SOCIAL NETWORKS AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract:

Contemporary digital communications are contributing increasingly to students' learning results on every level of education. The newest technologies encourage scholars' dynamic commitment, teamwork, and contribution in class activities, enables collaborative teamwork, and encourages knowledge distribution among teachers and scholars. Understanding the organizational structure and functionality in social networks helps students to achieve better and faster results. Faculty members become trainers, observing and providing response to scholars rather than guiding activities. Even if social networks may become interference in a teaching environment, our conclusions recommend that effective social networking in learning\teaching environments contribute actively and decisively on achieving quality education and skills-development.

Keywords: digital communications, social networks, collaborative learning, quality education

Introduction

Nowadays students consider important the independence and autonomy in choosing the learning method. They also distinguish limited necessity to learn facts obtainable at the touch of their personal computer. Instead, contemporary students necessitate tools for assimilating facts and figures, selecting useful material from vast repositories of information, determining which information is effective and useful, and learning how to employ and make proper use of their new-found knowledge.

Modern social networking is perfectly integrated with these learning methods. By making use of them students learn better, work independently and collaboratively, and acquire self-discipline through their utilization. Students also express a continuing enhancing of their commitment to achieve knowledge via social

networks. In time, some divergent opinions appeared, most of them regarding Web 2.0 technologies and students' learning outcomes. Detractors criticize the "*Google Generation*" of contemporary scholars as unable of independent critical thought.

Compared to old-style learning organization structures that provide few occasions for scholars to develop and preserve their own researching routines, learning platforms based on social networks place the control of education process into the hands of learners themselves.

Social networking

The social networking refers to the set of virtual means (internet) used to connect persons between them. With the advent of Internet, it covers web applications known as "social networking service online." These applications have multiple objectives and vocations. They are used to create a social network by connecting friends, associates, and more generally all individuals using a variety of tools in order to facilitate, for example, management of professional careers, distribution and visibility artistic or private meetings.

Social networks are social structures that enable people to establish a contact to exchange information. Users who access them what made to be in connection with different people, such as friends, family, coworkers, colleagues, etc... Currently there are teachers who consider the use of social networks for educational purposes in their classrooms inadequate due to different reasons. According to point C. A. Collazos, Guerrero and A. L. Vergara (2001: 4), teachers fear that using social networks happen to them some of the following:

• Loss of control in class.

• Lack of preparation by teachers.

• Fear not cover the content.

• Lack of ready to use in class materials.

Collaborative learning

"Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs."

(Gerlach, 1994)

Collaborative learning is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. It is a learning procedure based on the enhancement of cooperation within a group of students. Collaborative learning, as defined by Anthony Kaye is when there is a real interdependence between the members of the group in the creation of a task, a commitment to mutual aid, a sense of responsibility towards the group and its objectives.

People who engage in collaborative learning, as opposed to individual learning, are taking advantage of each other's skills and competencies (ask each other for information evaluate each other's ideas, monitor each other's work, etc.) More specifically, the collaborative learning based on the model that knowledge can be created in a group where members actively interact by sharing knowledge and by taking on different roles. Collaborative learning is deeply rooted in Vygotsky's view that there is an innate social skill for learning, explained in his theory of "*zone of proximal development"*.

Collaborative learning is usually explained by a group of students working together toward a common goal to get an understanding, meaning, solution or to create a product or any other product of learning. Furthermore, redefines the collaborative learning, the traditional student-teacher ratio in the classroom, resulting in a dispute over whether this paradigm is more beneficial than harmful. Collaborative learning activities can include collaborative writing, group work, collaborative problem solving, debates, student groups and other activities. The approach is closely related to cooperative learning. Alternatively, collaborative learning occurs when individuals are actively involved in a context in which learning takes place through explicit or implicit cooperation. Collaborative learning has often been portrayed as merely a cognitive process by which adults participate as supervisors of knowledge and children as beneficiaries. In contrast, appears at the indigenous people of America to collaborative learning occurs in a horizontal plane when adults and children are equal. This creates collaborative learning even when children and adults are involved in the game, and other joint activities.

Based on heterogeneous development of various activities groups can evolve through various tools, because the classroom interactions occur spontaneously. An example might be those cases where the couples come to understand better with the same explanation given by the teacher. Spencer Kagan defines it as: "*The sum of the parts interacting is greater than the sum of the parts alone*."

The main ideas on cooperative learning can be defined in:

1. **Formation of groups**: These are heterogeneous, where you should build practice of mutual aid and recovery of individuality for creating an identity group synergy.
2. **Positive interdependence**: It is necessary to promote good communication skills among the group, to the understanding that the objective is the realization of productions and that these should be made collectively.
3. **Individual responsibility**: The group will ultimately result as the consequence of individual research of members. It will be appreciated in the public presentation of the work done.

To consolidate the above, it is necessary that teachers have developed skills related to the anticipation of the shares. This is expected; be clear about the procedure for obtaining a specific result of both the teaching material and the writing, to carry out the activity in any stage of labor. Giving or receiving help does not improve learning in a group, but having consciousness need it, communicate and integrate this need the help offered in the own work (Guadalupe Gómez-Pezuela Gamboa, 2007). Thus, cooperative work contributes to the development of communication skills, group work and flexibility in thinking.

Internet social networks and collaborative learning

Social networks themselves are a feedback tool and a source of collaborative learning, and we can share our knowledge and get input from others; however it has come to confuse the term "collaborative" with "cooperative" because most of the time taken for reliable all the information that is found on these sites, and no longer the learning process is continuous consulting other sources or corroborating that information be backed by reference. Given that, there has been debate in education in the use of the terms cooperation and collaboration. This distinction has been made based on the degree of structuring the process of interaction of students, ie, the more structured and guided is the activity that will be cooperative and to the extent that students achieve perform their activities with greater autonomy will collaborative. If we analyze the characteristics and results of collaborative work we can realize that the process begins with the cooperative work and as it takes practice higher thinking is stimulated and the use of Information Technology is assimilated and Communication (TIC`s) reached a collaborative level. In this way, it is seen to social networking sites as an accompanist in the evolution of thought if good use of them in education is done.

However, it is also important to note that for social networks and ICTs can be effective in the classroom, you need to properly prepare teachers, because not only it is

introduce them to the methodology and work as they can, but they need training that tells them proper and correct way to use ICT in the classroom so they can make the learning process in a way that not only their teaching process is favored, but also collaborative learning in students.

Conclusion

The present research' structure is established on the constructivist theory to improving collaborative learning and engagement through the interaction of research group members, interaction with lecturers or supervisor, and intention to use social media. Social media can assist in enhancing academic performance of students and researchers when lecturers and supervisors integrate social media in their teaching methods. The findings showed that social media facilitates collaborative learning and engagement and this improves the academic performance of students and researchers, Moreover, future studies are advised to include additional elements to measure factors influencing academic performance of students and researchers via collaborative learning and engagement in education.

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