous, online learning (Casey, 2013b). When working in the online community, students are afforded the opportunity to work on the skills

necessary to become self-regulated learners – a skill which will be required for real-life applications (Lee, 2010). It is important to remember that this process of implementation of digital technology should blend the subject material with sound lesson design (Blaschke, 2014). The use of social media by a teacher does not eliminate the need for the physical classroom nor for sound lesson plans, but expands the learning opportunities beyond the ways in which lessons are traditionally taught.

In order for teachers to be able to create and maintain a hybrid classroom, there needs to be a means of supporting the instructors themselves so that they are more likely to make use of these resources (Williams, Warner, Flowers & Croom, 2014). It is hoped that as teachers begin to branch-out using social media in their classrooms, they will share their experiences and resources in order to support their colleagues who are just beginning to experiment with the use of such media (Williams et. al, 2014). This does not imply that the only teachers who would benefit from this type of documentation would be teachers who are new to the use of technology at all. Many teachers who are well-versed in the use of social media for personal uses may simply not have the time to develop the resources necessary to make use of it in their classrooms (Williams, Warner, Flowers & Croom, 2014). The incorporation of social media into the classroom will not only require scaffolding for the students, but will require professional learning support for the teachers as well.

Professional support required for implementation. The implementation of social media in the classroom requires that classroom teachers begin to approach their teaching style in a new light: they must now relinquish the power of instruction over to the students in their class. When planning on incorporating social media into instruction,

the teacher must consider the learning objectives of the course, the technology that will be available for use by the students, and the design of the lessons and learning that will be performed in the virtual world (Blaschke, 2014). Teachers who wish to move toward such a change in teaching and instruction may have a very clear idea of how each of these areas must be addressed. If an individual teacher is unclear as to how to approach such changes, there must be a support network in place for such professional development.

Many school districts are employing coordinators of technology for supporting teachers in the use of digital technology in the classroom. Though a valuable resource, these coordinators are often stretched across more than one thousand staff members and may not have time to work one-on-one with an individual teacher. For outside support, some teachers may form online communities referred to as Personal Learning Networks, or PLNs. These PLNs may bring together like-minded educators who are separated geographically in order to offer support on professional reform issues including the introduction of technology in the classroom (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008). This support is valuable because the educator is thrust into the same learning situation as his students shall soon be: an online network of help facilitated by the use of social media. Teachers supporting other teachers in a PLE can help with the implementation of digital technology and may also facilitate the sharing of lesson plans that are suited to such implementation.

If a teacher does not have access to a coordinator of technology at the district level, nor is at ease accessing a self-created PLE, there are other forms of support that may be available. There are publications available online and in bookstores that may be used by a teacher to navigate particular social media platforms. It is important for a

teacher to feel supported in the use of social media and digital technology. If teachers are feeling well-supported using digital technology, they are more likely to continue with the use and expand the possible applications (Orlando, 2014).

The Students

Once the teacher has a clear direction of the lessons that will use social media, it is time to look at the needs and impacts of said instruction on the students. Often students will report feeling that they are learning better if they have a sense of inclusion within the school (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013, as cited in Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney & Waters, 2014). If the classroom extends beyond the physical realm to the virtual realm through the use of social media, students will be able to increase their sense of community with one another outside of the constraints of organized class time (Allen et al., 2014). As such, the social media use will allow students to be able to gain the very important validation and acceptance of their peers in a teacher-moderated, online environment (Allen et al, 2014).

The importance of the feeling of acceptance by their peers and the development of a digital, social identity is an important facet of the learning that will be occurring online through social media (Allen et al, 2014). The modality of the exchanges that are afforded by the use of social media can be beneficial for students who experience social awkwardness or shyness (Casey, 2013b). Often, students feel far more comfortable sharing their opinions in the virtual world rather than the real world, regardless of their possible social standing within their peer groups. This is attributed to the reduction in anxiety-inducing elements such as the need for immediate responses (Allen et al., 2014).

Because of this, more students will be able to interact with one another and gain the important sense of acceptance from their peers (Allen et al., 2014).

As noted in the section under “The Teacher,” the use of social media in the classroom will shift the focus of learning to a more student-centric model. Social media will allow the students to become contributors to the learning of their peers and, in essence, becoming de facto teachers (Casey, 2013b). Learning which takes place through social media becomes less about the knowledge of the individual and more about the broad knowledge base of the collective (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008).

The use of social media by students can lead to other types of benefits rather than simply those gained through social interaction amongst peers. Social media can allow students to connect with experts within the fields of study for their courses (Casey, 2013b). This will enrich their understanding of the material by speaking to industry leaders. The skills learned from the use of social media itself can be viewed as marketable life and work skills (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). The use of social media and digital technology by students will increase their communication skills and ready them for a future that will require fluency in the digital realm.

Finally, students can create their own online learning networks that can be used to support them for more than one specific course of study (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). These informal learning communities would allow students to be able to share ideas with classmates that are registered within their particular section of a course and lead them on the path toward becoming a more self-regulated learner (Blaschke, 2014). Students will no longer need to rely on the teacher for help, but may now turn to these fellow learners for guidance. These personal learning networks will also allow students

to network with others who are taking the same course with the same teacher, a different teacher in the same school, or even a student from outside the realm of local contact (Casey, 2013b). Often these connections can lead to the creation of personal relationships that extend beyond the learning of a particular subject, but which are valuable as they reinforce the sense of belonging and acceptance that was discussed earlier (Casey, 2013b).

Social media is a valuable tool for use in the classroom as it can increase the ability of students to connect with one another beyond the scheduled time set by a school's timetable. This can allow students to increase their sense of belonging and aid in the creation of their online identities (Allen et al., 2014). The introduction of various social media platforms will often change the dynamic of the learning and shift the focus from top-down, teacher-centric learning to bottom-up student-centric learning as there is now a forum for the students to present themselves as leaders and experts beyond the time in class (Vanwynsberghe & Verdegem, 2013). Many students find that they learn better by being active participants and social media affords the students these opportunities (Blaschke, 2014).

The Learning

When introducing social media into the classroom, it is important for teachers to establish scaffolding to their students in order for them to be able to make the most of the opportunities afforded in the use of the media. There are certain skills and lessons that should be included in the learning, regardless of the type of social media that will be employed. As stated by Vanwynsberghe and Verdegem (2013), there is a literacy associated with the use of social media that must address the different competencies

required to effectively communicate with others online, to efficiently deal with the consumption and creation of content, and to judiciously handle the possible unintended side effects of such use.

Before beginning to work on the lessons that are possible using social media, it is important that the students will actually be able to access the technology that is needed. Often, it is the expense of technology that ends up preventing its extensive use in the classroom (Williams, Warner, Flowers, & Croom, 2014). Teachers can check with their districts to see if there is a clear “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) policy that may be utilized as a way of circumventing the consequences of such a situation. It is not only the changes in a teacher’s beliefs towards digital technology that will influence how much is incorporated in the teaching, but also in the acceptance of this style of learning by the educational organizations that oversee education in a particular area (Orlando, 2014). Once the students are able to access the social media, the teacher may focus on the material that will be taught using this media.

When teachers are creating lessons that will utilize social media, it is important for them to remember the purpose of using said media. Using digital technology simply for the sake of its availability is not a sound practice. This will not produce the types of advantages for the students as listed above. It is important that the lessons that are being created lend themselves to the use of social media’s collaborative and interactive powers and will be based on sound pedagogical practices (Blaschke, 2014). Simply providing students access to a social media platform will not in and of itself create collaboration or an online learning community (Weber, 2012). It is imperative that the learning that is

planned incorporates social media in a meaningful manner that meets pedagogically sound standards of teaching.

In order for social media to be used in the classroom, the teacher needs to examine the practicality and pedagogy of such lessons. It is important for the teacher to ensure that the over-seeing administration will permit the use of the social media for educational purposes and that the students will be able to access the media. Teachers must then be evaluating the lessons that are being delivered using social media to ensure that they follow good practice standards and are not simply being created for the sake of using a digital medium. Though students may need time for adjusting to this new style, it is important that the learning that occurs on social media does so because of it and not in spite of it.

Potential Pitfalls of Using Social Media

Though it is the conjecture of this researcher, as supported by the above literature, that the adoption of social media in the classroom is a positive pedagogical method of instructional support, it is important to acknowledge some of the concerns around the educational use of social media. Concerns may range from administrative acceptance of the use of social media by educational professionals to other issues like cyberbullying and privacy concerns that have already become problematic in social media.

One of the concerns of educators in the use of social media in the classroom is the lack of acceptance by over-seeing administration. Educators may be caught within a set of conflicting beliefs on the part of district or school-based administration. Teachers are encouraged to evolve their teaching practices beyond the traditional teaching methodologies of the past; however, they must still produce high test scores on

standardized exams that are prepared for by way of teacher-centred instruction (Orlando, 2013). This can leave a teacher feeling conflicted about the introduction of a hybrid classroom, particularly if the teacher feels as though his job will be in jeopardy based on his students' resultant scores.

Another concern of all stakeholders in education when looking at the utilization of social media is that of digital citizenship. The method in which students interact with one another in the virtual realm outside of educational applications has been a widely debated with certain high profile cases in both Canada and the United States in which cyberbullying of a victim has resulted in suicide. It is important for educators and administration to remember that the rules that would apply to a physical classroom in regard to peer-peer appropriate interactions must also be enforced online (Donlin, 2011, as cited in Blazer, 2012). Cyberbullying can be more than simply direct threats of violence, but may include the spreading of rumours or malicious gossip through online means. Parents, teachers, and administrators must recognize that these actions are not relegated and compartmentalized to simply the online, virtual realm, but that they often begin their manifestations in face-to-face encounters (Weber, 2012). Though it may seem that an online learning environment would create a new venue for supervision, many of the bullying issues that would arise online would have already been hinted at within the behaviours of the students in the physical classroom. This foreshadowing would lead teachers and administrators to certain students to be more watchful of in their peer-to-peer interactions online. Despite these concerns, there are far too many advantages in the types of learning opportunities available online for this to be a true detractor for the use of social media.

Another potential cause for concern in the use of social media for educational purposes lies within the constructs of the platforms themselves. The richness of this personal information that is available online may attract spammers or identity thieves. The saving grace of this situation is that most social media platforms have mechanisms in place that allow the user to block private information from public view (Weber, 2012). It is the responsibility of the teachers to advise their students of the proper settings that limit the publishing of personal information. This important step in the introduction of social media in the classroom is discussed in the project to ensure the safety of the students online.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize that there is a distinct difference between instructional technology and social media. Instructional technology is created expressly for teaching a specific topic and is often a closed media platform. Social media, however, is an open and collaborative platform that is used for the creation and dissemination of ideas and material (Wang, 2013). The use of social media can be a powerful tool which allows students to improve their working knowledge of the material and to make stronger connections within their social domains (McNeil, 2014). This can only be accomplished if the instructor is willing to remit some of the control of the learning of the students back to the students themselves within the virtual realm of social media (Williams, et. al, 2014).

The use of social media for educational purposes will cause a pedagogical shift in power from the teacher to the students. As students become the leaders, many teachers will find that their students will learn more than the specific subjects' tenets, but also the

skills of collaboration (Williams, et. al, 2014). Learning on social media sets free the power of crowd-based learning in the form of the creation of content (Song & Lee, 2014). Before embarking on the tasks specific to a course on social media, it is important that the teacher begins with scaffolding exercises that teach the students how to appropriately use the media in an efficient manner (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). Often, teachers may believe that there is little to no need to for this kind of instruction as the students are seen fluent within the media (Vanwynsberghe & Verdegem, 2013). The skills necessary to successfully navigate the applications available in social media will increase a student's sense of belonging with his peers, as well as allow for the development of a digital identity that will carry forward as he leaves the class which will be a benefit as he enters into real world situations that require said skills (Allen et al., 2014).

Learning is becoming more student-centred and is no longer confined to the constraints of a physical learning institution. Students now require skills of self-directed, self-regulated learning in order to adapt to this change (Song & Lee, 2014). It is more important than ever for students to be able to directly interact with the material being taught as well as interact with their peers. Social media affords students the opportunities to be self-reflective, to be mentors, and to be co-creators of content in the digital realm (Blaschke, 2014). These notions of changes in learning environment, interactive peer relations, and the development of self-efficacy are inter-related according to the work of Bandura in SCLT. As social media affords students the opportunity to engage with one another and with the subject material at hand in a meaningful and innovative manner, it is important for educators to be able to adapt to this change in education. It is the hope of

this researcher that this project will guide educators who are interested in pursuing this shift and may use the created e-book to prepare their hybrid classrooms.

The **Social Media** Handbook

A Guide for Bringing Social
Media into the Classroom

Angela Dop

Disclaimer

This e-book is not sponsored by any of the three social media platforms addressed.

This document is not intended to be an endorsement for these products nor a claim that others are not educationally valid.

I do not claim to be an expert on every nuance of social media, nor do I claim that this book has all of the steps necessary to protect your students.

Always check with your administration at the school or district level before introducing any social media in your classroom to ensure that you are working within their specific guidelines.



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Welcome!

Congratulations!

You have decided to try your hand at using social media in your classroom! This can be a little bit scary and overwhelming, but don't be discouraged! I think that you will be pleased with all of the possibilities that open up as a result of using social media.

In this book, I will be outlining some of the start-up paperwork and legal issues that you will need to address before getting going. Then, there will be the guide on setting up your classroom-based social media platform for the following: Facebook, Twitter, and WordPress. I will then include some of the troubleshooting concerns that either myself or my colleagues have run into and I will offer some suggestions to help manage these concerns.

Good luck!

NOTE: I am writing this guide from the point of view of a secondary teacher. These activities may be adapted for use in the elementary classroom

Getting Started

The Legal Stuff

The first thing that you will need to do if you are going to be having your students interacting online is to get a waiver signed by their parents or guardians. Many school districts already have one prepared, so check with your administrator or any technology support contact. This is a really important step for a few reasons:

1. The parents need to know what you are doing with their students and why. They do have the right to refuse their child participating online, but they may feel more comfortable knowing that you are taking precautions to keep their child safe online (more on that in the coming chapters).
2. Legally, you need to cover yourself and your school/district. There are risks in any endeavour that we choose to take on whether it is a field trip or the use of social media. Ensuring that you are covered will give everyone peace of mind.
3. It re-enforces to the students that this is a serious learning experience. If the students know that their parents are informed that they are going to be interacting online, they may respect this process more.

One of the biggest concerns regarding education and the use of social media has to do with FOIPPA. FOIPPA is the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It is in place to protect citizens from the unlawful collection of their personal information.



As such, teachers need to be mindful about the types of websites that they use with their students as schools should not be using of websites which store personal information outside of Canada without appropriate consent. As I mentioned in the disclaimer, you do not have to feel limited to only using one of the three social media sites that I am writing about in this book, but if you are using something else, make sure that you are covered legally!

How to Use it Effectively

Now that you have covered yourself legally, it's time to look at what needs to be done in the classroom before you introduce social media.

One of the most important tips I can give you is this: do not force social media into your lessons. Many teachers want to be innovative and try new things. That's great! But if you really want to use social media to its greatest potential, it's best to find lessons that will benefit from its use.

Social media should not be used simply for the sake of using it! Using social media as an electronic way for a student to complete a worksheet is not the best use of this platform.

The best kinds of activities that work with social media are the types that require collaborative work and feedback from the participants.

- When using Facebook, students can post to your class page and receive comments from yourself or their peers.
- With Twitter, you can develop a class hashtag for discussions (more about this later).
- For the WordPress sites, you and your students can create blogs and comment on each other's posts. You can also create forums where students can begin their own discussion threads.



Remember: social media is a 24/7 platform, so students can be interacting at any time as long as they have access to the Internet.

Digital Citizenship

So, by now you have had your students' parents sign the waiver form and you have chosen both a social media platform and an appropriate activity for using it. Now it is time to look at setting up the ground rules with your students in terms of their online etiquette and behaviour.

Social media is an amazingly powerful tool for connecting people over time and distance; however, it also has its drawbacks. Because these platforms are always "on," students will be able to interact with each other at any time. As a teacher, you are responsible for monitoring what is happening online and ensuring that the behaviour fits within your school's code of conduct. Your virtual classroom will have rules just like your bricks and mortar one! In order for your students to understand what the expectations are for their behaviour online, I would suggest taking the time to do a lesson on digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship is essentially a set of rules that we ask our students to abide by while online. This term is not limited to school-based interactions online, but includes all student online activity. I would use your school's rules as a guide for the behaviour, but also have a discussion with the students surrounding what they believe would be considered appropriate behaviour. This will allow them to own the rules. You will still need to be monitoring the interactions online, but at least the students will have no excuse about what was expected of them.

If a student does behave inappropriately online, the punishments should still follow the same protocol as face-to-face incidents of a similar nature. For example, if a student is bullying another student online, this should be handled in the same manner as “in person” bullying would be addressed by your administration.



Scaffolding

Now that your students know how to interact with each other, it's time to teach them how to actually use the platform you have chosen.

One of the biggest assumptions made by adults in regard to students is that they know how everything works online! There are many students who may not be familiar with one or more of the platforms featured in this book (or any other social media application), so it's very important that we actually teach them how to use the platform. If students don't understand how to actually use the app, they are less likely to try and will miss out on the learning opportunities that you have set up.

Make sure that you set aside some time in your lead-up lessons to teach the students the actual way to interact with the site. If it's possible, try to get your students actually face-to-face with the platform either by having them use school-owned computers or, if your district allows it, having them bring in their own devices to access it. Just like with any other skill you may teach your students in your classroom, you will need to model the work that is expected online.

Ready to Go Online

Way to go!

You have completed a lot of work getting your students set up for success on social media! Your students may have a lot of questions to begin with and it may seem very overwhelming, but as time passes and the students use the platform, they will get the hang of things...and so will you!

Similar to how the beginning of the year in your classroom can be, your students will likely be hesitant to initially interact with each other online. You will likely need to initiate discussions or supply activities in the early stages; however, as time goes by and your students find their digital voices, they will not require your prompts as often and you will become more of a facilitator.

In order to first encourage your students to interact online, you may need to introduce some type of incentive to foster or re-enforce interaction.

What follows in this book will be a guide on how to set up a class Facebook account, a class Twitter account, and a class WordPress account. So, choose the platform that you are interested in and get exploring!

If you are still unsure as to whether you should move online as a teacher, [click here](#) for a link to some articles that may help.

NOTE: You can still interact on several of these platforms as more of an observer than a participant. For example, your class can follow a particular hashtag without needing to tweet out comments.



Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media app boasting the most users worldwide. You may already have a Facebook account of your own. If you are planning on setting up a Facebook page for your class, I would suggest opening a new account created using your work email address. This way, there is some distance from your personal and professional pages.

Once you have your account created, you can invite the parents (or even students, if you are teaching older grades) to “Like” your page. This will allow them to see updates to your page on their newsfeeds. You can also tag certain people in posts if there is a specific parent that you think might be interested.

There are various security settings that you can enable on Facebook that will make your page private to only your Friends List, so depending on the language that your district has surrounding the use of social media, you may need to increase your settings to follow those guidelines. This makes Facebook a great place to privately share what is happening in your classroom!

When you are using your account, you may wish to post pictures of what your students are creating or pictures of them working.

NOTE: Many districts have a waiver for parents to sign at the beginning of the school year for the release of pictures of their children on the internet. Make sure that you check to see if your district has such a waiver before you post any photo where a child's face is visible!

Facebook also allows you to create "Events" and share them out. This could be notice of upcoming field trips, the due dates for major projects, or the dates and times of final exams. Anyone who is reached by the posts can add comments, so students and parents may be asking questions on these posts. You will need to make sure that you check this periodically.

Facebook as an educational tool can be seen as a virtual, interactive bulletin board.

You may post topics, pictures, and events that are of interest to your students, but the only people who will likely see the posts will be the people who have “liked” your page.

If you are looking for a method of broadcasting to a wider audience that is less constrained, try Twitter!

Have some further questions about using Facebook in your classroom? Take a look at the links here in [Facebook Help](#).



Twitter

Twitter is a social media app that allows users to communicate through short (140 characters) messages. Tweets can include links to other webpages or attached pictures. It is also possible to re-Tweet posts that you may find interesting, as well as reply to messages that are posted. Another way of using Twitter is by searching for a hashtag. Hashtags are short phrases, words, or initials preceded by “#”. More about hashtags a little bit later.



As mentioned earlier about Facebook, you may wish to start a class-based Twitter account using your school email. When you first open an account, you will be asked to create a Twitter handle. This will be your username. The Twitter handle will begin with “@” automatically...no need to add your own!

Twitter will also ask for a picture that will be used to each time you post a Tweet. Choose something that will identify you best, whether that is a photo of yourself, or a picture of something that your students will know is referring to you. Remember: This handle and picture will become part of YOUR digital identity, so choose something appropriate.

Once you have created your handle and have loaded a picture, you can personalize the biography on your account. If this is an account that you will be using to tweet out information to your students, you may want to put some of your own information in the biography. If this is an account that you will be using as a class to share out with, you may want to choose information that describes your class/students. You can also include the URL for your class-based website or blog.

Now that you have your account, you may choose to follow certain people on Twitter. Try searching for keywords as hashtags that suit your interests. For example, if you are interested in outdoor education, try searching #outdoored. Twitter is great for networking and interacting with people from all over the globe! You can tweet out information about your class or even questions you or your students may have. If you add a hashtag with certain key phrases, you will attract the attention of experts in that field!

Another use for hashtags would be for your tweets out to your students. If you come up with a class-specific hashtag, your students can search for your messages on Twitter quite easily. It will also allow you to use the same Twitter handle for multiple classes if you have some messages with different hashtags. For example, if you taught English 8 and English 12 at South Delta Secondary School, you could end your grade 8-specific tweets with #sdeng8 and your grade 12-specific tweets with #sdeng12 (note the lack of spaces). Students can then sort through your tweets for the ones that are directed at their class.

NOTE: You should always first search a hashtag to see if it is already in use by another group. On the Twitter main page, search the hashtag and see how recent the posts are using that hashtag.

WARNING:

Beware of spammers and inappropriate comments that may be posted using hashtags. Because of this, you may feel more comfortable following people instead of just following hashtags.

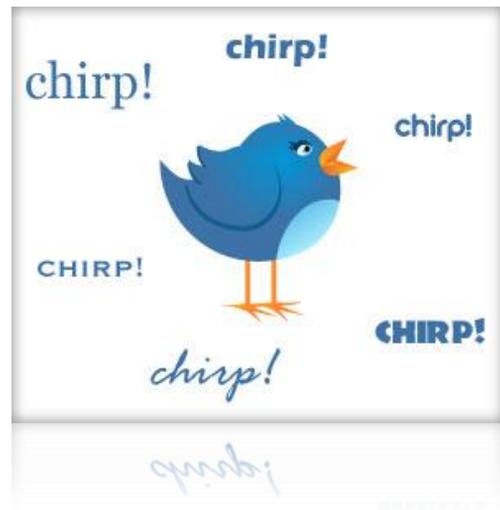


For further help in navigating the use of Twitter in the classroom, use these links in [Twitter Help](#).

If you are looking for some people or hashtags to follow on Twitter, take a look at some of the lists in [Who to Follow on Twitter](#).

Here are some tools that can help support the use of Twitter:

- HootSuite
- TweetDeck
- Storify



WordPress

Different Types

Before we delve into the details of working with WordPress, it is best to sort out the different types of WordPress sites that are available.

- **WordPress.com Sites:** If you go to WordPress.com, you can build your own blogging site. This site's information will be hosted on servers in the United States (this may be an issue with FOIPPA).
- **Own Hosted WordPress Sites:** These sites are created using WordPress, but are hosted on your own server that you would own and maintain.
- **BuddyPress Sites:** These are multi-sited and contained under the umbrella of a parent site. Each of the other user sites (students) would be generated from a parent site (teachers). These are usually complex installations that are run at the district level.

About WordPress

WordPress is essentially a blogging platform. Many blogging sites make use of WordPress when providing websites to users. Some school districts may offer their teachers the opportunity to create websites using this platform (BuddyPress).

WordPress is definitely the most technical of the three types of social media that are presented in this book, so do not worry if it seems a little fuzzy. The best way for you to be able to tweak your site so that it looks like exactly what you want is to play around with the settings! Though I will guide you through some of the main features, you may have some ideas of your own that can be achieved using this site. There are help guides built into WordPress sites, so you can always turn to them if your particular element is not addressed here.

A WordPress site can simply be used as a classroom resource for the students to access asynchronously. WordPress allows for multiple pages on the site and for the creation of calendars which would be of benefit for students to stay abreast of upcoming events. It will also allow parents to be able to view important dates in a central location of your site.

Setting Up Your Page

One of the first things that you will want to change when you first begin your site is the appearance. WordPress has a default setting, but this can be customized by clicking on the Appearance tab. Here you will find pre-created site styles under “Themes” or you will have the option to make your site in “Customize”. What is chosen here will impact how your site will display certain elements, so don’t be afraid to try out different themes until you find the appearance that is right for you!

If you are going to be using this site as a way to post assignments and information, you will want to get familiar with uploading. If you create a new page or post for your site, in the text area, you will have the option to upload images or files. You will be prompted to browse for your upload, so just choose your important files and upload them to your site! When you upload, you will have the option to change the file name as it will appear on the site. You may wish to simplify the name for some of your files for ease of use and understanding (e.g., instead of posting notes entitled “Ch.1.12.pt2,” you may want to name the file “Notes for Graphing, Day 2” or something along that line).

I mentioned earlier about creating a calendar. To make a calendar appear on your site, go back to the Appearance tab and choose “Widgets.” Widgets are different add-ons that you can have displayed on your site. In this case, you will want to add an “Events Calendar.” You can add multiple calendars if you teach different courses, or you can just have the one master calendar. To add important dates to the calendar, you will need to create new events (from the “Events” tab).

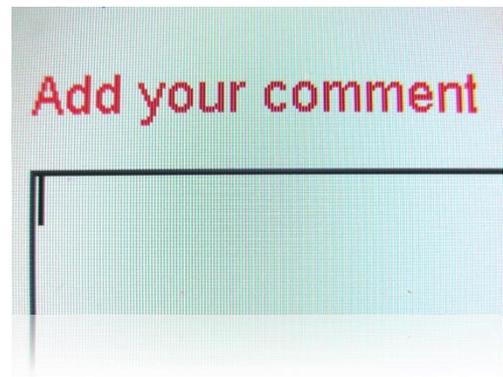


More on BuddyPress

My district uses a WordPress platform for providing staff a place to create and maintain class websites; however, it is also possible for the students in my district to be able to have their own WordPress sites. If this is the case, you will have the capability of having your students be able to blog on a particular timeline (every other day, weekly, etc.). In addition to posting blogs, students may also access others' sites and post questions or comments. These can then be commented on and so on. This will allow students to be able to have an online discussion and engage with each other outside of the classroom.

Another feature that is possible if you and your students each have a BuddyPress WordPress site is that of a forum. The teacher can create a forum main page and add students to the forum that would be most relevant to them. For example, if a teacher has two or more classes of the same subject and grade, it may be possible to connect all of those students in one forum. Alternately, if there are a few teachers who are teaching the same subject and grade, they can create one forum to connect all of the students taking that particular course. This will allow collaboration of the curriculum beyond class groupings.

One other feature you need to be aware of when creating your site to be a forum is the comment moderation. If students are going to have exchanges on your forum, the default setting of the site will require you to approve the comments that are posted. Students will be able to view their own comments that they have created, but they will be marked as pending and not viewable by the class until you have approved them. This is one way for you to monitor the behaviour online, but also to check what each student's participation is like.



Final Thoughts on WordPress

These are just some of the basic settings that you will need when using a WordPress site for your class. The best way to know what will work for you is to experiment on the site! Try out different settings to see if you like the way it looks, or have colleagues view it to see what other people think about the accessibility of the features. Again, if you are stumped about something not mentioned in this chapter, there is an extensive “help” feature on WordPress that will guide you to your answer.

For further help, check out some of these sites for [WordPress Help](#).

Check List

Check List

Use this list to ensure that you have covered all the necessary steps before you launch your online work with your students!

- Have you checked your district to see if they have policies about students working online?
- Have you received consent from the parents or guardians of your students? Does this consent address FOIPPA?
- Have you chosen the social media platform that makes the most sense for your intended use?
- Have you set up your platform?
- Have you chosen a unit or lessons that make the best use of the social media platform?
- Have you created your code of expected behaviour for online interactions?

Have you shared it with the

- Parents?
- Students?
- Administration?

- Have you shown the students how to use the platform?

It looks like you are ready to go! So enjoy making use of social media in your classroom and exploring the virtual realm with your students!

Troubleshooting

Here are a few troubleshooting tips that may help with setting-up and running your social media platform.

Q: Not all of my students have returned signed waivers. Can they still start online?

A: You cannot allow students without a signed waiver form to go online. Students who have not brought in a signed waiver can be provided with an alternate activity for work offline. Remember: The waiver serves to keep all the parties involved in this informed and legally covered. Going online without this may open you to complaints.



Q: My administration has concerns about the use of social media for educational purposes. Is there any research to support its use?

A: Yes! There is a lot of research that supports the use of social media in the classroom setting because of the ability for students to be able to collaborate with other classmates as well as students beyond their own classes. Collaboration is an amazing way for students to take ownership of their learning and to forge new bonds with students they attend school with, or students from around the world. You can search peer-reviewed papers through Google Scholar if you require evidence of this for your administration.



Q: Is it a problem for me to make my Facebook page private?

A: No, it's not a problem! Many parents will feel more comfortable having their children's information protected. Remember, the



Q: I'm trying to search my class hashtag, and nothing is showing up! I know I tagged something on Twitter just recently.

A: Check the spelling! Sometimes, when you are searching on Twitter, it will guess what hashtag you are searching for or wanting to write in your post. These suggestions may be exactly your class hashtag, or it may be off by a letter or symbol. Check both your search criteria and your account's tweets.

Another reason for this may be that you do not have a profile picture or biography on your account. Try adding these and see if your tweets are now visible.



Q: My students are commenting, but their comments aren't showing up on my WordPress site.

A: Check to see if you have approved the comments. There are often several comments pending approval. Check for these on the "Comments" tab.



Q: I'm adding a test as an event to my Word Press calendar and it wants me to narrow down the time. I have several classes writing the test that day. Is there a way around this?

A: Yes! There is an option to have the event lasting the whole day. If a student or parent looks at the event on the calendar, it will only say the date and what is occurring on that day, not that the test lasts all day; however, if you have the times included in the event, these will show up for the students and parents.



About the Author

About Angela Dop

Angela Dop is a secondary mathematics and biology teacher in the Delta School District (#37). She is very passionate about professional development and teacher mentoring. Angela enjoys including technology in new ways in her classroom.



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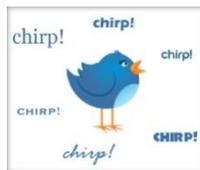
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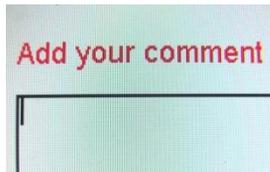
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Chapter Four: Reflections

Summary

The preceding project has been rooted in the framework of Bandura's SCLT. The theory is based upon the idea that learners have three different structures of influence upon the learning that is taking place. These structures are the environment, behaviour, and cognition. There is a give-and-take relationship between each of these structures, so a change in one will affect the other two. Because this model includes these three particular structures, I felt that it was the most relevant when speaking about the effects of social media on learning.

Traditional classroom-based learning has been the main design for education over a century; however, there have been adventurous educators who have begun to include online learning to supplement their classroom teaching. Studies that looked at the benefits and drawbacks of these teaching models were the subject for the literature review. Many of the studies found that harnessing the learning potential of social media allowed teachers to become facilitators of learning rather than the main source of the knowledge. The studies confirmed that students took greater ownership of their learning and were able to become leaders amongst their peers. This would often occur even if the students were not seen in these roles in the bricks and mortar classroom: the introduction of a virtual learning environment changed the social dynamics of the students and allowed for these roles to evolve. Based off of the supporting evidence that I found in the literature review, I chose to make a beginner's user guide to setting up social media in the classroom.

The project itself is an e-book created based upon my experience and research in using three main platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and WordPress. These sites are not the

only social media sites that would be appropriate for use in the classroom; however, it has been my experience that the majority of online users are familiar with these names and would likely gravitate towards them. I do mention that these choices are not the only ones available to the user and I do encourage the readers to try other resources.

For the Facebook section of the resource, I describe how the platform may be used in educational applications. It is my estimation that Facebook may be seen more as a virtual bulletin board, though there is the ability to spark online discussion between students. This will only work if the students already have Facebook accounts, or may have received permission from their parents to get one. If the students are of a sufficient age to be able to access Facebook on their own, there is the possibility of posting questions, pictures, or comments with the expectation that students engage with the material. The drawback of this type of platform is the reach that it may have. Unless the settings are kept entirely public, few people outside of the class and the teacher may be able to access the content, so Facebook is a social media platform that allows for limited sharing.

Twitter is another form of popular social media with which students are familiar. Twitter allows for short messages to be sent out from individuals. These will specifically show up in the feeds of the followers of the account holder, but may also be publicly searched by a specific hashtag or by the user name. Twitter allows for the posting of pictures, links, and short text, but can be accessed by the public at large better than through Facebook. My suggestions for its application in education included using a class hashtag, as well as learning to follow experts in the subject area of the class. Twitter

allows for a more open audience to be reached, but due to the limit in the length of messages, the interactions may be briefer.

The final social media platform I looked at was WordPress, which is a common blogging platform. It allows a site administrator to create a page that can be accessed and linked to by other users. The other users would be students with their own WordPress blogging sites that would be monitored by the teacher. In addition to blog posts, WordPress can be set up to facilitate forum discussions amongst the student users. I also included information on simply using a WordPress site as a classroom resource where a teacher may be able to post information about notes or upcoming events like due dates or test days.

My intention for creating this resource was to provide basic information to teachers who are just expanding into the digital realm. There can be professional pressures placed upon teachers to be fluent in online resources and my hope is that teachers may use this guide as a jumping-off point in their explorations online.

Changes in Beliefs

The process of this Master's program has been an opportunity for me to grow personally and professionally. There have been many new online resources that I have been exposed to and I have become well-versed in these applications. I have changed my attitude about technology in the classroom in a way in which I no longer see technology as a metaphorical carrot to entice my students to complete an assignment; rather, I have discovered that technology may be one of the best ways of strengthening peer bonds and encouraging participation from my students.

Through my research, I have learned that social media is a way for students to interact with each other over time and distance. In other words, messages may be left at all hours of the day and from any geographical location. This facilitates conversations that may have begun face-to-face, but have continued asynchronously through a particular social media platform. This is one of the new ways for students to interact with peers for social reasons, but may also be utilized by teachers for educational reasons. Class discussions may begin at 10:30 in the morning in a particular room in a school, but this may continue into the afternoon and evening on social media-facilitated sites.

In terms of my own personal growth, when I first began this program, I managed a very rudimentary class website upon which I would post my daily notes as well as any upcoming dates of note. Right from the first course in this program, we were encouraged to start using WordPress blog sites to create our written assignments. I had never used a more complex website and found that there was a steep learning curve in setting up and using the site. What I did to become well-versed in the inner workings of my website was to just play around with the settings. I gave myself permission to make mistakes and learn through trial and error. As a result, I became very comfortable with the WordPress platform and have since created a new classroom website on my district's WordPress-based hub that looks far more professional than the one I had a couple of years ago.

I have also learned about the different types of programs that can be used for online, synchronous collaboration. As a class, we have used BlueJeans and Blackboard. As small groups of students meeting, we have used Google Hang Outs. It was my first experience using these platforms and I have become quite comfortable and confident in

the use of them. I have encouraged other friends and colleagues to try out these programs for themselves as a way to network with others and as an alternative to Skype.

Through this program, I have also learned about the power of online education. My exposure to distance education was from watching my mother. She is a certified teacher in Saskatchewan, but British Columbia would not recognize her credentials. When I was in elementary school, my mother decided to try to complete her outstanding credits through distance education. She would sign up for a course, be sent a syllabus and textbook, and she would complete her handwritten assignments and submit them by mail to her professors. There was no personal interaction with fellow classmates. There was no real interaction with the professors except when the marked assignments would be mailed back with a few comments in the margins. This was how I thought all distance education was taught. When I signed up for this Masters program, my friends, my colleagues, and I assumed that this program would be of the same ilk, but that the assignments and reading material would be sent electronically. I was so pleasantly surprised to find that there was a synchronous component to this program! It allowed there to be interactions amongst classmates, as well as with the instructor. We all bonded in way that felt very real, despite the fact that, most of us, still have not even met. In this regard, our class never felt as though we were learning in isolation. We forged a learning community and modelled exactly what my research has supported: that the use of collaborative online platforms increase learning through the forging of social bonds as well as allowing the students to become surrogate instructors of the material.

Solidifying Convictions

As outlined in the previous section, I did a lot of growing as a result of my time in this program. I learned a lot of new material and was exposed to a lot of new (to me) technology. This being said, there were some beliefs that I held prior to this program that were reinforced. From my own experience, I know that shiny new objects that I bring into the classroom do not inspire learning to magically occur. Several times over the course of this program have we explored the idea that technology in and of itself will not create better learning simply because a task is now being completed on a computer or iPad. Technology needs to be integrated in a meaningful way in order for an educator to harness the power of collaboration that it can facilitate. This means that an educator cannot expect that when students are completing an assignment online that they will suddenly become more engaged simply because it is being done on the computer. It is not enough to use technology for the sake of using technology, no different than any other novelty item that an educator may wish to use in the classroom.

Before starting my graduate studies, I had observed that my students seemed more engaged if given the chance to work with others. I knew that social interaction was an important part of learning and should be incorporated when appropriate in the classroom setting. For me, as a learner, I realized how important this was when our cohort went from having weekly synchronous meetings to none at all in the following term. I felt very isolated from my peers and less engaged with the material. When the next term's classes resumed with synchronous sessions, there was a palpable difference in the cohort's engagement simply by having the opportunity to interact with one another while learning the new material. This helped me realize that group learning is important at any age.

A final conviction for me through this program was how much there is to learn. I knew when entering this program that I did not know a lot about technology. I had a good working understanding of the programs that I used from day to day both professionally and personally; however, I knew that on the spectrum of understanding of all there is in technology, I was definitely at the novice end. One of my concerns entering this program was that I was going to be so inexperienced in educational technology compared to my fellow classmates. The first course was definitely a learning experience! I had not been a student in over 13 years, plus I had all these new technology-based terms to learn and platforms to explore. It was not until some of our smaller group sessions online that I realized that I was not the only one who had a lot to learn and that even classmates who seemed to be experienced in some technological applications were not as well versed in others. In other words, no single person knows all that there is to know about education with technology: we all have so much to learn!

Beyond Graduate School

My studies over the last few years will help me in my career and beyond. They have reminded me of what it is like to be a student. They have given me confidence in my technology-based abilities. They have given me the ability to change my role in my district.

As an educator, it is important to reflect on what is being done in the classroom from the perspective of the student. A teacher may believe that the workload that is assigned is easily manageable for the students, but the reality may be that it is not. It has been invaluable for me as an educator to again put myself in the role of a student. I had forgotten how difficult it is to just live life with looming due dates on my mind. I had

forgotten how much longer it takes to read papers for school than it does for personal interest or pleasure, particularly if those papers needed to be annotated. These reminders have already helped to change my approach to the structure of my classroom. I try not to schedule any major due dates or tests around the times of any major student events. I try to ensure that the days that I choose for tests will be full classes instead of those that have been shortened due to evacuation drills, collaboration time, or assemblies. I think that being a student again, this time with a career and family to juggle, has given me insight into the different types of pressures that my own students face when in my class.

My work on my Masters has also given me the knowledge to become an emerging leader in educational technology in my school. As mentioned earlier, when I began this program, I had a very rudimentary understanding of the types of technology that was available for use in my classroom. As I have proceeded, I have learned new tools that can be used in the classroom and beyond. This knowledge has made me into a resource that my colleagues now search out for advice on their own technology questions. I have made recommendations on different set-up options for teachers' WordPress sites. I have been able to weigh in on discussions about different video-conferencing platforms that are available. I am going to be running a workshop on technology in our district's upcoming district-wide professional day. None of this would be possible without the foundation of knowledge that I have gained as a result of my Master of Education program. This program has taught me skills that are allowing me to become a technology leader in my school and district.

One of the biggest effects that this program will have on my career is that of opportunity. Though I love being in the classroom teaching, I like the idea of having the

option of changing my role in the school district should the opportunity arise. There are many roles that I could take on from that of a school-based administrator to district-based co-ordinator. The common denominator for most of these positions is the requirement of a Master of Education degree. Often times, it is the first listed requirement on the job posting. To have the ability to change roles and responsibilities at some point in the future is intriguing to me. I like being able to keep my options open to any opportunity that may arise. Though I may not be seizing upon the first opening that gets posted, it is comforting to know that if my dream job becomes available, I will have all the requisite education to be able to apply.

This degree program has already changed a lot about my career from reminding me what it is like to be a student to raising my status amongst the technological leaders in my school. I am uncertain as to whether or not I will be using this degree to change my position and career path in terms of my role in the district. Regardless of the path that I choose for my future career, this degree has already afforded me new opportunities to learn and grow as an educator.

Final Recommendations and Parting Thoughts

There is so much that I have learned before creating my final project. There have been new platforms to use and understand, as well as the legal issues of privacy and media use by minors to learn. As someone who has waded through much of the research and information available in the area of the educational use of social media, I feel that I can offer the following recommendations for others looking to follow in my path.

First, I would recommend checking with your own district. Many districts are beginning to develop policies surrounding the use of technology in the classroom. This

may be in the form of general BYOD policies, or more in-depth policies that may include a code of conduct for student behaviour online. Some districts, like my own, have actually created hosted blogging sites that teachers and students may access and use in a fully supported manner. If this is available, I would recommend making use of any and all district resources. The main reason is that the district will likely be supporting that platform financially and with human resources. There should be someone from the district that can be contacted for help if any issues arise. Using the district supplied platform will also help with the transparency in terms of the work that students are doing online and this, in turn, covers the teacher legally. Perhaps the biggest advantage of using a district-established platform is the fact that the groundwork has already been completed for the teacher, so there is no need to re-invent the proverbial wheel.

My second recommendation would be to do some reading on the subject. I do not mean just user guides or online help articles, but also some of the research that has been done on the subject of social media use in the classroom. If there is any kind of push-back from students, parents, administration, or even other teachers, knowing the research is the best way to have answers for any of the “what if” or “why” types of questions that may arise. This will not require hours of searching for articles that will support the use of social media in the classroom. I would be more than happy for any educator to make use of the articles that I have curated in my bibliography for this paper. The research can be used to add weight to the argument for the use of social media in the classroom, but also for teachers to be able to learn what has been tried before and, based on those results, what will work best. Though I am definitely a proponent of experiential learning, I would

still recommend that teachers do some research in order to avoid some of the documented potential pitfalls in the implementation of social media in the classroom.

My third and final recommendation would be for teachers to really examine the purpose of using social media. In a time of buzz words, it is important for teachers not to get caught up in the flurry of technological opportunities that have become available. To simply use social media for the sake of using it is not going to be engaging for the students. As with the introduction of any new teaching technique or resource, social media needs to be incorporated into the learning in a meaningful and purposeful manner. From the various readings that I have done over the course of this program, I have found that researchers seem to agree that technology is the new fad in educational resources. In the past, it has been television and videos, but now it is using the power of online networking sites, namely social media. I would recommend that teachers look at the material that is being taught in their particular course and then see if there would be an appropriate fit for the use of social media rather than to decide to use it for menial tasks like completing essays online. Social media has no limit to the collaboration that it can afford, but it must be used in a manner that makes sense and is meaningful rather than just as another means to complete regular classroom activities.

As I look back on the last couple of years of my studies, I am proud of what I have accomplished. There have been times that balancing family, career, and school were overwhelming. I am glad that I was able to persevere and am pleased to have produced an ebook that I hope will help others as they begin to explore the online world with their students. It is a relief to be done, yet I know that I will miss the opportunity to learn so much with such a great group of fellow educators. I wish the best of luck to all of my

fellow #tiegrad cohort members including instructors, and I look forward to when our paths will cross again.

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