New Arenas for Learning?

Teacher Trainees' Use of Participatory Media as Tools for Learning

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Purpose

Point of departure:

How do practices of learning and information literacy change when digital tools are used in educational settings?

How do teacher trainees appropriate participatory media as tools for learning?

Conceptual Framework

The socio-cultural tradition draws attention to the ways cultural tools mediate thinking and learning processes

(Säljö, 2010; Wertsch, 1991; 1998)

Appropriation describes a process of "*taking something that belongs to others and making it one's own*"

(Wertsch, 1998, p. 53).

Strategies and tactics.

(de Certeau, 2011)

Purpose

Study 1 – 2012

The first study explores how, and why, a class of Swedish teacher trainees use a Facebook Group as a platform for learning and communication related to their education.

Analysis of how the Facebook Group is appropriated as a tool for learning.

Hanell, Fredrik. (2014). Appropriating Facebook: Enacting Information Literacies. *Human IT, 12*(3), 5-35. http://etjanst.hb.se/bhs/ith/3-12/fh.htm

Previous Research

One overview of previous research suggests that Facebook has been of little educational use (Hew, 2011).

Manca & Ranieri (2013); Lampe *et al* (2011): the SNS is compelling to use within higher education since many students are familiar with Facebook and they spend more time on Facebook than on any other digital platform.

Selwyn (2009): when students are using Facebook in an education-related way, mainly administrative issues are discussed, and expressions of frustration or anger towards instructors or jokes about assignments.

Previous Research II

Madge et al. (2009): students perceive SNS as a recreational space and do not want it 'spoiled' by academic discussions.

The social aspects of Facebook use in educational settings (Ellison *et al*, 2007)

Bosch (2009): students appreciate being able to reach teachers instantly in an informal online environment.

Mazer *et al.* (2007): Facebook provides a "*unique method to nurture the student-teacher relationship*" (p. 15).

Material

Study 1:

The Facebook Group consists of approximately 210 students and two educators.

2012, the students were doing their second semester of the Swedish teacher training programme, studying to become pre-school teachers.

The conversations included in the first study are taking place over a period of two months, April and May 2012.

Method

An ethnographic method is used with the aim "*to study others 'in their space and time'*" (Markham & Baym, 2009, p. 8).

Textual and visual online data

Field notes

Semi-structured interviews with selected participants

(3 students, 2 teachers).

Why the Group was created

Interview with Kristian, educator:

"Last autumn we started to use a new form of examination, and I predicted that lots of students would have questions. So I wanted a channel where I could reach as many students as possible. And maybe there is a possibility that they can answer each other, instead of us [educators] having to come in and interpret."

(translated from Swedish)

The Group vs. the VLE

Interview with Kristian, educator:

"[M]any of us have [Facebook] like in a separate tab when we browse the web, and many are online through phone, so we are there. […] The fact that we actually see when something happens means that it feels like… ah, something is happening all the time, you don't really experience that on It's Learning."

Comment to the Group by Kenneth, educator:

"I have created 200 forums on It's Learning and I have never seen a discussion unfolding spontaneously there. Perhaps I am sounding bitter – perhaps it is the ugly interface." (87)
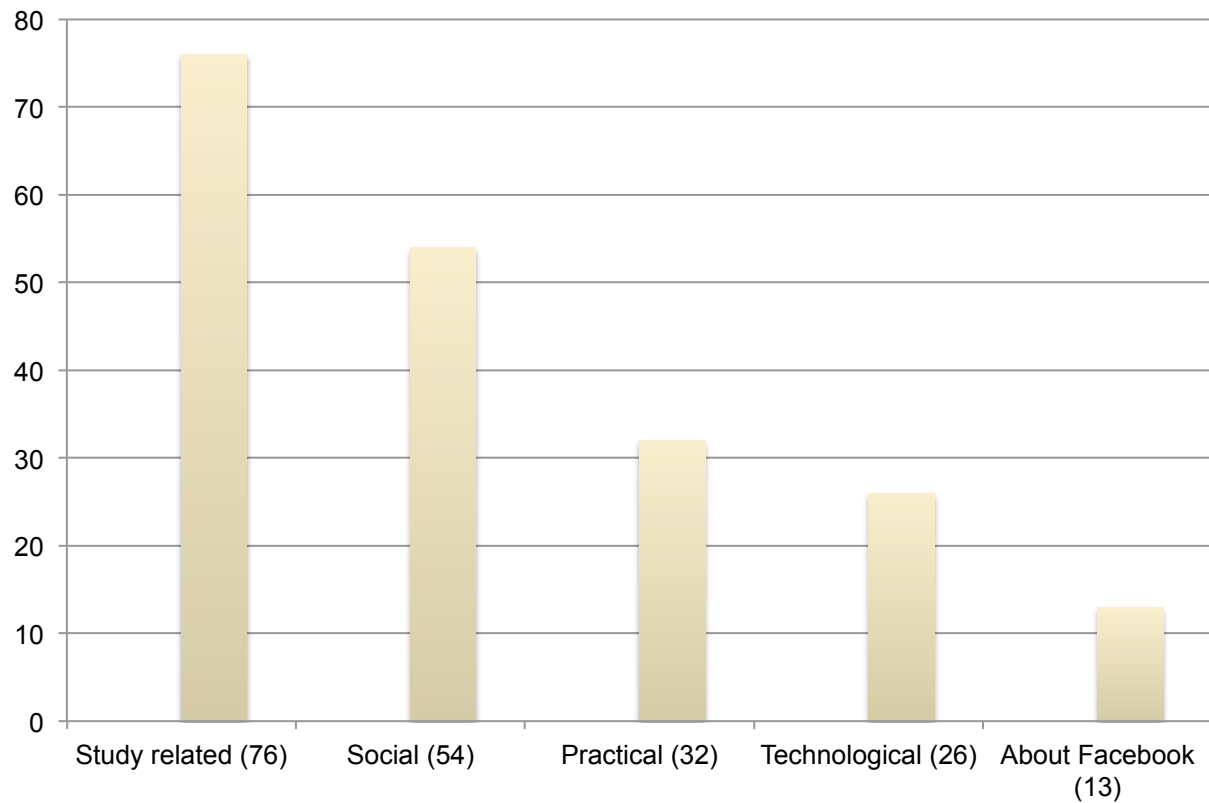
How do the teacher trainees and the educators appropriate the Facebook Group as a tool for learning?

Categories of conversation

202 posts were made to the Group. Five categories emerge:

Nurturing practices

The practice of posting *nurturing posts/comments* is an important way of appropriating the Group as a tool for learning, and an important part of being literate in the group (cf. Francis, 2010).

The transparency of Facebook, where every interaction is visible to everyone, means that this structure of nurturing and reciprocity works within a large group.

Nurturing posts

Ester, student, writes to the Group:

"I am sitting here almost with tears in my eyes, but tears of joy! Sitting and smiling and laughing with all the amazing movies you have done! I mean, damn, Skåne will get so many creative, playful and wonderful pre-school teachers in 2015! Your are awesome everyone of you! Big round of applause for everyone!" (71)

Building relations

Interviewer:

"What do you think is the best thing about the Facebook-group, for you as a teacher?"

Kristian:

"The building of relations. […] I think it is more exciting to work with students that I have some sort of relation with, and I think they find it more exciting to meet a teacher who they also know a little about and have some kind of relation with."

(Interview with Kristian)

These nurturing practices enable two ways of appropriating the Group as a tool for learning.

A problem-solving tool

- The Group is considered a tool for sharing and providing information relevant to the education;

- The Group is a credible source of information – learning as an instructive process;

- Positions of identity are fixed and stable – students and teachers have different roles and responsibilities;

- Teachers are seen as authorities and representatives of the education;

A relation-building tool

- The Group can be used for playful and humoristic communication – learning as a cultural process;
- Indicates a literacy where irony is an important communicative strategy and positions of identity are flexible;
- Teachers are not necessarily seen as representatives of the education;

The enactment of information literacies:
understanding the context of a conversation

Ester (posted on April 1):

"damn… just heard that [our] University will close down the pre-school teacher training programme! this can't be right for ours can it?" (16 - S)

Ida:

"That's right… How hard is it to look after children…! Pampers and Libero will give quick courses on how to put on diapers the right way. And Lindex have a two-hour training session on how to dress children quickly. Pedagogical activities are extravagant rubbish!!" (16 - S)

Kristian:

"Hmmm… Unfortunately, this is probably true. We have been reviewed by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and have received rather strong criticism. We had an emergency meeting at the department this Friday and we decided to announce the information to you, the students, the Tuesday after Easter. No new programme will start this fall. You who are enrolled now (enrolled fall 2011) will be offered places at [another University]." (16- S)

Kristian:

"To quote Vygotskij: 'You just have to make the best out of the situation'. [The other University] is not that bad." (16 - S)

Not all students are sensitive to the humorous nature of the conversation. Another student writes:

"I am also a little shocked and sad :/" (16 - S)

A constraining property of Facebook is highlighted in this
example:

The difficulty *to understand the context*, and the meaning of a
conversation when a large number of persons participate in a
discussion in real time with a multitude of perspectives and
perceptions on the subject discussed.

In a traditional classroom, the scene for discussion is set through information from schedules, the title of the lecture etc.

On Facebook the scene needs to be set in real time, during the current conversation.

The most important aspect of being information literate when a Facebook Group is used in educational settings is *to be able to reconstruct, and understand, contexts in real time*.

Purpose

Study 2 – 2013-2014

The second study seeks to broaden our understanding of how and why students use Facebook in educational settings and provides an ethnographic account of how teacher trainees are using Facebook and other digital technologies *to support and organize group-based learning*.

Material

Study 2:

Same group of teacher trainees as in the first study. I followed three key-informants during a course from November to January.

Material from two private Facebook Groups, with 9 students in each, and from Google Drive and Prezi.

Semi-structured interviews with selected participants.

(9 students, 4 educators)

Organising group-based learning in teams

Two main information activities are performed when group-based learning is conducted online:

Negotiation of what topic to focus on

Sharing information resources

Negotiation of what topic to focus on

"what's it going to be? Do we choose to focus on education, childrens' rights to schooling, I also think what [xx] said was good the difference between boys' and girls' rights to schooling, is a topic that is popular and one that we can find a lot about"

Conversation 25, "Perspectives on childhood", 131112

Sharing information resources

"In general:
http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2007n6/files/
Progress_for_Children_-_No._6.pdf"

Conversation 10, "Perspectives on childhood", 131112

Preliminary conclusions

Appropriation occurs on different levels: institutional, individual.

Appropriation of one technology affects how other technologies are appropriated.

Some students are critical to the digital mode of group-based learning: the output from teams working a lot with Facebook and Google Drive seems to be shallower; digital tools do not enable rich discussions.

Thank you!

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