Increasing students' motivation by using social networks in and out of the classrooms

Vladimir Trajkovic[1], Marina Vasileva[2], Olga Samardzic Jankova[3], Slavica Karbeva[4] and Maja Videnovic[5]

[1]Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering, Skopje
[2]Primary School Sv. Kiril i Metodij, Skopje
[3]Civic Accossiation Open the Window, Skopje
[4]Primary School Petre Pop Arsov, v. Bogomila, Municipality Chashka
[5]Primary School Krste Misirkov, Skopje

Abstract. Putting his Majesty computer into schools made tectonic shift of the central pillar in every classroom - the teacher. The threat became bigger with the use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter by the students, as a result of that these sites became forbidden in the schools.

But when the students are already there, available in any time and place, why can't we try to direct these users for the benefits of innovative learning and to improve their motivation?

The following text will try to investigate the possible answers of this question concerning the benefits from using Facebook and twitter in education as a media for communication between students and teacher.

After reviewing the subject of research from the aspect of planned distance education or distance learning which will continue and after the end of the school year, desired data will be obtained. Using the WebQuest method will provide approach to learning from the source of the information distant from the students. Qualitative and quantitative indicators will be presented by the measurement of the achievements and by the students and teacher attitudes.

Keywords: social networks, Facebook, twitter, WebQuest method.

1   Introduction

Putting his Majesty computer into schools made tectonic shift of the central pillar in every classroom - the teacher. The threat became bigger with the use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter by the students, as a result of that these sites became forbidden in the schools.

But when the students are already there, available in any time and place, why can't we try to direct these users for the benefits of innovative learning and to improve their motivation?

We can try to do the opposite - Threats to translate into Opportunities. Than we can seek benefits from using social networks: Facebook and Twitter, in and out of the

classrooms as a media for communication between students and teacher. The course will use the WebQuest method and available Open Educational Resources (OER).

1.1 Facebook

Facebook is the world's largest social network, with more than 900 million users as of May 2012, most of them using the mobile devices. This web service is free to join and open to anyone over 13. It provides a place for social connection via the sharing of photos, videos and text updates. Users create personal profiles and establish relationships with other people and companies.

1.2 Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets".

It was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey and launched that July. The service rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with over 500 million active users as of 2012, generating over 340 million tweets daily and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day. Since its launch, Twitter has become one of the top 10 most visited websites on the Internet, and has been described as "the SMS of the Internet." Unregistered users can read tweets, while registered users can post tweets through the website interface, SMS, or a range of apps for mobile devices.

1.3 Web Quest .

A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented lesson format in which most or all the information that learners work with comes from the web. The model was developed by Bernie Dodge at San Diego State University in February, 1995. WebQuests can be created using various programs, including a simple word processing document that includes links to websites. A WebQuest is distinguished from other Internet-based research by three characteristics. First, it is classroom-based. Second, it emphasizes higher-order thinking (such as analysis, creativity, or criticism) rather than just acquiring information. And third, the teacher preselects the sources, emphasizing information use rather than information gathering. Finally, most WebQuests are group work with the task frequently being split into roles.

A WebQuest has 6 essential parts: introduction, task, process, resources, evaluation, and conclusion.

1. The introduction provides background information and gives meaning to the exercise. The introduction should have a motivational component to excite the students.
2. The task is the formal description of what the students will produce in the WebQuest. The task should be beautiful, meaningful, and fun. Creating the task is the most difficult and creative part of developing a WebQuest.

3. The process is consisted of precisely defined steps the students should take to accomplish the task. It is frequently profitable to reinforce the written process with some demonstrations.

4. The resources the students should use. Providing these helps focus the exercise on processing information rather than just locating it. Though the instructor may search for the online resources as a separate step, it is good to incorporate them as links within the process section where they will be needed rather than just including them as a long list elsewhere. Having off-line resources like visiting lecturers and sculptures can contribute greatly to the interest of the students.

5. The evaluation is the way in which the students' performance will be evaluated. The standards should be fair, clear, consistent, and specific to the tasks set.

6. The conclusion part should be used for reflection and discussion of possible extensions.

1.4   Open educational resources

Emphasizing that the term Open Educational Resources (OER) was coined at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on Open Courseware and designates "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work". Users of Open Educational Resources have free (no-cost) access to the materials and free (no-cost) permission to engage in the "4R" activities when using them, including:

Revise: adapt and improve the Open Educational Resources so it better meets your needs;

Reuse: use the original or your new version of the Open Educational Resource in a wide range of contexts;

Remix: combine or "mashup" the Open Educational Resource with other OER to produce new materials;

Redistribute: make copies and share the original Open Educational Resource or your new version with others.

2   Research

2.1   Goal of the research

In the course of this research we tried to investigate are the students more motivated to learn through the use of social networks in and out of the classroom.

Hereby, the suitability shall be examined through the following research questions:

1. Does the communication between teacher and students, using the social networks, increase the students' motivation for learning?

2. Does the use of the WebQuest method during the above mentioned communication additionally increase the students' motivation to be proactive and implement hands-on experience?

3. Does the communication between teacher and students, using the social networks motivate the students to use actively open educational resources?

2.2   Description, participants, methods

In this digital world, opportunities for education are available like never before. Though teachers using online tools are empowering students to take part in their education, they may also expose them to inappropriate material, sexual predators, and bullying and harassment by peers.

Teachers who are not careful with their use of the sites can fall into inappropriate relationships with students or publicize photos and information they believed were kept private. For these reasons, critics are calling for regulation and for removing social networking from classrooms – despite the positive affects they have on students and the essential tools they provide for education in today's digital climate. The positive effects of social networking sites in education are profound and the students who are already engaging in social networking could benefit from incorporating it into curriculum. Through utilizing teaching techniques that incorporate social media, teachers should be able to increase students' engagement in their education, increase technological proficiency, contribute to a greater sense of collaboration in the classroom, and build better communication skills.

Having in mind that according to the State Statistical Office, 82.0% of the Internet users, from which the majority are the students, used the Internet for the social networking purpose, Facebook and Tweeter mostly, it is important to explore the possible benefits that such communication can offer to the modern education.

Use of social networks starts in the classroom, by giving modified WebQuest assignment with specific tasks, links to the relevant resources and clearly defined process. Using the social networks, the communication between the teacher throughout and the students does not end when school year ends, on the contrary, it becomes a form of a distant learning.

Students from three different classes and three different schools (two urban and one rural school) participated in the research: fourth, fifth and sixth grade students (age nine to eleven). Besides the student, their parents and teachers were also included in the research activities. Three different subjects were identified to be used during the research: mother tongue, mathematics and IT. The students and their teacher used their Facebook and Tweeter profiles for communication.

Prior to this research, all parents were informed about the use of Facebook and Tweeter for communication and they all signed that they approve their children to be part of this activity.

The task for the mother tongue assignment was presented as authentic situation when the school library is closed and the students are not able to borrow the necessary books for reading during the summer period. The teacher using the modified WebQuest method gave the assignment to students. The suggested resources varied

from printed to e-books, videos and multimedia. The students were given the opportunity to choose the way of the presentation of the completed tasks. During the whole process, the teacher and the students communicated using Facebook and Tweeter.

Math assignment was presented to the students as WebQuest authentic situation in which the students prepare themselves for the regional geometry completion using geometry application. The teacher used her Facebook profile to give geometry tasks and problems to her students and the students used their profiles to post the solutions on their walls.

For the purpose of IT assignment, each day the standardized tests were given to the students using Facebook.

The students and their parents were given questionnaires to provide feedback on the methods used for the purpose of this research. The group interview with the students and their parents was also valuable resource of information. The analytical descriptive method was used and qualitative and quantitative indicators presented by the measurement of the achievements and by the students, parents and teacher responses.

3   Results and data analysis

On the basis of the analysis the Opinions of the respondents covered with the surveys and interviews it was determined that:

According to the computer usage, 18% of the students reported that they use computer at school only, while the remaining 82 % use the computer at school and at home. In regards the use of social networks, 10% of students (and these are the youngest ones) do not have Facebook or Tweeter profile. 40% of the students have their Facebook profiles opened by their parents, 30% opened their profiles by themselves but with the approval from their parents, and 20% opened their profiles by themselves without approval from their parents. 70% of the students uses Facebook more than a year, 20% uses few months, and (as mentioned before) do not use Facebook. 18% of the students use Tweeter in the last few months and 72% do not use it at all.

About the effect of the communication between teacher and students, using the social networks, increase the students' motivation for learning

80% of the students stated that they communicated regularly with their teacher during the assignment, and 20% communicated from time to time. 80% of the students communicated with their classmates using Facebook, but using other communication tools (as phones etc.), and 20% used only Facebook. The students answered that the teacher's responses were in a timely manner and 18% waited for the response. 90% consider that the teacher provided valuable information and 88% confirmed that the communication with the teacher helped them to complete the given task. 85 % of the students consider that collaboration between them and the teacher enforces the learning. 80% would like to have other subjects be organized in a similar way.

The parents responded that they are very satisfied with such communication between their children and the teacher and that they would like the communication to continue during the summer break, because it is a good motivation for the students to have their responsibilities always on their minds.

All students responded that they would like to have the similar approach in learning in other subjects too. Students and their parents are very satisfied with the used method of learning and communication and they would like teacher to continue such communication with the students in the future.

The students' and parents' responses lead to the conclusion that: The communication between the teacher and the students using social networks increases the students' motivation for studying, which was expected. But wanting to go in depth, it was very important to find out the additional elements that increases the motivation during the teacher – student communication.

About the effect of the WebQuest method during the mentioned communication and the increased students' motivation to be proactive and implement hands-on experiences tasks.

The use of WebQuest method significantly draws the students' attention. It allows them to solve real life problems using Internet based educational resources. Besides the dilemma which way is the best to motivate students to do the reading during the summer period, part of the research was focused on comparing the traditional printed readings vs. digital editions found on Internet. It is known fact that the students consider the readings bored, so it was important to find creative and motivating tactic to encourage them to learn during spending time in front of the computer.

The given WebQuests motivated the students to spend their spare time and searching through the given resources to increase their knowledge. The students feel that the offered method of individual research provides more permanent knowledge which is not the case when they have to memorize the facts only. Student activities are very organized by the WebQuest and they can stay focused on using information rather than finding it. It extends students' thinking to the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy; analysis, synthesis, and evaluation and support critical thinking and problem solving through authentic assessment, cooperative learning, scaffolding, and technology integration. But also it encourages independent thinking and to motivate students. Differentiate instruction by providing multiple final product choices and multiple resource websites. Multiple websites as reading content allow students to use the resource that works best for their level of understanding. It helps the students to bridge the gap between school and "real world" experiences and encourages students to become connected and involved learners.

The received feedback from students allows us to conclude that: The use of the WebQuest method during the teacher – student communication increases students' motivation to be proactive and implement hands-on experiences tasks.

The communication between teacher and students, using the social networks motivate the students to use actively open educational resources.

The answers to the question regarding the previous experience in the use of the Internet based resources leads to the fact that majority of the students (90%) use Internet as a resource for their homework or project based activities within the last year or less.

76% of the students consider that the web based resources such as e-books and/or videos helped them better to understand the given tasks and complete them successfully, while 11% consider that the Internet has no influence in completing the assignments.

84% of the students that the Internet resources are appropriate to their age and understanding and 64% were motivated to look for additional Internet and digital resources.

The parents pointed that they like the idea to use the Internet educational resources very much and that they will be very happy if the quality as well as the quantity of the offered educational resources increase and is available for all subjects.

Having in mind the results received from the questionnaire, but from the group interview with the students and their parents it is fair to say that the communication through the social networks motivates the students to actively use open educational resources.

4   Conclusion

Nobody would dispute that the risks of children using social media are real and not to be taken lightly. But there are also dangers offline. The teachers and parents who embrace social media say the best way to keep kids safe, online or offline, is to teach them. The educational benefits of social media far outweigh the risks, and they worry that schools are missing out on an opportunity to incorporate learning tools the students already know how to use.

Traditional education tactics often involve teacher-given lectures, students with their eyes on their own papers, and not talking to your neighbor. However, social media as a teaching tool has a natural collaborative element. Students critique and comment on each other's assignments, work in teams to create content, and can easily access each other and the teacher with questions or to start a discussion.

Social networking could be a useful tool and the educational system should allow the use of these sites because students benefit from it in many ways. They can build skills that they may need once they finished their education. Overall, the social networking has great benefits, but is very important that the teacher implements its use properly and that it contains educational value.

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