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Chapter 5

Facing Off: Facebook and higher education

Debra Bateman and Julie Willems

Abstract

A social and cultural expectation that Information Communication Technologies (ICT) should be ubiquitous within peoples' daily lives is apparent. Connecting generational groups with a specific set of technological attributes also assumes the ways that particular groups of students should be able/do "naturally" use emergent mobile and social technologies. Moreover, the use of social networking technologies is evident in a number of ways within higher education (HE) pedagogies. As part of the suite of possibilities in Web 2.0, Facebook is used in a number of ways to support communications within and between institutions and their students as well as a mechanism for teaching and learning within specific units of study.

The chapter commences with a broad discussion about social sharing software of Web 2.0, specifically Facebook, as a potential teaching and learning tool in HE contexts. We traverse recent exemplars and discourses surrounding the use of social technologies for the purposes of HE. It is clear from the literature that while there is much excitement at the possibilities that such technologies offer, there are increasing anxieties across institutional and individual practitioners, in regard to possible consequences of their use.

Through autoethnographic methodology, this chapter showcases potentials and challenges of Facebook in HE. Through the use of constructed scenarios, the authors describe occurrences that necessitate increasing professional development and vigilance online. Some of the issues highlighted within this chapter include blurring of professional and personal life world boundaries, issues of identity theft and vandalism, cyberstalking and bullying, working in the public domain, and questions of virtual integrity.

Introduction

Increasingly, there is a social and cultural expectation that Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) should be ubiquitous within peoples' daily lives (Bateman & Oakley, 2009). Connecting generational groups with a specific set of technological attributes has also developed an assumption about the ways that particular groups of students should be able to, or actually do, "naturally" use emergent mobile and social technologies (Friedrich, Peterson, Koster, & Blum, 2010; Prensky, 2001). Such convictions undergird the application of ICTs in educational contexts, reflecting two of the key trends among those identified in the Horizon Report 2011 (Johnson, Smith, Levine, & Haywood, 2011): that we now expect flexibility in order to work, learn, and study whenever and wherever we wish to (Willems, 2005), and that the increasingly collaborative and socially connected nature of our worlds are changing the way that work and study are being conceptualized. The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies and other social network sites challenge the traditional ways in

which ICTs are being used for online teaching and learning in Higher Education (HE). Web 2.0 emphasizes social collective intelligence through the incorporation of social software tools such as blogs, wikis, and media-sharing applications for the purposes of development (creation) and co-creation of content in personalized learning environments (O'Reilly, 2005). A key feature of these technologies is their connectivity (Siemens, 2005). Their growth continues to increase at a phenomenal rate (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2006). They also change the way people access, interact with, create, and share data and information (Maloney, 2007; Robbie & Zeeng, 2008). Examples of Web 2.0 technologies that are increasingly being used in HE contexts include weblogs (blogs), wikis, online publishing tools, video hosting, and social network sites, in addition to constantly emerging tools for specific purposes. Examples of current popular social networking sites include Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, and YouTube. These technologies have the potential to significantly impact upon teaching and learning practices in HE, especially in light of the increased capacity of mobile hardware to access these.

As part of the suite of possibilities in Web 2.0, Facebook is increasingly being used in a number of ways to support communications within and between educational institutions, academics, and their students, as well as being used as a specific mechanism for teaching and learning within units of study. At the same time, this medium has not been exempt from a range of issues ranging from mild forms of misbehavior through to serious breaches of human rights and criminal acts. This chapter explores the use of Facebook in the context of HE, encompassing the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Online learning and social network communities in higher education

There has been a mixture of excitement and anxiety across HE with the constant imperative to utilize more technologies within various aspects of the role of an academic. Educators have adopted more established web-based technologies as part of their teaching and learning strategies (Barnett, Keating, Harwood, & Saam, 2002), such as word-processing products, information presentation products, electronic mail applications, and database and spreadsheet packages. The uses of these technologies have also more broadly permeated the everyday practices of information organization and distribution throughout and beyond individual institutions. To some degree, this has forced an increased uptake of technology even among low adopters. However, while the use of technology has increased, these technologies are often being used in traditional ways for content delivery, grade reporting, and communications (Maloney, 2007).

While online learning in HE is now established practice, the incorporation of social sharing networks is new. It involves the blending of formal and informal media for learning. DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, and Francis (2009) argue that while the outcomes of participation in a formal online course are dissimilar to participation in a social network, several of the affordances inherent in social networking sites may be of use in achieving the goals of online learning.

Facebook

Facebook is a popular social networking site. Social networking sites are defined by the users' abilities to develop an online profile of him or herself within a bounded system, indicate with whom they would like to share connections, and view the connections made by their friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Typical features of a social network site include the ability to accept and leave comments, share personal photos, documents and videos, share web resources, blogging, and

instant messenger capabilities. Facebook has a myriad of add-in applications that can be used and these are designed to further familiarize the user with others in his or her network and to encourage more frequent communication and interaction between them. Examples include the ability to establish an opinion poll and to send out invitations and gather acceptances and apologies for the same events. It is these applications that capture more time within a session than any other feature, and make the environment highly engaging. The Horizon Report 2011 suggests that the magnetism of sites such as Facebook “not only attract people but also hold their attention, impel them to contribute, and bring them back time and again – all desirable qualities for educational materials” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 12).

The Press Room at Facebook provides some interesting statistics that highlight the impact of this particular social network (Facebook, 2011a; Johnson et al., 2011, p. 12). As of April 2011, Facebook has more than 500 million active users, of whom half log on in any given day. Each of the users on Facebook has an average of 130 friends, and is connected to 80 community pages, groups, and events. Within the Facebook environment, the average user creates approximately 90 pieces of content within each month. Around the globe, 30 billion pieces of content are shared each month on Facebook in the form of web links, news stories, blog posts, and photo albums. All of these posts and links are translated across 75 languages (Grossman, 2010). This highlights the ubiquity of the medium and the potential usefulness it can have in HE.

According to a number of studies, between 78% (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009) and 95.5% (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2008) of all enrolled students in HE have indicated that they use Facebook.

Concentrated memberships of students on Facebook are not surprising given that this social network site was originally constructed in 2004 as a means of informally connecting college students (Ellison et al., 2006; Grossman, 2010). By comparison, Gross and Acquisti (2005) suggested that only 1.5% of teaching staff within universities are members. While more recent figures are not available for this specific group, Lipka (2007) has reported that adults are a fast growing group on Facebook, and identified teaching staff from within HE are among this group. Given the mix of increasing social popularity, and its open platform that allows for third-party application development, Facebook demonstrates a great opportunity for participants within HE to share ideas, celebrate creativity, and participate in an environment that offers immediate feedback from others who belong within a specific network.

Methodology

Bateman (2010) has recently shared some of her experiences in using Facebook in formal HE in terms of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Bateman describes how she uses Facebook as part of her informal teaching practices to inform her teaching practice and provide student feedback in “real time.” Bateman also notes that Facebook is used by her students “as a mode of representation for student assessment, knowledge production and dissemination” (Bateman, 2010, n.p.). Using examples from her experience, Bateman signals not only the potential for social sharing media such as Facebook but also cautions about the various pitfalls in adopting social technologies in formal education contexts, arguing that educators need to be vigilant in these spaces to protect their academic integrity and also uphold a duty of care to the students that we interact with in these spaces.

As exemplars of misbehavior online, this chapter follows the use of Facebook across a number of educational contexts in HE. Using autoethnographic methodology (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparks,

2002), the authors reflect upon some of their personal experiences and represent them through constructed case studies, encompassing not only the perceived benefits of employing Facebook in HE but also the pitfalls. For as Johnson et al. (2011) caution, any discussion or investigation that relates to the adoption of new technology also needs to consider the important constraints and challenges from a variety of sources, such as personal experiences.

The exemplars included in the section to follow highlight the potential of Facebook as a tool for collaboration, the monitoring of student satisfaction and engagement, and as a medium for student assessment tasks, knowledge production, and dissemination. The chapter then moves on to provide some case study examples experienced by the authors to demonstrate situations of misbehavior online in the context of Facebook. Within each of these exemplars, the implications of such practices will be investigated specifically in regard to practical solutions for all stakeholders including appropriate boundary-setting guidelines of what is essentially a virtual private/public social sharing space. The data is presented in the third person, inserting characters of differing gender and discipline. This avoids identification of any of the specific parties involved.

The potentials and benefits of facebook in higher education

Facebook Potential 1: Social Community for a Geographically Dispersed Cohort

Gone are the days when the entire student cohort of a course is geographically present within a given lecture space. In the modern world of flexible learning options in academia, students can find themselves geographically dispersed. According to DeSchryver et al. (2009), online courses are more often successful when they appear to be communities of learning, with high levels of social presence, which together lead to high levels of discussion and interaction among students. As a result of interactions within the context of a specific subject, the social community often emerges within social networking sites.

Facebook has been perceived as a technological tool that is largely successful at building community. One of the ways in which community can be seen to be built is through social presence. According to Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), social presence is defined as the degree to which people perceive each other as real in mediated communication, or as a learner's ability to project himself or herself socially and affectively into a community (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999). The importance of building a strong presence is reflected in research undertaken by Swan and Shin (2005) that correlates students' perceived higher social presence with greater participation within course activities. According to a study undertaken by Yorke (1999), the main reason for students' noncompletion of courses is the result of a perceived lack of social presence or "unhappiness with the social environment" (O'Donoghue & Warman, 2009).

Social community – case study

A postgraduate subject in Law attracts students from all over the world. The subject facilitates rich and "academically heavy discussions," which students pursue beyond the formal learning encounters with lecturers and other staff. As a result of their discussions, students also engage in more social chatter as they work out who and what they have in common in educational settings outside of their studies. The virtual spaces in which these activities take place are distinctive. All academic discussions

occur within the University's Learning Management System, whereas more casual and social interactions take place in a Facebook

group developed by a small group of one year's cohort.

On the Facebook site, most wall posts represent interactions between different groups that have formed within the larger group. Of particular interest for us is the ways in which what is considered social is in reality often associated with the subject content. What is different is the tone and language used to engage with the unit content. In this subject, Facebook could almost be considered a virtual study group, generated and managed by the students.

Facebook Potential 2: Alternative Learning Management System (LMS)

Facebook offers some potential as a Learning Management System (LMS). An LMS is used within the context of HE for online teaching and learning. In some instances, the LMS is used for distance learning, or as a complementary pedagogical practice to face-to-face learning in on-campus learning. Like the social network sites, applications within an LMS include discussions, blogs, learning modules, conferencing facilities, and host a range of media. The LMS is generated from within the HE institution and unlike the social network, there is little opportunity for students to customize or contribute to the development of the environment beyond their responses to what has been created by their teacher. In this way, there is limited capacity for social presence and online community, enabled through autonomous student action. Alternatively, the interaction that is facilitated within Facebook offers features not commonly found within the traditional LMS. There have been early studies that have examined such affordances, and the ways in which a social network site can potentially replace these LMS within educational settings (DeSchryver et al., 2009).

Alternative LMS – Case Study

Given that such a high percentage of students are enrolled in Facebook and log in at such regular intervals, a lecturer decided to develop his subject's presence within Facebook. His Facebook page and group contained many of the regular features as would be expected in an LMS, with a welcome, links to structured wall discussions and external links to the library e-readings. There were functionalities unlike his institution's LMS that enabled him to identify when his students were online and what they had accessed within his Facebook site. More regularly than he would have in the dedicated site, the lecturer regularly posted announcements and updates to the group page, and discovered that students used the synchronous chat function frequently when they identified him online, to clarify aspects of their learning and their assessment tasks. Often on his own profile page, the lecturer reflected that he had "never known my students so well." This familiarity is further reflected in his knowledge of his students' personal lives outside of the institution, as a result of the ongoing news feeds and "more casual ways of interacting."

Facebook Potential 3: Peer Teaching

A third potential of Facebook is the opportunity for peer teaching. Peer teaching in an online environment, according to Rourke and Anderson (2002), has the benefits of achieving the requirements of “teaching presence” in online environments because it achieves the three roles of teaching presence: selecting the aspect for discussion and focusing the discussion on this particular aspect; facilitating the discussion; and providing direct instruction such as content, feedback, and working through any potential misconceptions. Facebook provides students with opportunities to teach each other in synchronous communication through instant messaging and asynchronous communications through the discussion strings. It can be a very powerful medium and lead to a “double learning” opportunity (Whitman, 1988) for the students.

Peer Teaching – Case Study

A group of undergraduate nursing students working both in on- and off-campus modes were using the asynchronous aspect of Facebook to discuss a particular assessment task based on the case study of a patient who required a surgical stoma due to the effects on the bowel of chronic disease. The students were required to complete their assignment using particular sub-sections in their paper, such as “Patient Education” and “Hospital Discharge” to guide the discussions.

Discussing each specific section of the assessment task helped the online students share insights, develop their ideas (especially when one student had a clear strength of knowledge in one aspect of the case), listen to frustrations, overcome stumbling or writing blocks, reassure each other, and to guide and correct where necessary (especially in the context of an informal social and collaborative network). Through this process, the resultant informal peer teaching and asynchronicity of the communications ensured that all the required sections were covered. The additional benefit of the informal teaching space for the students was that it was not bounded by the usual time constraint of the lecture theatre or tutorial, allowing the opportunity for the discussion to take as long as was required to resolve the issues arising for and between students. A subsequent string of messages from the student nurses indicated that while the papers were individually written, all reported to have received the grade of high distinction on this particular assessment.

Facebook Potential 4: Resource Sharing

Facebook can also provide means for academics and students to share resources in their own online communities. In this way, Facebook is able to be used as a learning common between staff and students joined through course activity or a specific research interest. A learning common has been described as what happens when information is organized in collaboration with learning initiatives defined through cooperative processes (Beagle, Bailey, & Tierney, 2006). It is in these collaborative representations of data and interpretations of that data that a learning common is said to be successful or not. Facebook as a social technology provides the affordance of multimodal engagement with texts (New London Group, 1996). A benefit in using a common space is that resources are then able to be redirected to, hyperlinked across, or embedded within a number of other sites for different purposes.

Resource sharing – case study

Across a number of units of study in Education, students had been asked to identify resources that would be useful for their teaching of different curriculum areas. Their lecturers had asked them to upload these resources into the respective curriculum sites within their LMS. However, as students began uploading these resources and links to external resources, they approached the teaching staff to request that they all be collated within a space that would be available to them beyond the years of their enrollment at the institution when they would lose access to the LMS. As the resources were linked to assessment tasks, the teaching staff insisted that the work be undertaken in the LMS. The students constructed a Facebook site and multiple linked pages, and after uploading resources to the LMS, linked resources across the pages and group. Staff from this unit were also invited to join the group and contribute shared resources. As an open group, these staff members have also been able to include other teaching staff.

Thus, as notes in the listed potentials and accompanying case study exemplars above, informal social networking sites, such as Facebook, can be incorporated positively into formal learning environments or can be used tangentially to support learning. However, what happens when things go wrong in these online worlds? For when things go wrong, they can progress swiftly from bad to ugly, as a perusal of any current news site will attest.

Misbehavior online: challenges that Facebook offers

Facebook enables access to significant amounts of information about an individual, through the creation of a profile. When users register for Facebook, they provide a name, sex, date of birth, and email address. They may then choose to add other information about themselves through Facebook-defined identity categories such as basic information, relationships and work, and educational backgrounds. On Facebook, basic information includes where a person lives, their birthday, sexual orientation, languages spoken, and a short bio about himself or herself. In listing their relationships, they connect their profiles to profiles of other family members and to other friends, as well as identifying a relationship status. Facebook users also denote their employers and schools and other educational institutions they are currently, or have been enrolled in. In making these links, further links are often created to those institutions and providers that create other links to those who are also employed or enrolled in those places. As well as all of these personal information, users respond to questions about their political and religious views, preferences for music and other media, hobbies and interests, and are able to provide a variety of contact details.

Facebook Challenge 1: To Friend or Not to Friend, That Is the Challenge

In the previous section of this chapter, we highlighted the potential of Facebook through the notion of social presence. Social presence is the network that emerges between different groups of people, and in the context of Facebook is based upon those whom they have identified as friends. There are a number of ways in which friends can be identified or alternatively are recommended to

the user. In most instances, friends look through others' friends lists or identify friends from common groups or like institutions. However, the ways in which we understand the concept of friends in our face-to-face existences often varies to the ways in which approved friendships are connected in networks within Facebook (Lipka, 2007). This can result in a significant challenge in blurring the boundaries between personal and professional relationships, and in the ability to discern for and by whom information is made available.

To Friend or not to friend – case study

A lecturer in Business Studies is vibrant and enthusiastic in her teaching style. She is relatively close in age to the students, compared to many other teaching staff in the same faculty, and clearly advocates ubiquitous use of ICTs in learning. Over the first five weeks of a teaching period, she receives over a hundred invitations to “be friends” on Facebook with students from two subjects. The lecturer rejects the friending invitations as she adheres to a “personal friending policy” that does not include the inclusion of other staff or current students, although she does have friends who are both past staff and students. Students describe her in evaluation feedback as inaccessible as they feel offended that she has not accepted their friendship. The same lecturer also reflects on a time when she adopted her personal friending policy and in sorting through her list, she culled a number of colleagues who she had previously accepted as friends. In the same way that students felt offended by her distance on Facebook, the colleagues similarly were unhappy and there were multiple corridor meetings speculating on what was behind her motivation.

Facebook Challenge 2: Electronic Identity Theft

The electronic identity represented on Facebook is problematic on a number of levels. At the most basic level, this seems a good way to share details with others who have been approved as “friends”; however, in the context of a course of study within a university, students are enrolled from different places and operate within different worldviews. The provision of information in a social site requires a sophisticated understanding of the ways that others are able to access and utilize information.

In the same ways that Facebook and other social network sites offer the user an opportunity to increase social presence, the focus on increased interactivity often highlights positive interactions, and fails to also showcase interactions that do not specifically increase learning outcomes. In outlining their study, O’Donoghue and Warman (2009) describe the assumptions that underpinned a project seeking to identify changes in teaching and learning behaviors within Facebook as a tool for transition. In this project, through the use of Facebook, the course group developed social presence prior to the commencement of a course. Quite simply, the researchers assumed that as a result of the friendships that were developed online in Facebook that student perceptions of the university would change and become “less threatening and would therefore have a positive impact on their satisfaction of their student experience” (O’Donoghue & Warman, 2009, p. 4). What the preliminary discourse of such research does not take into consideration is the ways in which students differentiate within the environment between the social network site as a place for social presence and the social network site as a place for structured and/or measurable learning.

It is not unusual to search Facebook groups and pages and identify sites dedicated to a particular subject or course code. Across six of them identified for this chapter, there were a number of common features. In all of them, the teacher in charge had presented a warm welcome and orientation to what this Facebook page or group was about. The orientation in each of these pages clearly invited students to “get to know others in the group” and to “clarify readings, tasks and other aspects of this subject,” clearly with an expectation of building social presence among a community of learners. In response to these orientations, small groups of students respond to the teachers’ invitation and introduce themselves to the group: however, across all six of these sites, there was little evidence of students engaging in discussion about content of the course materials. From this, it could be assumed that the Facebook site was a secondary site for learning management. Rather the sites were all used by students to explore the networks of others, seeking who they had in common in friends’ lists and what other courses and subjects others were enrolled in. In one of these sites, it was evident that a number of students had previously known each other. Smaller groups had emerged across a number of these sites, and a number of social events were attached by students.

Identity theft – the unlawful stealing of one’s persona – has become a significant problem with popular social sites such as Facebook. A number of universities around the globe are now taking active steps to caution the unwary and stem the problem. One university, for example, cautions students that they are specific targets due to the likelihood of their clean credit histories (Brown University, n.d).

Recently, a new challenge has arisen – that of so-called “identity vandalism.” Identity vandalism, according to Neill (2010, p. 22), involves “[d]eriding the newly bereaved, and dead or missing by internet vandals, who typically hide behind the protecting veil of anonymity,” which reflects the potential of lawlessness in the guise of online democratic practices. Perpetrators of such online events, known by the slang word “troll,” are now being tried and punished in similar fashion to how they would when transgressing in other media. In educational circles, identity vandalism can potentially affect one’s career or standing within the community. A recent epidemic has seen students hacking into others’ accounts – including accessing the personal Facebook accounts of their educators – and writing statements (vandalizing) the wall on behalf of the unsuspecting person. Some of this is meant light heartedly, but in other cases, maliciousness is the purpose driving such attacks.

Electronic identity theft – case study

Jane has worked in the library for a considerable amount of time, and distracted by the thought of leaving her studies for the day, forgets to completely log off the shared computer on which she has been working. In doing so, she has left her Facebook page and access to her network directory available. Laura who works on the terminal shortly after is enrolled in the same course and in humor updates Jane’s page with disparaging comments about the lecture each of them had attended that morning and about the lecturer whom had presented. One of the comments suggested that the lecturer would benefit “from losing a ton or 2.” There were also inflammatory comments regarding the lecture content that focused on a socially sensitive topic. The lecturer is meticulous in her audit of digital spaces and uses keywords associated with her subject codes and her surname to undertake Google searches. Within a Facebook search, she identifies Jane as a person who has unfairly violated her and requests a

meeting before proceeding with a complaint to a disciplinary committee of the institution.

Facebook Challenge 3: Public Domain

While one of the opportunities of this research is that it relates to comments made in the public domain and thus overcomes issues surrounding ethics permissions, the challenge is indeed that these communications are in the open arena. As with all open access applications, the use of Facebook for student work, while ideologically sound and promising, can be extremely problematic. Questions of intellectual property (IP) and the ways that the work of staff and students can be used and abused are part of the tension of working in such an environment.

Public domain – case study

The lecturer had developed a subject assignment that required students to post a response to a weekly task within the specific institution's LMS. In the settings of the LMS, students were encouraged to attach images and other files, rather than embedding them within discussion sites. In response to the set weekly task, based upon culture-jamming, students were asked to manipulate a contemporary advertisement to represent an alternative view, by using other text, or adding further images to the existing text. They were then required to upload their image into the LMS. Being contained within the LMS, and being only used for educational purposes, meant that there were minimal, and only temporary, copyright issues to be resolved.

In completing their task, and in the process of uploading their images, a number of students attempted to embed the images within discussion posts in order to more seamlessly navigate a significant number of images, as opposed to opening the same number of attachments. To maneuver around the system, they attempted to upload their images into a third-party site, from which they could generate an embed code and then upload in HTML. While they were unsuccessful in being able to embed their images, there were a significant number of images reflecting some very topical social and cultural issues that were now present within Facebook, which the students were using as a photo hosting repository. And, while these images might have appeared on the students' sites as their own opinions, or own creative works, the vast majority of the students had uploaded the images with tags including the institution name and unit code. This meant that in undertaking a search for materials online, these images generated hits for consumers.

This work being placed within the public domain enabled another lecturer, more loosely associated with the unit to also draw upon this work for different purposes. As the second lecturer developed his thinking more around what the first lecturer had done, he used the images and work in a national conference presentation without reference to the first lecturer. In his own words, "they were there for the taking, for anyone to use as they are available out in the open."

Other concerns were linked to three specific images that all "culture-jammed" the advertising campaign of the institution itself. In one of the images, a student appears bound to a railway line, with text that aligns the institution with attempted suicide. In

another image, the original advertisement that promotes the institution as providing colorful experiences on an equally colorful background was manipulated to promote the institution as a provider of “education which gives colorful sexual diversity.” In the third image, the institution is depicted as “Play School” (a preschool television series shown by the Australian Broadcasting Commission) and the senior executive of the institution as one of the fictional characters from the show.

Facebook Challenge 4: Cyberstalking and Cyberbullying

Cyberstalking and cyberbullying are swiftly becoming challenges within the broader Facebook community as any perfunctory scan of the daily papers and legal cases will reveal. In studies undertaken by Slonje and Smith (2008), it was suggested that this bullying in virtual spaces could be most often identified as insidious, pervasive, and covert in that the bullies are able to be invisible and invade multiple domains of their victims’ lives, often in front of a larger audience. In the same way, cyberstalking has been used to describe “behaviors that involve repeated threats and harassment by the use of electronic mail or other computer-based communication that would make a reasonable person afraid or concerned for their safety” (Finn, 2004, p. 469). Within social networking communications, what may start out as seemingly innocent communications can swiftly become a transgression of basic civility down to the violation of civil rights and the committing of an unlawful and punishable crime against others at its most heinous.

Cyberstalking and Cyberbullying – case study

For educators who reside and work in small rural communities, the interlinkages between one’s social, generational, community and professional lives are often extremely intertwined, leading to a high likelihood of students knowing educators in a variety of contexts. One such educator working across the spectrum of educational contexts from secondary school to higher education (HE) within that community had received many queries in Facebook to assist former students with their academic challenges. While the educator had regarded Facebook as her own social space and not a workspace – even if this did at time cross into the professional arena – she had been happy to assist her students where she was able.

A particular situation arose concerning a former student who was studying in the HE institution where the educator was working. Initially, the student had sent a string of minor generic requests for assistance via Facebook over a period of a few months, and in an attempt to be supportive, the educator had promptly answered. These included such queries as where to find a given publication or how to go about a particular genre of assessment.

Late one evening while chatting in Facebook with some geographically dispersed relatives, the educator received a panicked message from the student for immediate help with an overdue assessment task that she did not understand. The educator replied that the student would be best to contact her unit lecturer in the first instance. The return response was that the student’s lecturer was on leave. After further questioning, the educator eventually ascertained that the student had simply misread a word in the question, hence her inability to find resources on the topic. The

educator then provided the student with a clarification and an explanation, provided an example of how to proceed, and embedded other electronic resources in the response.

From that moment, however, things quickly deteriorated to the point where the educator felt she was experiencing cyberstalking and harassment. Every time that the educator logged into Facebook the student would instant message (IM) her immediately with requests that the educator help the student complete entire units of study encompassing multiple assessment tasks. Flooded by personal IMs from the student, the educator tried to avoid logging on during peak times to avoid being harassed, but alas, even at 2:00 a.m., there she was! At this time the educator also began noticing that the student was spending a lot of time in procrastinating behaviors in Facebook, such as playing online games, sharing YouTube clips, and was becoming a “fan” of everything. As a response, the educator again suggested that the student contact her unit lecturer, in addition to making an appointment with the learning support team in the library to speak with them about each of her assignments. Rather than taking any of this advice, however, the student’s cries for help intensified, coupled with questions as to why the educator would not help the student. Eventually the educator had to directly request that the student stop contacting her as she had her own professional work deadlines and personal family commitments. This was a difficult process of disentanglement made more challenging by the small rural community in which both educator and student lived.

Facebook Challenge 5: Virtual Integrity

Integrity refers to honesty and trust. Academic integrity describes the ways in which staff and students engage ethically in their interactions with each other and the content and expectations of their courses. Throughout the world’s HE institutions, committees and centers are established to ensure that ethical policies and practices are observed in research and teaching and learning activities. The increasing interactivity within social networking sites such as Facebook and among other Web 2.0 environments makes it challenging to necessarily monitor and quality assure the blurred spaces between academic work, social behaviors, and the environments in which they merge.

Virtual Integrity – Case study

In a science subject, the lecturer stands in his first lecture and outlines the content and assessment tasks that will underpin learning. In his summary, he indicates the explicit links between lecture content and the second assessment task of the unit, and stresses the imperative for students to engage with lecture materials, either in real time or in a recorded format that is uploaded weekly within two hours of the lecture taking place. The lecturer provides some exemplars of the types of submissions that have been received in previous years, and suggests that there will be further discussion about this requirement in subsequent lectures and workshops. The subject commences without a hitch, and the lecturer is assured that all is well among his students by their observed absence on the internal LMS of the institution. The second week of the subject begins and he delivers a second lecture. Directly after his lecture,

he facilitates a workshop group; and upon his approach to the room, he receives a palm-sized notification that there is a Facebook group operating to “help each other out” through the second assessment task. The lecturer in this instance had been mistaken for a student enrolled within the subject. He does nothing immediately; however, the moment his workshop concludes, he logs on to Facebook to investigate the group operating about his subject.

He identifies the group immediately as he simply enters the subject code within the search engine within Facebook. The group had been established directly after the first lecture, and slowly students were joining the group. Initially, he sees the group as a healthy way of collaborating for those who are not au fait with the LMS; however, upon closer scrutiny, the lecturer notes that the group has established a roster to attend the lectures on behalf of the rest of the “friends” and to consequently upload the notes that are taken. Over the next 48 hours, the lecturer takes a series of screen shots to record membership, thinking that it might only incorporate a small number of students, and that it would quickly cease to have an impact as students begin to interact with his dynamic lecture style and interesting subject content. Over the period of time that he observed the site, approximately 60% of his students had linked their profiles to the group. As well as discussing lecture content, the Facebook group is casting many aspersions upon his good name.

The lecturer then immediately identified all of the students involved in the Facebook group and contacted them by their institution’s email address. He alerts them to the specific page in their subject outline that describes the academic misdemeanor of collusion, and how the Facebook group has the potential to facilitate this act. He also reminds the students that the group has been constructed in a public space, and how some of the negative comments about him personally and professionally could have negative consequences, especially as they are unwarranted. Within 17 minutes of sending the email, the Facebook group is deleted, and within three hours, the lecturer received 73 emails of apology, most of which claim ignorance to the challenges that have been outlined. His favorite email suggested that he “relax. We didn’t mean harm, and nobody important is on Facebook anyway.”

Discussion

Facebook thus provides both benefits and challenges to those adopting it in the context of formal teaching and learning in HE. The additional case studies reflect and highlight these, including a number of issues in utilizing social sharing software in formal education contexts. As previously emphasized, technologies offer affordances that challenge and expand pedagogical and learning strategies, and enable increased engagement based on connections to students’ life worlds. A summary of these potentials and challenges is listed in Table 1.

For the purpose of this chapter, however, we focus on issues that are pertinent to discussions of HE in sustaining use of social networking sites and/or preventing abusive practices. In this chapter, we have identified five key issues related to the use of Facebook in HE. First, based on the previous case studies, we wish to investigate the purposes of the institutional LMS and highlight perceived deficits that draw academics and students out to work in social networking sites such as Facebook. Second, it is imperative to consider the tensions between providing opportunities for “social presence”

within learning, and facilitating social interaction within Facebook that distracts all concerned from the core business of HE providers: teaching and learning. Third, we outline a number of challenges that are faced by academics as public people, their work as readily accessible, and their institutions within these social networking sites. Fourth, we consider the vagueness of a HE institution's jurisdiction to address student misbehaviors within social spaces such as Facebook and the blurring of professional and personal relationships based on the notion of "friending." Finally, we highlight the need for academics, their institutions, and their students to scrutinize and be alert to emergent technologies and the ways in which they are being used for and by stakeholders across contexts.

The purpose of an LMS within and external to an institution is central to the discussion of the ways in which a social networking site such as Facebook can/cannot/should/should not be used as an environment to support learning. Institutions pay significant amounts of money to provide virtual environments and associated tools that enable student interaction with academic staff, as well as their peers. The environments are constructed through a hosting technology such as Blackboard, WebVista, and more recently in Web 2.0-like environments such as Moodle, Drupal, or Desire2Learn. There are significant tools associated within the environment, such as discussion tools, electronic lecture streams and repositories, whiteboard collaboration applications, synchronous communication tools, and core content that all enable staff to enhance student learning experiences through these complementary materials. And, in the ways that these environments are organized, they provide secure and private spaces in which activities central to student learning can occur.

Table 1. Potentials and Pitfalls of Facebook in Higher Education.

Potentials	Pitfalls
Potential for social community for geographically dispersed learners	To friend or not to friend
Alternative LMS	Electronic identify
Peer teaching	Public domain
Resource sharing	Cyberstalking and Cyberbullying
	Virtual integrity

In this chapter, we have mentioned the staff's motivation for using Facebook as an alternate LMS, in that it was perceived as an opportunity to connect learning with students' life worlds, and where they are already present. Contrary to the benefits of a secure space, Facebook exposes academics and students, and the work that they undertake to a risky, volatile, and ever-changing virtual space, with unknown and often unseen audiences. In another case, the staff member had used Facebook to provide a repository for all of the ICTs that she was unable to undertake within the institution's LMS. This is significant, as with the rapid developments of emergent technologies, it is challenging for institutions to adapt at the same pace. A way in which the LMS as a formal learning environment can be valued and sustained is to ensure that it too can be dynamic, and connect specifically with the dimensions of students' life worlds in ways that it connects to their learning. For many reasons, Facebook cannot adequately provide such an environment, especially if social presence within learning is to be separated from idealized social interaction.

A narrowed focus on the development of social presence to more strongly engage students in learning or to facilitate a supportive learning environment can detract from the purposes of learning, if social presence becomes social interaction. The social presence that is referred to in academic

literature often refers to the ways in which learners are aware of other learners within a digital or virtual learning space. The use of tools within an LMS includes those mentioned previously as ways in which social presence is developed. Within the LMS, the tools are specifically targeted to generate awareness of others relative to a specific learning task and to understand a particular knowledge form or skill set. The locus of control within the LMS is set by those charged with responsibility for student learning from an institutional perspective and often students are provided with authorities that enable them some autonomy within the structured environment. As evident within these cases, in the use of Facebook, the notion of friending is one way in which that social presence quickly turns to social interaction.

Facebook is a social networking site. It has been generated to connect various students across different institutions, with the intention of developing social connections. With its various applications and ways of becoming more familiar with people who are both known and unknown, it does not promote itself for facilitating scholarship and learning. In fact, fundamentally, the social forums and interest-based activities are distracting for academics and students in sustaining attention to learning tasks that require intellectual rigor or challenge us to rethink existing ways we may have thought about things. The constant alert of incoming messages and prompts to synchronous chats are not conducive to rich learning, and as described, the convenience and accessibility of merged LMS and social space challenges academics and students alike in clearly defining different parameters of their lives. Caveats need to be placed around access to educators and supervisors, and this access agreed to by all parties. Some educators such as Bateman (2010) have experimented with having a Facebook account for their work-related activities and one for their private lives, but anecdotally, students can find both. Thus, even though social sharing sites such as Facebook are open 24/7, it does not correlate that those educators need to be on duty 24/7. In the same manner, the ways in which information is both shared and accessed provides challenges to the notion about who owns information, and how this information can be used.

The notion of the public academic is not a new one, and the very ideology promoted that we are operating within a knowledge economy does not equate with the practice of making all academic work and staff accessible in a way that their core businesses may be compromised. The placement of institutional and academic IP within a public forum such as Facebook raises a number of challenges. Significant research and scholarship funding is tied to specific IP. IP are the ideas, inventions, and innovations of a specific academic, which are often developed through further investment and become financially valuable through the institution an academic is aligned to. In their employment, much of their IP is assigned to the institution itself. Further, many HE providers refer to all teaching and learning materials that are developed in the course of an instructor's employment, as well as the activities that are generated as a direct result of that teaching, as IP that belongs to the institution.

Further, insofar that the placement of work produced for the core businesses of a HE institution limits the exclusivity of any potential IP, the volatility and integrity to which that work may be subjected is also of concern. When images and other pieces of work are hosted within a social networking site such as Facebook, they are accessible by known and unknown people, groups, organizations, and companies. While in the uploading of materials for information sharing the intent may be collaborative, the consequences may be quite contrary. In the cases presented, there were two ways in which this was demonstrated through the violation of electronic identity and the manipulation of corporate branding. These are not the only ways in which uploaded content on Facebook may be subject to manipulation for different purposes. Monopolizing or claiming someone else's identity, whether directly or through the alleged provision of resources, risks compromising another person's livelihood as well as autonomy in representing his or her self-concept. Moreover,

through the manipulation of corporate brands or professional materials, the use of Facebook provides an unsecure environment in which the investment of millions of HE dollars in professional resourcing may easily be unwittingly challenged as beneficial. Clearly, there are ethical considerations, as well as legal imperatives that need to be addressed.

We suggest that at this moment in time, institutions have limited jurisdiction to address student misbehaviors within these global and virtual social spaces. The laws and conditions that Facebook users are subject to are blurry at best, and the terms and conditions a user agrees to in entering the environment clearly demonstrate the dynamic and changing boundaries. Specifically, in using Facebook, a user agrees to a disclaimer that reserves “the right, at our sole discretion, to change, modify, add, or delete portions of these Terms of Use at any time without further notice” (Facebook, 2011b). In itself, this is a shift in the usual legal agreements that are made to protect the commercial and intellectual interests of academic staff and their students within an institution. Further, Facebook clearly identifies its purpose as being for personal use only, which blurs the ways in which students can indeed participate within formal learning requirements of their learning in HE. In doing so, they contravene the conditions of their enrolment in the site. Facebook offers individual user accounts and does not have agreements with groups. This challenges the nature of the services that are expected to be offered to students upon their enrollment in their course and for staff with respect to the terms of their employment. In the use of an LMS, an institution has a third-party agreement that ensures the security and support of teaching and learning; however, the use of Facebook exposes stakeholders to a dynamic and often volatile environment for which there is little recourse should something not result as it has been intended. Given these terms, it is difficult then to pursue students in their personal virtual space for good, bad, or ugly interactions in the same ways that we could pursue them within learning environments that are constructed specifically for these purposes. However, having said this, the need to be vigilant in the potential enablers and inhibitors offered within Facebook and other such spaces is crucial within HE.

In thinking more about the uses of Facebook, HE institutions require investment, not only in the building of infrastructure and hardware that traditionally consumes significant resources but also in building a significant and dynamic knowledge base of emergent technologies. It is timely that current LMS systems be renewed to reflect many of these technologies that in turn enable innovative practices within virtual learning environments. Similarly for staff and students, familiarity with a changing digital world is crucial. Institutions and associated students must be vigilant in preserving and protecting their personal and professional images, as well as corporate branding. This is not possible without a sophisticated understanding of the nuances that are present within alternate environments and the ways in which the practices of staff and students within these virtual spaces permeate physical worlds for good, bad, and ugly.

Future Research Directions

The integration of social sharing sites – whether deliberately or organically, student-led or teacher-directed – into formal HE is a fascinating area of study. This exploratory work signposts important future research directions that warrant investigating. These include a larger qualitative ethnographic study of the media. It also warrants the collection of what some might refer to as “hard” data – quantitative data gathering in and around usage in HE and the possibility of triangulating this data collection with the personal stories that add the depth of understanding of the lived experiences of participants within this fascinating online world.

Conclusions

It would be easy to assume from the points raised through the case studies and in discussion that we are suggesting that Facebook should not be used for teaching and learning experiences in HE. Our thoughts are not so simple. We are strong advocates for the uses of technologies as pedagogical supports that enhance student learning; however, in this advocacy we are also cautious and critical consumers of emergent technologies. While there is an abundance of policy and procedure statements across HE contexts regarding face-to-face and LMS-based online learning technologies, there is clearly a dearth of anything that promotes responsible and critical uses of emergent technologies, such as Facebook, in, for, and about teaching and learning. Given that student and staff access to Facebook and other social networking and Web 2.0 tools, governance cannot be limited by simplistic filtering systems. As such, the need to be proactive in sharing and shaping virtual experiences is pertinent in guiding best practice on the adoption and integration of emergent technologies in formal educational environments such as those in the HE sector.

Misbehavior by staff and students within online environments such as Facebook must be governed and guided with the same thorough thinking and practice that informs the face-to-face environment. It must also be supported by the same types of resources that are afforded to any other misbehavior across HE institutions. Coming to an understanding of how this might occur also depends upon the development of systemic tools that are able to monitor student and staff use of web-based applications in the same ways that plagiarism tools such as Turnitin can be applied within institutional systems. And, deep thinking must be applied to the ways in which consequences and penalties can be applied given the fraught and blurry terms and conditions in which stakeholders operate outside of the institutional environments.

It is not sufficient to suggest that HE providers bury their collective heads in the virtual bucket of sand. Rather, it is crucial that there are adequate resources that enable key stakeholders to be alert and informed to new and emergent technologies, as well as their potential strengths and challenges. Simultaneously, the affordances of emergent technologies offer us opportunities to extend our practices and interactions with colleagues and students; however, in doing so require technologically savvy staff and support to enable sufficient policy as well as professional learning that in turn empowers proactive and self-protective technology adoption across the sector to all staff and students. The use of technology, such as Facebook for technology's sake, poses significant threats to academics and staff as a result of a less than sophisticated understanding of a dynamic environment that continues to evolve.

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