From Face to Face to Face…book: New Methodologies for Using Facebook as a Teaching Tool

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Unlike traditional teaching methods (face to face, in which a plurality of individual interfaces with the physical shape of a teacher), the modern technological systems have sparked numerous innovations to improve teaching methods. You hear about blended learning: integrating various methodologies (traditional and innovative) to provide a new pedagogical style to students. An important platform to facilitate the learning of university activities is Facebook: since 2004, the most popular social network in the world, with about one billion active users. In recent years, however, it has also been recognized as a useful e-learning platform. Thanks to Facebook, benefits of learning are associated to a better communication among students, a better access to resources and a better management of logistics courses. The social network involves students using technologies which are familiar to the new generations: There is an increasement of interactivity and collaboration, flexibility and networking. We must of course pay attention to the critical issues arising from the dangers of stalking, distractions, lack of privacy, but the advantages of a greater access to information, a better way to analyze researching capabilities and many other advantages make Facebook a new and important frontier for modern teaching.

Keywords: teaching, blended learning, Facebook, social network, learning platforms

Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been a radical change in the way of experiencing the world that led metamorphosis in all areas. From now on all institutions have learned to exploit and to benefit from new technologies, while until some time ago the school district still seemed anchored in archaic teaching methods and solutions (Lathi, 1998).

In the first part of the paper, we present the contributions that new systems of education have led to modern teaching methods. We discuss about blended learning and e-learning in general and then we focus on the social networks and on Facebook in general.

Finally, the study of the consequences of an intelligent use of social to improve teaching methods, especially in university, with the use of a private group of Facebook. The study shows a substantial improvement for students in the way of living the college career and examinations in particular.

Blended and E-Learning

If until the mid-2000s, the term "e-learning" has been a key term in the literature on distance education, starting in the following years new expressions have been imposed in the vocabulary related to the studies on

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web-based learning (Clark & Mayer, 2011).

There has been a progressive shift from e-learning of the first generation, based on the use of closed platforms (called "Learning Management System") (Matuga, 2001), to e-learning of the second generation, characterized by the use of devices of Web 2.0. The latter are usually described as "dynamic", "interactive", "democratic", "social", and "user-centered": If the first generation of the web was different, in fact, for facility of access and use of resources, the second is characterized by the immediate production and socialization of the contents (John & Sutherland, 2004).

Recent studies have ensured that it is useful to talk about blended learning: Technology becomes a key tool to improve teaching techniques at all levels. The traditional teaching has thus seen a gradual evolution through interactive multimedia, for which they have arrived at a modern context in which they overturned and completely undermined all methodological paradigms and temporal learning (Lathi, 1998). Thanks to the Internet are obviously more accessible information and materials not easily findable anywhere else, and the interest and the attention of students seems to grow exponentially (Berge & Collins, 1995).

Through the e-learning activities students can achieve significant results in the way of learning and culture in the way of studying, like a different approach to the study of each subject. Students can acquire a collaborative mindset, receive positive contributions by the teacher and the other students and in turn they can intervene and provide grants that will be useful to all members of the group (Driscoll, 2002). Teaching online greatly reduces the distance between teacher and student and between student and student, as if on the web you would reverse a virtual classroom where it is more practical having interaction between people (Berge & Collins, 1995). It's easier in this perspective for the teacher to learn from the questions asked by students to customize learning paths and spend more time on difficult topics and on topics seemingly difficult to understand (Bonaiuti, 2006).

E-learning is becoming increasingly important in modern educational environments thanks to its undeniable advantages over traditional classroom training (Ranieri, 2005). This article aims to promote a new innovative teaching method based on the use of Facebook as a tool to improve teaching in university classrooms for all subjects.

In recent years, the radical change in the way of understanding the binomial teaching/learning led, globally, many schools and universities to integrate their way of teaching with the most modern and advanced technologies based mainly on the Web (Ranieri, 2005). The same trend is felt in professional training since the traditional systems, based on classroom lectures, have always brought, for companies, high costs for both implementation and in terms of lost production. In contrast, distance education through new technology ensures considerable benefits, first of all extreme flexibility of time and space: The student is no longer forced to be present at the same place of the teacher and he can also study from home when and how much he wants (John & Sutherland, 2004). Add to this we consider the improvement of access to education, increasing the quality of the training content, its management more flexible, the ability to easily measure the results and decreasing costs: We understand why distance learning is actually very appetizing in all educational environments (Matuga, 2001).

Unfortunately the current systems of distance learning are not without flaws. Currently, the main flaw of the systems on the market is that they do not fully exploit the potential of the means they have available: very often, social networks and social media in general are used as mere vehicles of information and not as tools capable of processing this information in an intelligent and personalized way (Ranieri, 2005). More specifically,

they do not allow for the customization of teaching on the real needs and capacity of the individual but they offer standard courses for all users, do not allow the adoption of innovative educational models and they remain often linked to the traditional model of classroom teaching or they are reduced to a simple individual study of electronic textbooks (Bonaiuti, 2006).

Unfortunately, the tools of distance learning often exploit the results of the exercises only for reporting on progress of the students and not to influence on the successive learning experience through, for example, variations in the sequence of lessons or the use of any material of recovery; these tools fail to independently assess pedagogical parameters for individual students essential for optimizing the learning process as, for example, cognitive abilities and perceptual abilities in relation to different types of media (Bonaiuti, 2006).

The risk is that these tools do not offer any intelligent support to teachers in the creation of courses other than the ability to aggregate material and establish a learning path through it, without offer any intelligent support to learners in their choice of educational objectives based on the prerequisites already owned (Koper & Olivier, 2004). The purpose of this article is to show how you can overcome these limitations through the use of a social network like Facebook to enhance the experience of teaching.

Facebook and the Social Network

Social media, which constitute the specific subject of this paper, belong to the second generation of the web (web 2.0 tools) and they, in recent years, have been seen by many literates as a powerful driving force for the transformation of the practices of teaching and learning in an open, interactive and social perspective (Hanneman & Riddle, 2014). Although they are rare threads located in the context of the potential of Web 2.0 for teaching, social media, and more generally the application of Web 2.0, they are seen as devices that facilitate participatory learning and knowledge building. Being interactive, social and flexible, these tools can provide students with a space to actively collaborate to generate knowledge, rather than just to passively receive information (Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009).

These forms of cooperation are not limited to work in small groups, but they can cover entire networks consisting of a plurality of individuals united by common interests, the so-called "collective". In parallel, the new generations of students are represented as less and less satisfied of the simply passive use of the contents and they are increasingly prone to creating and sharing digital resources (Penuel et al., 2009). These media, in fact, enable and at the same time feed on the participation of people who, through their actions, can produce, share, exchange, make interactive and populate these virtual environments based of contents and social relations (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

An innovative idea is the use of Facebook as a system for online teaching to complement the traditional face to face courses taught in the classroom (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011). Information technology and in particular social networks allow their students to have an easily access to learning materials and tutoring online services without the constraints of time and place: It changes in this way the ways of learning (Fife, 2010).

Using Facebook as a tool for teaching also creates in the student an habit to see the Internet and the web in general as a source of materials and documents (Munoz & Towner, 2009).

With the highest number of subscribers, more than one billion and 300 million (Facebook, 2014), Facebook is considered the social network par excellence. Created in 2004, available in more than 70 languages, Facebook is more than a social networking site; it is actually a social platform that contains within itself a myriad of features and applications both native and developed by third parties (groups, pages, private

messaging, photo albums and videos, notes, events, but also games, professional applications and many others) (Junco, 2012; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). The growing use of Facebook as a learning tool and as a scholarship environment is evidenced by the growing number of educational experiences and research based on it (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011).

The explosion of facebook has in fact inevitably aroused reflections and attention even by academics and literary critics (Cheung et al., 2011). If in Italy the landscape is still mostly limited to texts and articles that highlight the economic, social and even political benefits generated by Facebook and other social networks, in parallel there are many contributions of authors, mostly of Anglo-Saxon countries, much more interested to grasp the potential of educating and teaching of these Web 2.0 tools (Junco, 2012). Looking at the most popular social networking sites, it can be observed as they offer users the ability to upload and share their resources such as images and video, but also to include, for example, the function of the chat to discuss in private, and a public profile that each user can update and possibly customize at will (Fife, 2010). This in itself may explain at least in part the success of an environment such as Facebook, which succeeds better than others to integrate different resources, achieving an high level of multimedia and thus meeting the new generations, more and more "multitasking" (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). However, and it is still an open challenge for scholars, it is groped to describe in detail the actual behavior of users in these social networks (Watkins, 2009). Some researchers have shown, for example, with regard to adults, a greater tendency to employ these sites to expand their network of knowledge, what is customarily called properly "social networking", where the term "network" denotes the tendency, more rather widespread among adolescents, to interact on the Web with networks of friends and acquaintances who already have, playing so perfectly the real world in a virtual world (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2002).

Social networks can provide users the opportunity to expand their knowledge and their level of information, so as to be profitable in the learning, if we include the opportunity for comparison and interaction with other peers (Hanneman & Riddle, 2014).

An additional element, particularly relevant at the pedagogical level, it is a chance to experience, through the tools of Web 2.0, a collaborative learning, or, according to a socio-constructivist approach, not the simple interaction with other users of the Network, but sharing resources and especially the production of new materials (Downes, 2005).

Discussion: Facebook as a Tool for Teaching

Many were the innovative teaching techniques used in recent years: it has gone from theater to jazz, from cinema to Youtube, from counseling to coaching (Barbaro, Di Lieto, Francischelli, Premutico, & Richini, 2012). Many systems are adopted with the only common purpose of stimulating motivation and interest of the students towards any school subject they were preparing to study. It is necessary that in the age of media and information technology teaching also adapts itself to innovative forms; in fact it is generating a school environment where communication and learning are experienced 24 on 24 hours without any apparent stop (Munoz & Towner, 2009).

Below we show the reasons that led to undertake a series of studies in which social networks, particularly Facebook, could be the secret weapon for teachers of any subjects to excite students to its themes. First, the choice of the social network facebook it's because of its characteristics that make it different from all the others (Kirkpatrick, 2011). The primary peculiarity of this social is the number of members: in 2012 they were

recorded one billion people, and of course the number has increased exponentially in recent years (Phillips et al., 2011). Still, an important advantage it is the social interaction that Facebook generates: In fact it shows an interface that is relatively simple to use and that offers the possibility of a cooperative and permanent learning. Another feature of the social network is the consequence of the previous year, and it is represented by the facilitation of communication between students and students and between students and teachers, as it is to generate a communication channel fast and constantly active (Phillips et al., 2011). Whit Facebook questions can be promoted in private (even if this mode is not useful for helping other students participating in the course) or publicly (with public comments or posts). The social network of course also enables the delivery of multimedia content in the reference group, so you can post photographs and images representative of doubts or concerns (Watkins, 2009).

It needs having a computer or a smartphone that is equipped with an internet connection (and the vast majority of students (if not all students) has got at least one supplied) to manage in the best way the immense flow of information of the web. It would obviously be useful to create printed materials and support for the few students who do not have internet from private home, first ascertaining the number of people without adequate technological tools (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012).

The innovative teaching idea is to open a private group on facebook and to load on it informational materials which are then brought to the attention of the students of the lessons (Junco, 2012). Through a proper technological and didactical organization it also would be possible recording live lectures in class and post them on the Facebook group to make also absent students and working students partakers of the content and the explanations of the lessons. In this way the lessons are accessible to all students: It is available to both students absent for any reason both to students who wish to use the online lesson to repeat in a better way some concepts not perfectly understandable. Facebook also facilitates the organization of the lessons as it makes possible to simultaneously share online contents or slides of the lectures, so you engage students and enhance the limited time available during the lessons (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Even during lessons, students will then use their mobile device to follow in the best way the lesson and to not have to give up anything concept. In this way the lessons face to face further demonstrate the true value of the interaction in the presence as an indispensable tool to clarify concepts otherwise taken for granted by the teacher (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

It is published in this way on the reference group the trail used within the course, also by using external links: in this way facebook becomes a sort of archive and, at the same time, it becomes a program of study functional and constantly updated for the teacher and for students (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

It is important for the operation of the platform the organization of the resources potentially useful for the course. And there is no doubt that the multimedia material posted by students further enriches the variety of resources available to all students in the course. In this way, the groups of the following years will be more comprehensive and increasingly understood as a network of opinions, thoughts, projects (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). The continued availability on the social media of teaching tools for the study, training test, communication and chat with fellow students and teacher is an important resource to stimulate both autonomous and cooperative learning. It is useful to include exam tests and interactive exercises that allow students a self-assessment, understood as a fundamental tool to improve their understanding of the topics cornerstone of the subject in question. Thanks to the instant feedback generated by classmates or the teacher himself it is possible to identify and solve, maybe even repeat during the courses face to face, any problems when they arise (Walsh et al., 2013).

Thanks to the instrument of private group of Facebook you have a daily monitoring of student activities on the social network, and you constantly receive feedback from students so that any errors or perplexities become a significant learning opportunity for all students, even those who until then they had not expressed themselves on the subject in question (Cheung et al., 2011).

The motivation, a positive reinforcement and the sense of control of the students on their learning are absolutely critical factors: It is essential to attract the attention and interest of the students about them learning environments by using e-learning tools that are closer to the reality that they live every day (Watkins, 2009).

Obviously you need to protect the privacy of students that, on the social networks, usually share not only the basic information of identity (with name, age and real photos) but also they share their passions, their desires, movements, thoughts, ideas (Walsh et al., 2013). There are also risks resulting from the multiplication and fragmentation of information channels that can generate confusion and therefore require the development of appropriate strategies for the selection and validation of resources (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). There are furthermore other additional sources of tension, including the challenge of redefining the roles of teacher and student, the opposition of the working group that operates in a closed traditional e-learning platform and a work arena opened to contributions and the comments of all, the relationship between individual learning and collaborative learning, where the latter raises problems not only for the assessment but also in the view of the particular learning styles of students (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). At these critical issues there are others that are specific to the university context. In general, you can highlight a wide diversity of values and visions between the academic and social world: The first is characterized by a vertical and hierarchical organization, and the second for the horizontal and participatory approaches; the formal process of review and scientific evaluation is typical of the first questioned by the production of content "from below" typical of the second (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

Conclusion

The educational goal to which intends to bring into play the facebook group is the awareness of the social network as an useful information tool. Internet brings with itself enormous potential for research and organization of information, although students often use the same tools only for recreation or as a waste of time (Downes, 2005). Also opportunities are fed for aggregation in a blended environment where everyone has space, time and possibility to discuss and reflect, to develop critical thinking and understand how learning is not limited to the simple acquisition of concepts, but that is an important mindset (Driscoll, 2002). Social networks thus represent a reservoir of potential that have been developed, up to now, only a small part, but which are actually able to transform education style thanks to multimedia and blended learning. It comes a new way to collaborate, communicate, teach that it is no longer anchored to the previous limits of space and time but rather it is able to overcome the isolation and bring to a better didactic methods (Bonaiuti, 2006).

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