Essay

Social Media in the Classroom: Challenges and Strategies in Faculty Development

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Abilene Christian University began developing a campus wide mobile learning program in 2008, providing a context of campus saturation by 2010. The reimagining of teaching and learning prompted by this initiative led to the use of mobile learning and to the introduction of social media components into the learning context. This paper will discuss the promise and challenges of social media in the classroom, explore the use of social media in higher education, and discuss the strategies that the Adams Center for Teaching and Learning has used in order to provide faculty development training for the use of social media within both traditional and non-traditional learning environments.

As the use of mobile devices has proliferated, so has the concept that such devices may be useful in the process of teaching and learning. Mobile learning has been defined by Wu, Wu, Chen, Kao, Lin, & Huang (2012) as featuring "learners engaged in educational activities, using technology as a mediating tool for learning via mobile devices accessing data and communicating with others through wireless technology" (Wu et al. pg. 818). The use of mobile technology in education is an exciting way to reimagine

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teaching and learning. It provides the opportunity for a more flexible learning model that gives both faculty members and students access to multiple information sources and a shift from an authority based learning structure to a community of learners (Peters, 2007; Hamm, Saltsman, Jones, Baldridge, & Perkins, 2013). Mobility allows for the chance to learn in formal and informal settings in a "just in time" manner (Park, 2011).

Model of Mobile Learning

Park (2011) adapted Gay, Reiger, and Bennington's (2002) model to develop a framework for mobile learning. This framework includes a mobility hierarchy, ranging from 1 to 4. Level 1 is content intensive and focuses on production, includes applications such as calendars and grading, and is asynchronous. Level 2 focuses on flexible physical access and includes local databases and interactive prompting. Level 3 mobility applications capture and integrate data. These include network databases, data collection, and mobile libraries. Level 4 mobile learning applications allow for communication and collaboration. These applications include real time chat, email, and social media. Level 4 applications of mobile learning allow for intense communication and synchronous group work.

Creating Significant Learning

This understanding of mobile learning provides a framework to appreciate the best types of applications to involve students in synchronous, engaged communication. It fits well within the model of teaching and learning that Abilene Christian University has adopted as our standard, Dee Fink's (2003) learning taxonomy for creating significant learning. Fink's model goes beyond the cognitive taxonomy of learning provided by Bloom (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956) and allows the consideration of important aspects of learning such as helping students become aware of how to learn and develop life skills that impact communication, interpersonal relationships, and the ability to adapt to change (Fink, 2003). Fink's taxonomy of significant learning includes six kinds of learning. The first type of learning is foundational knowledge, which includes understanding and remembering information and ideas. Application is the second type of learning, and involves developing particular skill sets, critical, creative, and practical thinking, and managing projects.

The third type of learning is integration, which encompasses connecting people, ideas, and realms of life. As students learn about themselves and others, they are engaged in the fourth type of learning, the human dimension. Developing new feelings, interests, and values is a part of caring, which is the fifth type of learning. Lastly, the sixth type of learning involves learning how to learn as one becomes a better student, inquires about a subject, and becomes more self-directed.

In order to fully realize the impact of mobile learning, activities must be carefully crafted to use the strengths of mobility to promote significant learning. These two models blend in the development of learning applications that encourage students to communicate and collaborate in their learning experiences. Rather than being isolated in interacting with content, students who engage in learning activities that allow them to cooperate with one another in the process of learning are more likely to experience significant learning.

Social Media in Education

Social media has been defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, pg. 61). Web 2.0 describes the way that both programmers and users work collaboratively to use the World Wide Web as a platform to continually modify content and applications (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). Some of the most widely used Web 2.0 tools include blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, video and photo sharing, avatars, microblogging, and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Tunks, 2012). These tools allow users easy access and the ability to communicate, create, and share content. Kaplan & Haenlin (2010) propose that there are both challenges and opportunities in social media, and these can be applied to the educational setting. A recent study of undergraduate students demonstrated that student use of social media has increased steadily in the past several years (Dehlstrom, deBoor, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2010). This begs the question, how can social media be effectively integrated into a program of mobile learning?

Research has demonstrated that Web 2.0 technologies have allowed for increased social teaching and learning in higher education classrooms (Churchill, 2009; Top, Yukselturk & Inan, 2010). Blogs have been shown to be effective in building a sense of community

in a course and in impacting perceived learning (Top, 2012). Social networking has been used to store and share information (Arnold & Paulus, 2010). Increased learner independence, engagement, and communication have all been linked to the use of social media as a component of mobile learning (Hamm, Saltsman, Jones, Baldridge, & Perkins, 2013).

Applications of Social Media use at Abilene Christian University

In 2008, Abilene Christian University (ACU) began the process of complete mobile saturation by providing mobile devices to all incoming freshman. By 2010, all undergraduate students had access to a mobile device. This mobile learning initiative was built upon the belief that students learn best when they have the ability to communicate and collaborate with others (Abilene Christian University, 2010). Data indicate that 84% of faculty at ACU regularly use a mobile device for in-class activities and 90% believe that the device has led to increased out of class contact and participation in learning (Abilene Christian University, 2010). Faculty at ACU have used mobile learning in many different ways, with the use of social media as one powerful tool for enhancing communication and collaboration among students.

Faculty Development

As all of the undergraduate students at the university had the use of a mobile device, the Adams Center for Teaching and Learning (Adams Center) was tasked to provide faculty development programming in order to increase faculty ability to optimally serve students. At the launch of the mobile learning initiative, the Adams Center put a plan into place that encouraged early faculty adopters through incentives and resources while also providing regular opportunities for all faculty to explore the use of mobile learning and particular strategies tied to the use of social media. Research has indicated that teachers often feel ineffective in using Web 2.0 technology and are reluctant to use it in their classrooms (Pan & Franklin, 2011). Faculty development activities are key in providing opportunities for faculty members to become aware of ways in which social media can be used effectively in learning, become proficient in the use of social media for educational use, and develop a community of peer and expert support in the use of such tools. Kukulska-Huhme (2012) proposed

that peer-learning activities allow faculty members to share collective experiences with one another while developing their skills.

The Adams Center has worked to establish a consistent pattern of support for faculty members seeking to grow in their knowledge and skills in using social media in the educational setting. In order to allow faculty members to become aware of strategies for use, become proficient, and develop community, three types of faculty development opportunities have been employed.

Inspirational sessions consist of early adopters and experts sharing innovative uses of social media within the mobile learning context. Such sessions allow early adopting faculty to share their own experiences with their colleagues, along with the challenges and benefits of the use of the new technology. Expert inspirational sessions allow faculty members to hear from educational technology experts as they share cutting edge uses of technologies for learning. These have included workshops on such topics as the use of specific applications, podcasts, Google Hangouts, and Twitter.

Educational sessions consist of practical, hands-on workshops in which faculty members learn how to use specific technologies. These workshops range in level from beginning to advanced and provide faculty members the occasion not only to acquire new skills, but also to develop a community of support with their colleagues and fellow learners as well as the experts who are leading the session. These workshops have included specific instruction in how to set up a class blog, how to use social networking sites for in and out of class assignments, and practice in using particular applications.

Lastly, online learning modules and podcasts have been developed to offer faculty members just in time learning occasions. These courses range from simple podcasts that walk a faculty member through creating a class blog to a multi-week module designed to increase knowledge of creating significant learning along with guided course redesign and activity planning.

Classroom Strategies

One of the most common uses of social media on the ACU campus has been the use of the device to access wikis in order to search for and share relevant information with peers during formal class activities (Perkins & Saltsman, 2010). Surveys of students suggest that the ability to use their mobile device to access and share such infor-

mation increases their perceived control over the learning environment (Perkins & Saltsman, 2010). Faculty members at ACU have used Blogs extensively. While some faculty members have chosen to use a class blog as a tool to share information with their students, others have utilized the interactive nature of the blog to provide students with the opportunity to continue class discussions after class meetings, begin exploring concepts before class meetings, and share information relevant to the course material with one another. Google Hangouts has been used to provide students with synchronous opportunities to discuss class material outside of class meetings. Social networking sites such as Facebook have been used to create the chance for groups to connect and communicate. Twitter has been used to provide students with a way to communicate with one another during the course of classrooms or outside activities. Dr. Stephen Baldridge utilized the concept of what he termed "remote teaching" in order to allow students to complete separate activities outside of class while simultaneously communicating with one another and the teacher through Twitter. This provided his students with the opportunity to take learning outside of the classroom, and yet communicate and collaborate in a synchronous manner. The use of remote teaching with social media led to a significant increase in the knowledge of learners engaged in this type of teaching when compared to those in a traditional lecture based classroom (Baldridge & McAdams, 2012).

Conclusion

The strength of all of these strategies is the convergence of highly engaged students communicating and collaborating with one another in order to produce significant learning. The encouragement of communication and collaboration through activities that meet Park's (2011) fourth level of mobile learning not only build foundational knowledge, but also promote the self-direction needed for students to learn how to learn in the Fink model (2003). Taken together, the use of social media as one aspect of mobile learning has increased the ability of faculty members at ACU to teach their students effectively. But in order to fully realize the benefits of social media in education, faculty members must become comfortable with the use of such technologies and be provided with a consistent level of support. The use of the inspirational, educational and just in time online faculty development activities provide faculty members with the ability to grow in

their understanding of social media technologies, become confident in putting those technologies into place, and access to ongoing support as needed in order to best serve their students.

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