

## BOOK REVIEW

**Poore, M. (2012). *Using Social Media in the Classroom: A Best Practice Guide*. Sage, 255 pp. ISBN: 9781446202807.**

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As the use of social media in teaching proliferates, numerous “how-to” books have been published with varying emphases. Many are oriented towards specific tools which seemingly preclude any discussion of their appropriateness. Others are so general that they essentially present a base introduction to social media. In Megan Poore’s book *Using Social Media in the Classroom: A Best Practice Guide*, an equitable balance is struck. Her background in preparing pre-service teachers is evident as she promulgates a cogent systematic approach.

The book is divided into four main sections, 1 - Getting Started: The Essentials, 2 - The “Big Four”, 3 - Enriching Your Practice, and 4 - Social Contexts. The strength of this architecture is its ability to serve beginners while also presenting a good idea pool for more advanced users. While the book is not a complete resource for advanced users, it effectively details ideas and tips that are useful to disparate groups.

In “Getting Started”, Poore delineates an introduction to social media and what it encompasses. Salient distinction is made between Web 1.0 and 2.0 abilities and their unique qualities (pg. 5). As defined in the book, Web 1.0 represents basic unilateral presentation of essentially “read-only” digital information. The student consumes the information with low, or nonexistent, social interactivity. In contrast, Web 2.0 represents the socialization and democratization of content in multi-lateral exchanges. In this framework, the educator becomes a curator of course information, but not its sole owner or creator. Disparate groups contribute and help form the bases for understanding and applying the new material throughout the process. The various social trends advancing this social constructionist philosophy undergird the book’s relevance.

Aimed squarely at instruction, the opening section attempts to explain how incessant evolutions from “read-only” to “social constructionism” have affected all aspects of education. Consequently, it highlights how education has been forced into a difficult choice. This choice is grounded in a pressing need to find a place in this new digital world while also retaining the best of the past. The book’s attempt to resolve this quandary is a key strategic component.

In this section, various additional concepts are introduced and further defined. The section incorporates basic vocabulary and the meanings of terms such as RSS, Hyperlinks, Tags, Widgets, etc. An excellent cross-reference of educational purpose to social media tool is a welcome inclusion (p. 17). Too often, authors create great tomes of debate and bluster, and fail to give the reader an effective tool with which to achieve their teaching mission.

The “Big Four” constitutes what many may consider the most useful section of the book as it relates the basic foundations of social media. Tools such as blogs, wikis, social networking, and podcasting are competently described in a way that makes their meaning and use accessible to educators. Poore writes as one who has undergone the journey of implementing these tools and thus offers much valuable advice. A curious amount of space is dedicated to wikis and blogs. This choice is only questioned due to the rapid migration on the web from text, to photos, and now social video; however, potential obsolescence of any technology well haunts this topic. Podcasting is thoroughly covered and particularly useful as she covers various subtopics, from creation to ultimately publishing. Even experienced podcasters can learn from her coverage of equipment, file formats, and final editing (p. 102).

“Enriching Your Practice”, is the book’s catchall third section which contains an assortment of different tools and services. The list includes a myriad of digital products such as visual media, instant messaging, Skype and Twitter. Many of these tools are presented as “middleware” that in isolation are educationally inert; however, when appended to a well-executed syllabus they can come to life. The ambition of this section perhaps exceeds its grasp as the wide-ranging tools probably deserve treatment in a separate book. Trying to describe how to integrate at least 11 digital services while also describing numerous productivity tools in chapter 12 seems too ambitious a task. That said, Twitter coverage is excellent with a good description

of its educational benefits and pedagogical underpinnings (p. 124). Likewise, her coverage of the dangers of inappropriate and puerile student content is highly practicable. Unaware of the potential for offensive or disruptive content, a practitioner can easily fail to weigh the pros and cons of allowing unmonitored social posting. This balance between benefit and potential danger is a useful oscillating framework throughout the book.

The last section, "Social Contexts", forays into the sociological and legal issues surrounding digital education. Included are topics such as digital natives, technological divides, and cyberbullying. The entirety of Chapter 15 is dedicated to cyberbullying, perhaps to a fault, detailing the problems, symptoms, and numerous potential remediations. Given the variability of this problem in K-12 versus higher education, a bifurcated approach might have more closely reflected actual risks. Good useful coverage is provided of data backup and general strategies for ensuring recoverability (p. 225). In this section, Poore effectively communicates the many issues an educator must consider prior to adopting third-party software that effectively "owns" user information. A review of basic legal issues anent digital content and its management is included and well thought out. Also offered is an examination of social media's terms of service and its implications (p. 209). By not ignoring these important ramifications of potential copyright and intellectual property infringements, the author does the reader a great service.

Throughout the book the recognition of social media risk is appreciated. Frequently, educators will employ a social media tool sans a full appreciation of the legal, grading, and pedagogical consequences. Concordantly, a course can flounder when students violate intellectual properties, disagree with grading matrices, or fail to learn effectively. In the book, these risks are delineated to inform readers of negative potentialities and the required mitigative actions. The effect is an even, balanced assessment that facilitates the needs of a decision maker.

The book also contains a complementary resource website that further dimensionalizes the material with added content. There the reader will find relevant handouts, planning forms, checklists, and other resources. In keeping with true Web 2.0 methodology, Poore welcomes active engagement and participation on the website to enliven topics. Participants have clearly taken her up on the offer, as

much of the content is user-generated. Particularly useful are the discussion boards where many areas are further analyzed and debated. Used in conjunction with the book, the website represents an excellent enhancement for the reader.

In conclusion, *Using Social Media in the Classroom: A Best Practice Guide*, achieves most of what it attempts. It is a product-neutral overview of social media and how an educator can optimize them. Beginning users will find it accessible as a starting point for exploration, and mid-level practitioners will benefit from its relative depth. While the book is not an exhaustive compendium, nor intended to be, its approach to teaching successful cognitive approaches is eminently valuable. In the ever-changing world of digital media, software tools tend to come and go. Correspondingly, technology books can quickly become outdated and useless. Poore's strategic concepts and learning approaches, however, should last. She seeks to instill in the reader the requisite knowledge along with the right learning mindset. To perceptive readers, this point will neither be lost nor unappreciated.

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