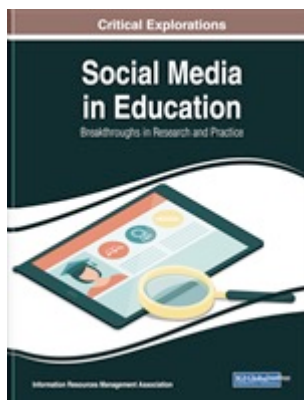




Social Media in Education: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice

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Book Review

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Medhi Khosrow-Pour, editor; four associate editors; and over forty authors contributed to the volume *Social Media in Education: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice*. The authors teach and research in various contexts around the globe and as such the book provides insight into a multiplicity of learning contexts. Although much of the book reflects K-12 learning environments, there are several chapters specifically focused on the use of social media in higher education. Despite not focusing on higher education, many chapters have applicability for teaching with and through social media in higher educational contexts. The book is rooted in extensive research and organized into five sections: Curriculum Development and Instructional Design; Higher Education; K-12 Education; Language Education; and Reading, Writing, and Speech. Each section covers topics relevant to teaching and social media in a range of classrooms, online teaching and learning, and specific student learning issues related to the use of social media.

Faculty teaching in theological school and university contexts will find sections one and two to be the most helpful (Curriculum Development and Instructional Design; Higher Education). The use of social media in everyday life is ubiquitous and this is underscored throughout this volume. The authors of Chapter 1, "Examining the Benefits of Integrating Social Media into the Classroom," cite a helpful definition for social media by Bryer and Zabattaro as, "technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders. The technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text), sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds" (2). The authors of the first chapter examine various pedagogical theories in relation to social media in the classroom and conclude that connectivism theory is perhaps the most helpful. Their outline of principles

of connectivism indicates that learning and knowledge rest on a diversity of opinions; learning is a process connected to varieties of information sources; learning may reside in non-human appliances; capacities to learn is more critical than what is known; continual learning is necessary; the capacity to make connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill; up-to date knowledge is vital; and decision making itself is regarded as a learning process (3). None of these conclusions are new. However, the focus on student continual learning and knowledge development through social media constitutes a new direction for thinking about what connotes knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, and how teachers might foster student learning.

One claim that this book asserts often is that social media facilitates active learning and collaborative learning. Resource and information sharing become a democratized project rather than being dependent on the authority of the teacher. In addition, the learning process can be more personalized and active. Co-created learning environments provide degrees of student buy-in that may have been somewhat absent prior to the introduction of social media in contemporary classrooms. The authors contend that creating communities of learners around shared interests fosters continuous learning and the potential for more positive learning environments overall. The authors of Chapter 2 also critique the current gaps in the literature around social media as an instructional tool. They claim there is a lack of information about how social media is utilized in classrooms, a lack of comparative research studies about best practices to develop and design social media strategies for classroom applications, and an overall need for alignment between social media use and assessment practices in classroom teaching (27). Yet, despite gaps in the research they claim, “by facilitating active learning, promoting affective learning outcomes, inspiring creativity and innovation, supporting team-based work, and creating a community of learners [sic], social media enhances [sic] students’ learning” (28).

Chapter 3, “Utilizing Social Media to Engage Students in Online Learning: Building Relationships Outside of the Learning Management System” offers a foundational understanding of the history and role of social networking in student learning and provides specific insights about the benefits of social media use and instructor’s roles in relation to it. In addition, the chapter provides a couple of case studies for further reflection about the benefits and challenges associated with the use of social media in teaching. Areas of concern include: access to social media; privacy; time commitment for students and teachers; distraction and lack of focus; and integrity of the materials/content. The question of reliability or integrity of content and its quality requires teachers to help students gain capacities to differentiate content so as to discern what is reliable versus what is not.

Social Media in Education also attends to the topic of social media and multi-literacy. It is concerned with understanding the varieties of learning domains that make up student's learning matrices. The semiotic codes that make up multi-literacies are considered as variant domains of knowledge acquisition and construction. The book's authors are aware of the multiple identities with which contemporary students navigate social media environments. Adapting and creating social media tools to meet student learning needs is also addressed. TeacherTube is one such example; developed to mirror YouTube and yet focusing exclusively on educational uses for classroom learning. It also indicates the learning level for which the videos might be applicable (K-12 or college). As the authors of Chapter 6, "Incorporating Students' Digital Identities in Analog Spaces," contend, "The advent of social media ushered in a time where multi-literacy became increasingly important, as social futures might ultimately be defined by one's (in)ability to exist in both digital and analog worlds simultaneously" (98).

As with any multi-authored volume on a given topic, there are many overlaps between the various chapters that can be repetitive. That said, the book provides a wealth of information about social media in relation to student learning and teaching practice in K-12 and higher educational contexts. One insight that surfaces throughout concerns how teacher intentionality about the use of social media for advancing student learning in any instructional context has a direct correlation with positive student learning outcomes. Aymerich-Franch and Fedele in Chapter 8, "Students' Privacy Concerns on the Use of Social Media in Higher Education," affirm that "undergraduate students generally accept the use of social media in the classroom but only when their use is justified and not linked to compulsory activities... students tend to use social networks to organize classroom work among themselves... Students are reluctant to use this social network [Facebook] for activities that involve interaction with faculty or to carry out subject activities organized by faculty" (142). Hence, there is a need for teachers to carefully select and navigate social media spaces in order to both recognize student's private social media spaces as carrying certain learning capacities that may be outside of the teacher's domain and to create social media spaces for specific learning activities that may be either teacher or student generated. One way by which teachers may discern what is appropriate for the use of social media in their classroom involves a brief questionnaire that interrogates their own use of social media in the classroom and that of the student's experience with social media in the classroom (164). This can help teachers discern student familiarity with various types of social media in their own learning experience and aid teachers in discerning what might best meet student learning needs for their desired student learning outcomes.

Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of this edited volume are the lists of references at the conclusion of each chapter. They constitute a gold mine for further research into the topics addressed and can widen and deepen one's understanding of the use of social media in

contemporary teaching practices for advancing student learning. Professors of religion and theology will not find any articles directly related to their respective fields of study. However, the book does provide a wealth of ideas that could be modified for teaching in theological schools and higher educational contexts. For example, issues related to the use of iPhoneography could have resonance with questions about hermeneutics and perception in general. In addition, the cost of this volume may encourage faculty to ask their libraries to purchase the book instead of adding it to their personal collection.

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