

Social Media and education

Primary school children are increasingly engaging in virtual worlds with social network functions (game sites such as Club Penguin, Minecraft or Webkinz).¹ Unreflected digital public spaces come with both opportunities as well as risks. Children's virtual worlds connect young children to the pleasures and benefits of the digital world and their impacts on classroom learning have intensified in accordance with the growth of Social Media since 2004.² Currently a rather controversial discussion among experts is taking place thinking on how Social Media are enhancing or disrupting learning experiences. So far, though empirical evidence has been rather scarce in the academic literature.³

While controversies are going on the impacts of Social Media in our daily routines are undeniable. Social Media and education are closely connected when we think upon the idea that the internet opens opportunities for people to learn autonomously of institutions. Nevertheless the idea does not keep up with the reality check where global tendencies show a standardisation in ways of rising numbers of multiple choice quizzes instead of individual learning spaces.⁴

Using digital opportunities and Social Media platforms in classrooms is inevitable today but it has to be well reflected regularly. For example, communication among teachers and pupils. A common way of communication in secondary schools is using E-Mail. Both teachers and pupils get mail addresses from the institutions. Yet in recent years more and more pupils do no longer read their incoming Mails as they moved to low-threshold services like WhatsApp, Facebook-Messenger or other.⁵

Therefore, teachers could start to use the same channels like students do or they stick to traditional communication channels and try to encourage their students to do the same. However, students use the new channels naturally while it's hard for them to stay active on most LMS systems because the common Social Media channels tend to be nearer to their thoughts.⁶

Mechanisms of Social Media

To use Social Media in classrooms teachers, need a deeper knowledge about its mechanisms. First of all, contribution and participation are not equally spread. People without knowledge about Social Media are left out of it and be endangered to be isolated sooner or later. However, people who own accounts on Social Media are not integrated in it incremental. They have to use their

¹ Digital Play: Social network sites and the well being of young children; D. Holloway; 2014;

<https://www.anzca.net/documents/2014-conf-papers/755-anzca14-holloway-1/file.html>; accessed on 2018-12-11

² Cf. Van Dijck, J. & T. Poell (2018). Social media platforms and education. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, 579-591, edited by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick & Thomas Poell. London: Sage

³ Cf. Van Dijck, J. & T. Poell (2018). Social media platforms and education. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, 579-591, edited by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick & Thomas Poell. London: Sage

⁴ Cf. Generation „Social Media“ *Wie digitale Kommunikation Leben, Beziehungen und Lernen Jugendlicher verändert*; P. Wampfler; 2014; Germany; Vandenhock & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG; S.126

⁵ Generation „Social Media“ *Wie digitale Kommunikation Leben, Beziehungen und Lernen Jugendlicher verändert*; P. Wampfler; 2014; Germany; Vandenhock & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG; S. 127

⁶ Cf. Podcast by H. Wittenbrink, D. Muchitsch; upon autoplay on Social Media;

<https://www.facebook.com/Cloudthinkn/videos/276874386352392/>; accessed on 2018-12-20

accounts and keep them up to date and reliable at the same time. Something like a peer pressure to make better contributions, more likeable contributions or just more contributions on a given time could occur.⁷

On the other hand, there is also a broader concept, which understands that “today’s online and networked environment requires that young people develop new skills to participate and stay safe in the new digital media environment”.⁸

Considering that here are the most important Social Media mechanisms:

Everybody is able to

- Participate (produce content)
- Join a conversation (comment on contents)
- Pass on (share contents)
- Evaluate (judge contents)
- Expand (e.g. work on with something like we do on Wikipedia)
- Correct (self-purification)
- Network⁹

When we are talking about participation in Social Media among Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010) and later born children we already heard that their usage starts at very early ages. They are looking for entertainment, maintaining friendships and getting information about their interests. Children are exploring rooms along the net and there is almost no way turning back from this trend. Therefore, it is necessary to provide those rooms for children and show them opportunities on how such places can be designed and used for educational purpose.¹⁰

As children develop many competences naturally while using Social Media and digital Media, a reflected look from adults is always advisable but we have to keep in mind that we are in no position to deny them access to Social Media as children have a right of freedom of opinion, thought, conscience, religion, association and assembly as stated in the UN convention of children rights.¹¹

Another point while thinking upon childrens’ rights and the mechanisms of Social Media which is always in line with the term of participation we have to ask ourselves, are we driving the net or is the net driving us? Platforms run in most cases commercial and users can only participate at the given rules of those platforms with no right at all to co-develop the upgrowth of them.¹² On the dark side some of the platforms went under fire as their usage of personal data went public. But the net is a great place of information and knowledge when you look for example at wikipedia and other online encyclopaedia.

⁷ Cf. Roland Gabriel, Heinz-Peter Röhrs (2017): Social Media. Potenziale, Trends, Chancen und Risiken. Springer-Verlag GmbH, Berlin; S. 82 & 84

⁸ Cf. Collin P, Rahilly K, Richardson I & Third A 2011b, The Benefits of Social Networking Services: A literature review, Cooperative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing, Melbourne.; p.12

⁹ Cf. Babka S. (2016) Was ist Social Media?. In: Social Media für Führungskräfte. Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden

¹⁰ Cf. Siller, Friederike: YOUCitizen, Kindheit und Freiheit im Netz (2016), p. 146 - 149

¹¹ Cf. BMFSFJ; 2015

¹² Cf. Social Media; G.J-H. Schmidt; Germany 2013; Springer Verlag; p. 81

So we are realising that teaching is changing. It is no longer simply about passing on knowledge to next generations. Teachers in the 21st century, in all educational sectors, have to cope with an ever-changing cultural and technological environment. Teaching is now a design science. Like other design professionals - architects, engineers, town planners, programmers – teachers have to work out creative and evidence-based ways of improving what they do.¹³

Social Media and Online Didactic

New tools, new technologies ask for new didactic scenarios when they should be implemented into the classroom. Especially the specifications of Social Media require tough schedules and very detailed plans, because of their hybrid nature. Students use those tools for their private life's, for hobbies, connecting with friends, which is good because they are learning to use those tools effectively without much guidance. Teachers can expect a decent level of competences from their students.

But with these competences due to the private use of those tools come along the problem with distraction. Both Youtube and Facebook recently added the autoplay function, which means videos start to play automatically when they appear on your screen. The platforms use an algorithm to hold users as long as possible on these platforms.¹⁴

In addition, with detailed plans the teachers must provide space for the students where they are free to self-organize their learning processes and are able to reflect it for themselves and in collaboration and discussion with others.¹⁵ So in general we can see that to reflect your own learning think critical about the content you are learning about is moving more into the picture.

To increase motivation elements and processes of gamification could be integrated into learning scenarios. Especially Generation Z is profiting from detailed feedback, progress reports and back coupling during learning processes. They need support from teachers and a fielding didactic scenario to feel comfortable and motivated to reach their learning aims.

Educational design patterns – examples

Every new generation of learners is learning more interactive and knows better to network among each other. Therefore, pedagogical approaches have to adapt to those fast changing circumstances. There is no longer in-line learning because interactive platforms are enabling complex and interactive interactions among teachers and learners.¹⁶ Learners are more focused on certain problems than on learning about a whole science, they are looking for knowledge – just in time, at the very moment they need it. While the past approach was to teach knowledge more broadly based.

¹³ Cf. Laurillar, D. (2012). Teaching as a design science: building pedagogical patterns for learning and technology. New York, NY: Routledge.

¹⁴ Cf. U. Haller; NZZ am Sonntag 2018-12-16; S. 3; accessed on 2018-12-21

¹⁵ Cf. J. Erpenbeck, S. Sauter, W. Sauter; Social Workplace Learning – Kompetenzentwicklung im Arbeitsprozess und im Netz in der Enterprise 2.0; Springer; Germany, 2016; p. 3

¹⁶ Cf. Piasecki, S.; Lernen im realen und im "Scheinraum". In: Rummler, Klaus (Hg). Lernräume gestalten – Bildungskontexte vielfältig denken. Waxmann 2014. Münser/New York

Taken further, the literacies required to thrive in a digital age are multidimensional and encompass 'digital age literacies'.¹⁷ These span the range of media, digital, social and emotional literacies required for young people to "learn through multiple media confidently, effectively and safely".

All these facts lead to the necessity of interdisciplinary when using digital media in classrooms. While assignments in former times focussed on the school subject, today it is essential to take in evaluation and examination of sources of the internet.¹⁸ However institutions struggle to increase the adoption of internal Learning Management Systems (for example Moodle, which is broadly implemented in schools in Austria and Germany) and at the same time, they are unable to stop pupils and students from using Social Media during lectures.¹⁹ The educational potential of digital tools is in theory endless, however current pedagogical practices fail to capture it.

One of the new methods is called "Rapid-E-Learning". It is based on micro-learning units which are enabling to achieve learning aims within a short time lapse. These micro-learning units are usually imbedded in Social Media backgrounds.²⁰ Microlearning is tailored on the specifics of mobile devices.²¹ The single learning steps are usually Multiple-Choice questions with elaborated feedback which provides explanations and further information about the content. The integration of pictures, audio and video is also possible.

Flipped classroom in history class (This looks as a Case Scenario, to be decided if to be left in the Theoretical Framework and/or taken out to be used as an attachment)

A professor of undergraduate students did a class of Historiography. Therefore he recorded a series of 15 minutes videos that covered contents of class, e.g.:

- Various sources used by historians (earlier writings, empirical records; registries of birth, marriage and death; eye witness accounts, artefacts)
- Themes around which historical analysis tend to be written
- Techniques used by historians (narrative, analysis, interpretation)
- Three different position or theories about history (objectivist, marxist, post modernist)

Students worked through the videos according to a suggested schedule, twice a week they had a one-hour lecture in class, where specific topics of the videos were discussed. In addition, an online discussion forum was used at the university's learning management system. The professor posted there similar topics for collaboration. Students were expected to write at least one post which counted on the final grade.

After three weeks the class was divided into small groups (72 students in total into 12 groups) and their task was to research the history of a city outside the United States over a period of 50 years and fulfil the following task:

¹⁷ Aspen Institute Task Force on Learning and the Internet, 2014

¹⁸ Cf. Generation „Social Media“ Wie digitale Kommunikation Leben, Beziehungen und Lernen Jugendlicher verändert; P. Wampfler; 2014; Germany; Vandenhock & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG; p.131

¹⁹ Cf. Siemens, G., Weller, M.; Higher education and the promises and perils of social network; p. 165; <http://oro.open.ac.uk/28418/1/1076-1505-2-PB.pdf>; accessed on 2018-12-14

²⁰ Cf. R. Gabriel, H.P. Röhrs (2017): Social Media. Potenziale, Trends, Chancen und Risiken. Springer-Verlag GmbH, Berlin.; p. 140

²¹ Cf. Bruck, P. A., Motiwalla, L., Foerster, F.; Mobile Learning with micro-content: a framework and evaluation; 25th Bled conference; Bled; 2012

Pick a particular theme that covered the 50 years and write a narrative based around the theme;
Identify the sources the finally used in their report, and discuss why they selected some sources and dismissed others;
Compare their approach to the positions covered in the lectures;
Post the report in the form of an online e-portfolio in the course space on the university's learning management system;

For the tasks the given time period to work on was 5 weeks. The last three weeks of the course were exclusively used for group presentations, which were recorded and put online. The students were asked to assign grades for their colleagues' work. Those grades were taken into consideration for the final grade.

The grading was a combination of

- individual grades
- peer grading
- group work and
- contributions online and class discussions

The teachers' conclusion was interesting, because Ralph Goodyear was surprised and pleased at the quality of the students' work.²²

This example shows how the use of digital media enables a deeper learning, a more complex examination with the content. Students are using channels and tools they are familiar with from private use and benefit from the already built competences on an educational background.²³

²² Cf. A.W., Bates; Teaching in a Digital Age; <https://www.tonybates.ca/teaching-in-a-digital-age/>; accessed on 2018-12-20

²³ Cf. Hussain, Irshad & Cakir, Ozlem & Candeğer, Ümmügülsüm. (2018). Social Media as a Learning Technology for University Students. International Journal of Instruction. 11. 10.12973/iji.2018.11219a.; p. 290

Content Strategy at FH JOANNEUM (This looks as a Case Scenario, to be decided if to be left in the Theoretical Framework and/or taken out to be used as an attachment)

At the FH JOANNEUM the degree course Content Strategy aims to accompany students who wants to work in the field of developing and systemizing online-contents. The degree course is constructed with a high percentage of online learning as it is extra-occupational.²⁴

A lot of the organisation of Content Strategy and its task management is executed by using digital media. Micro-learning is something students get to know at the very beginning of their studies. A tool in use for this concept is "Trello". Trello is a platform which allows users to make boards with assignments and tasks and add other persons to it. The tasks are divided into small sections and Trello documents the progress of every student or a group of them.²⁵ Communication among teachers and students takes place via Slack, which is an instant messaging-tool.²⁶ Documents are shared on Google drive and weekly web conferences are held using Zoom. Zoom offers communications software that combine video conferencing, online meetings, chat and mobile collaboration.²⁷

The example of Content Strategy shows in an exceptional way how to use new technologies effectively to teach a complex topic which itself is new and quick changing. It is learning content strategy by doing content strategy.

Problems and Risks when using Social Media

With the greater impact of Social Media our society is changing. Children are developing their identities upon watching others and interaction among people. Therefore, it a natural consequence that Social Media and its platforms do have influence and power in this process. Different voices are getting louder these days that the pull algorithms of the big platforms (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram) is dangerous on the wellbeing of both children and adults.²⁸

A quite new trend are influencers. People who show their own life public by using Social Media.²⁹ Influencer are showing teenager a perfect bubble of lifestyle, happiness and almost endless consumption. To be as much authentic of possible some of them open up about depression, eating disorders or other dire straits in life. To be authentic is one of the key factors of influencers. Yet most of the photos or videos shared by influencers are sponsored by companies, brands or simple product placement. Snapshots of their real life a rather rare, because almost everything they are sharing is staged. Children and teenager who are not trained to think critically and reflected on content they are seeing on the net are easily affected by influencers in a way that they think that those accounts are showing real life instead of being an ongoing advertisement.

²⁴ Cf: <https://www.fh-joanneum.at/content-strategie-und-digitale-kommunikation/master/en/my-studies/degree-programme/>; accessed on 2018-12-14

²⁵ Cf: Pauschenwein J., Wittenbrink H.; Semester-Design in berufsbegleitenden Studiengängen – Erfahrungen am Masterstudiengang „Content-Strategie“ (COS); in Pauschenwein J.; Ritschl H., Michelitsch L.; E-Learning Tag 2018 – Tagungsband; 2018; p.58

²⁶ Cf. www.slack.com/; accessed on 2018-12-17

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_Video_Communications; accessed on 2018-12-17

²⁸ Cf. P.Wilhelmer; Kurier; „Man sagt immer: Leg’ es doch weg“; 2018-06-03; p.39

²⁹ Cf. K., Bück; <http://www.codingkids.de/wissen/was-bitteschoen-sind-eigentlich-diese-influencer>; 2018-06-26; accessed on 2018-12-21

As many teenagers do have access to the internet and mobile devices from a very early age on they know in theory what influencers are doing. Some of try to start their own careers and then realize how hard this business is, they can be dragged into self-doubts of not being good enough for this perfect looking society.

Another often used term today is “Cybermobbing” people are discriminated and bullied on the internet. In many cases those people are bullied in real life as well sometimes from the very same people. In recent years there is an increasing number of cases which ended fatal. Bullying in the internet is a very cruel form of discrimination because it is exposing the victims to a potentially unlimited number of humans.

So to sum up the biggest problems among using the net are the time spent there, getting a wrong image of the world of it and the misuse of the net to discriminate people. All of those risks could be faced by educating our children a reasonable and reflected handling of the internet and its tools.