Building Classroom Learning Communities with Social Media

by

Jennifer Hegna

Dr. Kevin Tharp

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

November 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

Chapter I: Introduction

"Until fairly recently, online education amounted to little more than electronic versions of the old-line correspondence courses. That has really changed with arrival of Web-based video, instant messaging and collaboration tools" (Lohr, 2009, ¶ 6). According to the Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies, (n.d) "with the emergence of new, social technologies (aka Web 2.0) we are now seeing a new phase of E-Learning, known as E-Learning 2.0, which supports a more social and collaborative approach to learning, so it is also known as Social Learning" (Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies [C4LPT], ¶ 15).

Statement of the Problem

How do instructors effectively use Web2.0 tools to engage students and enhance collaborative learning while providing participants with a strong sense of community?

Purpose of the Study

This paper will study the Net Generation as to understand their learning characteristics. It will then examine "sense of community" and the participatory culture to recognize new needs for course/activity design. Finally, it will evaluate the new role of the educator to develop guiding questions to facilitate learning communities effectively.

.

Chapter II: Literature Review

If you build it, will they come? How do instructors use Web2.0 tools to engage students and enhance collaborative learning while providing participants with a strong sense of community? Today there is a plethora of new tools for educators to extend learning in their face-to-face or online classrooms. All too often, instructors use technology for the sake of technology – yet, if designed within their courses right, technology can deepen the learning of the individuals while bringing students out of online isolation. This paper will study the Net Generation as to understand their learning characteristics. It will then examine "sense of community" and the participatory culture to recognize new needs for course/activity design. Finally, it will evaluate the new role of the educator to develop guiding questions to facilitate learning communities effectively.

The Net Generation

It is important for educators to understand their students as this new generation of learners are different and have different expectations when it comes to learning. Don Tapscott (2009) describes the Net Generation as collaborators. They are spending more and more time online playing games, chatting, instant messaging, and social networking. With the rise of SMART phones, they are connected to their virtual communities all day long. They are prosumers "who have a natural instinct to collaborate and co-innovate" (Tapscott, 2009, p. 90). Net Geners want to feel that their opinions matter and want the ability to influence decisions.

> "Educators should take note. The current model of pedagogy is teacher focused, one-way, once size fits all. It isolates the students in the learning process. Many Net Geners learn more by collaborating – both with their teacher AND each other. They'll

respond to the new model of education that's beginning to surface-student-focused and multiway, which is customized and collaborative" (Tapscott, 2009, p. 91).

The Net Generation also wants freedom. "They prefer flexible hours and compensation based on their performance and market value – not their face time in the office" (Tapscott, 2009, p. 75). Could freedom also be applied to seat time in the classroom? How effective is seat time in relation to learning? The Net Gen's search of freedom is also transforming education, "learning should take place when and where they want it…attending a lecture at a specific time and place by a mediocre professor, in a room where they are passive recipients seems oddly old fashioned, if not completely inappropriate" (Tapscott, p. 77).

Tapscott (2009) also indicates that innovation and customization are also characteristics of the Net Generation. Net Geners want customization of learning materials based on their needs. "Student expectations regarding technology customization in the classroom are closely linked to faculty knowledge and skill. The Net Generation's views on technology in the classroom include the expectation that professors will use technology to better communicate expert knowledge" (Roberts, n.d., ¶ 16). As for innovation, students want to become co-creators of content – not passive receivers. The 2009 Horizon Report states "Innovation is valued at the highest levels of business and must be embraced in schools if students are going to succeed beyond their formal education. The ways we design learning experiences must reflect the growing importance of innovation and creativity as professional skills" (Johnson, Levine, Smith, & Smythe, 2009, p. 5).

Jane Hart, founder of the Center for Learning and Performance Technologies, describes today's *learner2.0* characteristics:

- "They prefer hyperlinked information coming from many sources.

- They are skilled multi-taskers, and they parallel process. They are used to simultaneously working with different content, and interacting with others.

- They are visual learners, preferring to process pictures, sounds, and video rather than text.

- They are experiential learners who learn by discovery rather than being "told." They like to interact with content to explore and draw their own conclusions. Simulations, games, and role-playing allow them to learn by "being there," and also to enjoy themselves and have fun.

- They have short attention spans, so prefer bite-sized chunks of content (on a PC or iPod).

- They are very social, and love to share with others.

- They enjoy working in teams. Interaction with others is key to their learning, and they want to be part of a community, collaborating, sharing, and exchanging ideas.

- They are happy to take on different roles in their learning, either as a student, or even as an instructor, facilitator, or supporter of others, and switch between them.

- They prefer to learn "just in time," that is, have access to relevant information they can apply immediately.

- They need immediate feedback, responsiveness, and ideas from others, as they are used to instant gratification.

- They are very independent learners, and are able to teach themselves with guidance; they don't need sets of instructions like their predecessors — just like they found out how to use their iPods or Google.

- They prefer to construct their own learning – assembling information and tools from different sources" (Hart, 2008, pp. 4-5).

Sense of Community

McMillan and Chavis defines a sense of community as: "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together"(McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Chavis (2006) further describes sense of community as having five elements:

- Meeting needs - Communities form, grow, and maintain themselves by meeting the needs of their members.

- Sharing values - Things, or priorities, community members commonly believe are important. Values can evolve as members experiences change.

- Membership – Feelings of belonging, trust, and caring where sense of bonding only strengthens as these feelings increase. Defining boundaries will fill a need for identity, trust, and security of the community.

- Influence – Provides members with opportunities to influence improve the community, thus strengthening the community's values and norms.

- A shared emotional connection – Feelings, or positive relationships, that comes from either a sense of shared history or through experiencing a very important events together, like organized successes and other small wins. (Chavis, 2006)

In the world of online learning, many courses focus on pushing out content to the participants. The Center for Learning and Performance Technologies (2009) describes this method as Elearning 1.0., where content is organized and delivered by experts – like teachers. Within this environment, students do not have an active role in their learning as it is organized

for them. Elearning 1.0 is about content not collaboration. Within this old method of classroom delivery, the sense of community is lost and students may feel isolated.

"Educators began to notice something different happening when they began to use tools like wikis and blogs in the classroom a couple of years ago. All of a sudden, instead of discussing pre-assigned topics with their classmates, students found themselves discussing a wide range of topics with peers worldwide" (Downes, 2005). Wikipedia describes this new learning as Learning 2.0. It is built around student collaboration and "assumes that knowledge is socially constructed through conversations about content and grounded interaction about problems and actions" ("E-learning", n.d.)

The participatory culture– new communities of learning

Developing communities of learners is a shift in the traditional classroom paradigm. Lehman and Chamberlin (2009) describe instructivism as a teacher-centered learning model in which teachers stand and deliver content while students have expectations to absorb, memorize, or interpret the information provided for them. Lesson design is based on reading, discussing, homework, repeat. Activities generally require simple comprehension levels like essays or multiple choice worksheets and quizzes. The teacher answers the students' questions. In a student-centered classroom, or constructivist approach, information comes from multiple authentic sources and the teacher serves as a guide on the side. Learner needs establish daily lessons. Activities require deep levels of Blooms Taxonomy and can include role playing, simulations, or creating content. Students are encouraged to find their own answers to their questions, assessments are authentic, and project based (Lehmann & Chamberlin, 2009, table 3.1).

New learning theories such as social constructivism or connectivism have replaced industrial aged instructivism models. Henry Jenkins (2006) describes this generation of learners as the participatory culture. According to Jenkins, the participatory culture defined as having:

- Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement

- Strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others

- Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices

- Members believe that their contributions matter (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 7).

Members feel "some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)" (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 7). This participatory culture works and learns together distributing knowledge to their community.

Unfortunately, schools are very slow to adapt to this new learning due to a "lack of understanding of the promises and affordances of a networked society" (Reilly, 2009, p. 8). To help educators and learners become more proficient in adapting to today's rich media landscape, Jenkins (2006) identifies 11 social skills for collaborative classrooms:

- "Play - the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving

- Performance - the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery

- Simulation - the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes

- Appropriation - the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content

- Multitasking - the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details

- Distributed Cognition - the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities

- Collective Intelligence - the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal

- Judgment - the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources

- Transmedia Navigation - the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities

- Networking - the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information

- Negotiation - the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms

- Visualization - the ability to interpret and create data representations for the purposes of expressing ideas, finding patterns, and identifying trends" (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Wiegel, & Robison, 2006, p. 4).

Teachers' new role in classroom learning communities.

Palloff and Pratt's (2007) instructor function model takes into account the people involved and their social presence and interaction between learners and facilitators. It also looks at the purpose of the instructor to establish guidelines, shared goals, and practical considerations. The processes of the teacher are interaction and communication that support presence including collaboration, reflection, and teamwork among learners. Facilitator outcomes should include the

co-created knowledge and meaning, personal reflection, personal transformation, and an increased self-direction. (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, ex 6.1)

"A successful learner in an online environment needs to be active and engaged in knowledge generation…and the educator serves as a gentle guide in the educational process" (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 119). According to Pallof & Pratt, learners are responsible for seeking solutions to problems and using the facilitator's guidance in a meaningful way. Students also should not be expected to be "alone" in the online environment. "The failing of many online distance learning programs has been the inability or unwillingness to facilitate a collaborative learning process" (Palloff & Pratt, p.120).

To begin the collaboration, the online introduction discussion (forum) or activity should begin with a very simple yet meaningful exchange of information. This may begin with an introduction on a discussion forum of who the person is but also should have some substantial information that others can relate or link to in order to provide feedback. This first exchange of dialogue must be a safe and trusting environment. Facilitators should be virtually present during this time and should respond and greet every student's personal post. According to Lehman and Chamberlin (2009), "While students should not respond to every introduction, it is important that the instructor responds to every one of the personal introductions. This reassures the individual student, validates his or her posting, and provides the instructor an opportunity to model some discussion techniques for everyone's benefit. In all other discussions in the course, the instructor should not respond to every posting. It will subdue peer interaction and everyone will be looking to the instructor for the *answe*r" (2009, p. 160).

"One of the most important lessons teachers must learn, whether face-to-face or online, is not to participate too much…We have seen many potentially rich exchanges undermined by

teachers who ventured their own ides too frequently, thereby removing from the students the

responsibility and the opportunity to keep the dialogue going. A wide variety of brief, concise

observations, questions, clarifications, affirmations, and acknowledgements are the best ways for

teachers to maintain "social presence" while keeping students coming back for more

conversation and participation" (Brooksfield & Preskill, 2005, p. 235).

Social media and the Seven Principles

In 1987, Chickering and Gamon, described seven principles in effective teaching in

learning in undergraduate studies. (Chickering & Gamon, 1987)   In 1996, the principles were

revaluated and Chickering and Ehrman (1996, pp. 3-6) linked how instructors could utilize the

original principles with cost-effective information technologies like computers, video, and

telecommunications technologies to advance teaching and learning:

1. *Good practice encourages contacts between students and faculty* – Within this

    principle it is noted that "frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is a most

    important factor in student motivation and involvement" Asynchronous

    communication tools can augment face-to-face connections outside of the classroom

    and allows shy students to ask questions, challenge the teacher, or expand on their

    ideas.

2. *Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students* - Good learning

    is collaborative and social and enhanced when there is a team effort. Developing

    group projects or developing meaningful discussions can sharpen participants

    thinking and understanding. Use of blogs, wikis, social networks, and discussion

    forums are some of the tools available for student collaborations.

3. *Good practice uses active learning techniques* – Students are not actively learning in classes that require passive listening. Students must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to daily lives. Students can use reflective tools like blogging to develop their ideas. Web 2.0 offers many opportunities for students to create content based on what they are learning, examples include online presentations, videos, online posters, or podcasts.

4. *Good practice gives prompt feedback* – Students need appropriate feedback on their performance to benefit from the course. "Instructional responsiveness is central to the creation of an effective online learning environment" (Brooksfield & Preskill, 2005, p. 223). Facilitators need to be able to "compensate for lack of physical presence by creating a supportive environment in the Virtual Classroom where all students feel comfortable participating and especially where students know that their instructor is accessible" (Illinois Online Network [ION], n.d., p. 2). It is equally important that the course (Palloff & Pratt, 2007) be designed to allow and expect constructive and thoughtful feedback from students to each other.

5. *Good practice emphasizes time on task* – According to Chickering and Ehrman (1996) "Time plus energy equals learning". Keeping students on task is an important role of the facilitator. Allocating the right amount of time for activities and feedback (like grading) is critical and should be indicated in the syllabus. Reminders and announcements are also helpful. There are typical tools like announcements pages in learning managements systems, web pages, or email. New social tools include using a shared calendar, like Google's calendar, allows participants to be reminded (via email or sms) of assignments due dates. Microblogging tools like Twitter to announce

information to students. Whatever the tool used, it is important that it is utilized and

modeled by the facilitator, throughout the course as part of a communication tool and

should not used as a onetime experience.

6. *Good practice communicates high expectations* - "Expect more and you will get it.

High expectations are important for everyone — for the poorly prepared, for those

unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated" (Chickering and

Ehrman, 1996). According to Wikipedia Bloom's Taxonomy refers to a classification

of the different objectives that educators set for students (learning objectives) that

defines six levels of cognitive mastery. ("Bloom's Taxonomy", n.d., p. 1). In figure

1, as one goes up the pyramid, the more the student understands the material at hand.

In the 1990's, Bloom's taxonomy was revised (Overbaugh & Schultz, n.d.) and the

terminology was changed to reflect 21st century learning and higher order thinking
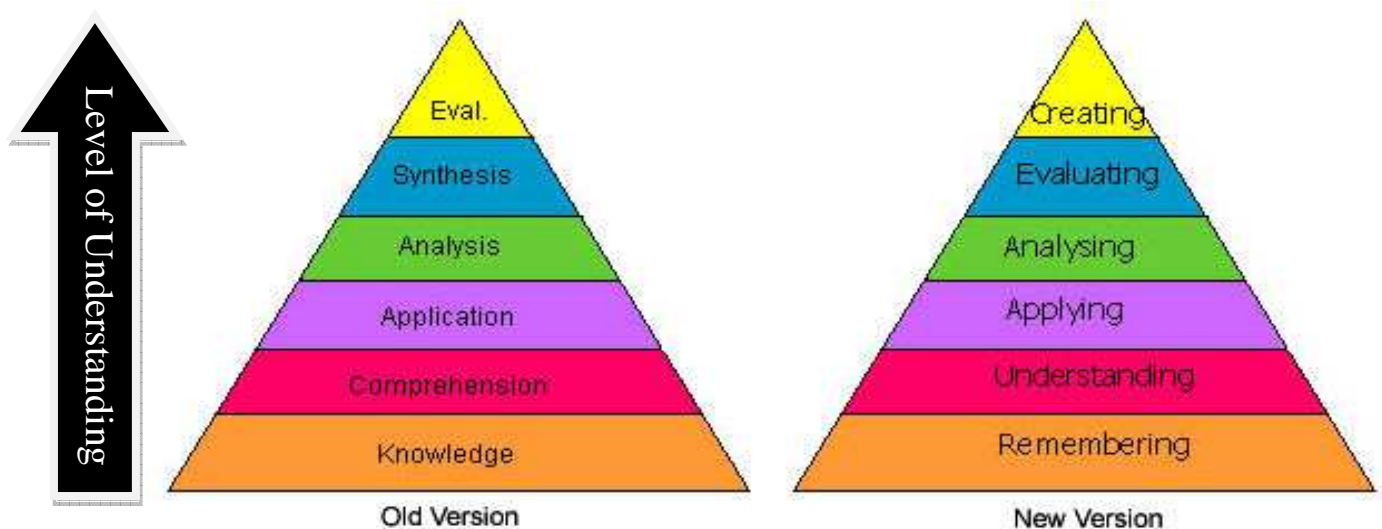
skills.

Figure 1 – Revision of Blooms Taxonomy (Overbaugh & Schultz, n.d.)

In 2008, Andrew Churches decided to take the revised Blooms Taxonomy and apply it to new behaviors and social media tools available to educators today. "Bloom's Digital Taxonomy isn't about the tools or technologies rather it is about using these to facilitate learning" ("Bloom's Digital Taxonomy", 2008, p. 1).

Bloom's Digital Taxonomy

HOTS
Higher Order Thinking Skills

Key Terms

Creating — Verbs → Designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing, devising, making, programming, filming, animating, blogging video blogging, mixing, re-mixing, wiki-ing, publishing, videocasting, podcasting, directing, broadcasting

Evaluating — Verbs → Checking, hypothesising, critiquing, Experimenting, judging, testing, Detecting, Monitoring, blog commenting, reviewing, posting, moderating, collaborating, networking, refactoring, testing.

Analysing — Verbs → Comparing, organising, deconstructing Attributing, outlining, finding, structuring, integrating, mashing, linking, validating, reverse engineering, cracking, media clipping

Applying — Verbs → Implementing, carrying out, using, executing, running, loading, playing operating, hacking, uploading, sharing, editing

Understanding — Verbs → Interpreting, Summarising, inferring, paraphrasing, classifying, comparing, explaining, exemplifying, advanced searches, Boolean searches, blog journaling, twittering, catergorising, tagging, commenting, annotating subscribing.

Remembering — Verbs → Recognising, Listing, Describing, Identifying, Retrieving, Naming, Locating, Finding, bullet pointing, highlighting bookmarking, social networking, social bookmarking, favouriting/local bookmarking, searching, googling.

LOTS
Lower Order Thinking Skills

COMMUNICATION SPECTRUM

Collaborating

Moderating

Negotiating

Debating

Commenting

Net meeting
Skyping
video conferencing

Reviewing

Questioning

Replying

Posting & Blogging

Networking

Contributing

Chatting

e-mailing

Twittering/Microblogging
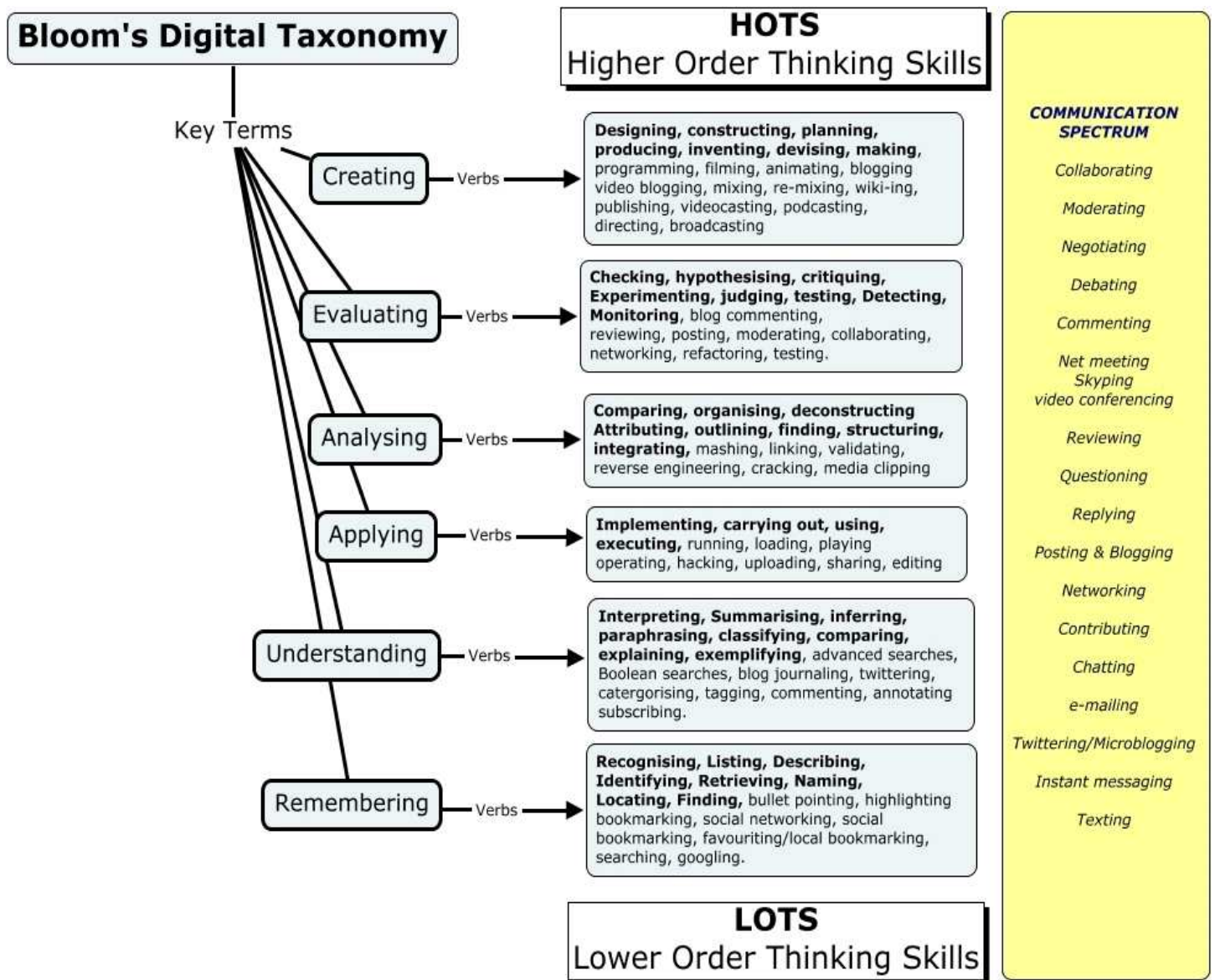
Instant messaging

Texting

Figure 2 - Concept map ("Bloom's Digital Taxonomy", 2008)

7. *Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning* – Every student learns differently. Teachers must design their courses so it fits the learning needs of all

students. According to Chickering and Ehrman (1996) "Students need opportunities to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learn in new ways that do not come so easily" (Chickering & Ehrman, 1996, p. 3). With the surplus of materials and tools available on the web, facilitators can easily create or embed content (videos, podcasts, and interactive objects) to assist students with different learning styles.

Guidelines for developing an online learning community in the classroom

To be successful, teachers must do some pre-planning to create an effective online community. The following steps (Palloff & Pratt, 2007) are not all inclusive but rather a representation of guidelines and questions teachers should consider when applying social media in the classroom while building a collaborative learning environment.

1. Develop your course/activity's learning objectives and goals. What is it that you want your students to walk away with knowing or being able to do? Will you allow input from your student?

2. Develop your course/activity guidelines.

    a. How much participation will you require? Will you limit participation? Be careful of information overload – Quality trumps quantity.

    b. Will you require online discussions? Will the occasional "I agree with you" suffice or will you require students to expand on feedback?

    c. What expectations do you have of your students? Copyright, nettiquette, grammar, spelling?

    d. How will students be assessed? Discussion? Participation? Personal reflection? Content creation? Be sure to remember Blooms Taxonomy as you develop your rubrics and be sure to keep assessments authentic.

    e. What are the timeframes to completing activities? How much time will it take to complete activities? Example – Skype conference ½ hour.

    f. What safety measures will you take and expect? Will you require students and parents to sign contracts? How will you protect your students' privacy?

    g. Be sure to include how students are to contact you.

3. What tools will you use to help facilitate learning? What content will help guide your students? (readings, videos, podcasts) How will technology play a role in your delivery of collaborative learning? Will you use asynchronous (blogs, wikis, social networks, micro-blogging) or synchronous (Instant messaging, voice/video over IP, web conferencing, virtual worlds) tools to collaborate, discuss, or develop content? What will the end medium look like? (video, podcasting, online office applications, photography, presentations) It is important to recognize that you should not use technology for technologies sake – but to use the technology to help students learn.

4. Determine your role as a facilitator. How will you develop your social presence? How will you bring human elements into your course? How will you provide substantive feedback to your students? How often will this occur? How open are you to suggestions or creative ideas from your students? How will you link learning and activities to real life situations? Will you incorporate smaller more intimate group projects? How will you address multiple learning styles? How will feedback from students help you to improve your course/activity?

Chapter II: Discussion

Conclusions

Alfred Rovia's and Hope Jordan's (2004) research indicated that teachers can build successful online learning communities in the classroom by "thinking less about delivering instruction and more about producing learning, reaching out to students through distance education technologies, and promoting a strong sense of community among learners" (Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p. 11). New social media technologies easily allow teachers to incorporate and support collaborative learning environments, and it is important to recognize that these new tools are inherent of the Net Generation's collaborative, freedom seeking, and innovative characteristics. This generation of learners does not wish to be left in isolation, but would rather collectively create and produce content and knowledge for the masses. A strong sense of community can help facilitate this learning and it is important that teachers and professors recognize their roles in facilitating and designing these new learning environments. "Collaboration is not a 21st century skill, it is a 21st century essential" ("Bloom's Digital Taxonomy", 2008).

References

Bloom's Digital Taxonomy. (2008). In *Educational Oragami*. Retrieved November 26, 2009,

from http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/Bloom%27s+Digital+Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved November 25, 2009, from

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloom%27s_Taxonomy

Brooksfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (2005). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques*

for democratic classrooms (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies. (n.d.). *A guide to social learning: From e-*

learning to social learning [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from

http://www.c4lpt.co.uk/handbook/sociallearning.html

Chavis, D. W. (2006). *Strategic factors for building community: The five C's community,*

connections, control, cash & collective action. [Brochure]. Baltimore, MD.: Campaign

Consultation, Inc.

Chickering, A., & Ehrman, S. (1996). Implementing the seven principles: Technology as a lever.

American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation, pp 3-6.

Chickering, A., & Gamon, Z. (1987, March). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate

education . *The American Association for Higher Education Bulletin* , *39*, 3-7. Retrieved

from http://www.aahea.org/bulletins/articles/sevenprinciples1987.htm

Downes, S. (2005). E-learning 2.0. *eLearn Magazine*. Retrieved from

http://www.elearnmag.org/subpage.cfm?article=29-1&section=articles

E-learning. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved November 26, 2008, from

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ELearning_2.0#Learning_2.0

Hart, J. (2008). The learner today. *The eLearning Guild's Learning Solution eMagazine*, 1-10.

      Retrieved from http://c4lpt.co.uk/articles/understandinglearners.pdf

Illinois Online Network (). *Weaknesses of online learning* . Retrieved November 24, 2009, from

      http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/overview/weaknesses.asp#Facilitator

Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Clinton, K., Wiegel, M., & Robison, A. (2006). *Confronting the*

      challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century. Retrieved

      November 1, 2009, from

      http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/files/working/NMLWhitePaper.pdf

Johnson, L., Levine, A., Smith, R., & Smythe, T. (2009). *The 2009 Horizon Report: K12 edition*.

      Austin, TX: The New Media Consortium.

Lehmann, K., & Chamberlin, L. (2009). *Making the move to elearning*. Lanham, Maryland:

      Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Lohr, S. (2009, August 19). Study finds that online education beats the classroom. Message

      posted to http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/19/study-finds-that-online-education-

      beats-the-classroom/

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory.

      Journal of Community Psychology, *14*, 6-23.

Overbaugh, R., & Schultz, L. (n.d.). *Blooms Taxonomy*. Retrieved November 25, 2009, from

      http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm

Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. (2007). *Building online learning communities: Effective strategies for the*

      virtual classroom (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Reilly, E. (2009). What is learning in a participatory culture?. *Threshold*, , 8-11.

Roberts, G. R. (n.d.). Technology and learning expectations of the Net Generation. *Educause*.

    Retrieved November 2, 2009. Retrieved from

    http://www.educause.edu/Resources/EducatingtheNetGeneration/TechnologyandLearnin

    gExpectati/6056

Rovai, A., & Jordan, H. (2004, August). Blended learning and sense of community: A

    comparative analysis with traditional and fully online graduate courses. *International*

    Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, *5*(2). Retrieved from

    http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/viewArticle/192/274

Tapscott, D. (2009). *Grown up digital*. New York: McGraw-Hill.