
Editorial

Tomayess Issa*

School of Information Systems,
Curtin Business School,
Curtin University,
GPO Box U1987, Perth,
Western Australia 6845, Australia
E-mail: tomayess.issa@cbs.curtin-edu.au

*Corresponding author

Piet Kommers

Faculty of Behavioural Sciences,
University of Twente,
P.O. Box 217,
7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl

Biographical notes: Tomayess Issa is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Information Systems at Curtin University, Australia. In addition, she is a Postgraduate Course Leader and Postgraduate Online Coordinator. She is a member of an international conference programme committee of the IADIS International Conference on Internet Technologies and Society and IADIS International Conference on International Higher Education. Furthermore, she initiated the IADIS conference for Sustainability, Green IT and Education. Currently, she conducts research locally and globally in information systems, HCI, usability, the internet, sustainability, green IT, cloud computing, social networking and teaching and learning.

Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente, The Netherlands. His specialty is social media for communication and organisation. As Conference Co-Chair of the IADIS multi-conference, he initiated the conferences of IADIS International Conference on Web-Based Communities and Social Media, IADIS International Conference on E-Society, IADIS International Conference on Mobile Learning and IADIS International Conference on International Higher Education. He is a Professor at the UNESCO Institute for Eastern European Studies in Educational Technology and he is Adjunct Professor at Curtin University in Perth, Australia.

Editorial to the special issue's theme: 'Social media for life-long learning'. Typical for life-long learning is the fact that it anticipates to to-morrow's reality that we do not know yet. In this sense, the 'learning' has a double meaning. Its first element offers professionals to change their focus of expertise during their career several times. Reorienting one's field of interest often has the danger that it meanders too much due to accidental demands in the job setting. Its risk is that finally the professional has not sufficient convergence in his/her focus of attention (Festinger, 1954). Learning then

implies ‘catching up’ your colleagues’ speed of learning, even if it is their first discipline and if they mastered this new discipline already a long time before. The second element, the continuous agenda to orient a working professional into directions that they never even thought before.

A good example is a worker who had a formal education in domain A and gradually starts integrating notions s/he developed as a hobby or during volunteer working in domain B before. The intriguing question is how social media help in this second element; to what extent is this person applying the expertise in domain A unto domain B or vice versa? If we articulate this problem in a formal sense, it may be quite a complicated question. However, given the fact that the concerned person has his/her prime responsibility in domain A, it is not difficult to see that the major concern of the ‘application’ process will be that the regularities in domain A will be respected. In other words, in the given situation we say, ‘B is applied to A’. In fact, the success of this cross fertilisation will encourage the ‘learning practitioner’ to undertake more domains other than B to be applied to A. The term ‘boundary spanner’ that was reserved for special cases is now a commodity for professionalising anyway.

Prospect, introspect and retrospect on the articles in this special issue for *IJCEELL* (life-long learning); weblogs evolve into social networks for promoting lifelong learners’ development. Personal learning environments enables learners to explore and build their own spaces on the web to organise their own learning: publish and share their views on the studied topics and comment to each other. A remarkable tendency is that learners tend to be less shy than in the past; their ideas and work will be posted publicly rather than ‘under cover’. This illustrates the current open culture of blogging, wikis and social networking penetrated rather deep in students’ mentality. For students the social networks have a wider role than ‘meeting’ their peer students; it is a ‘hub’ to the stage of applying for jobs, finding colleagues and customers. In other words: the social media exemplify the life-long learning attitude. Interesting to have the research and vision of 14 authors from seven different countries, Puerto Rico, USA, Israel, UK, Turkey, Mexico and Jordan, collected in this special issue.

In the first article, ‘The change from weblogs to social networks to develop lifelong learners’, Noraida Domínguez-Flores brings the following questions:

- 1 What are the characteristics of weblogs that support the development of lifelong learners?
- 2 What are the characteristics of social networks that support the development of lifelong learners?
- 3 How does the use of weblogs compare with the use of social networks as tools to develop lifelong learners?

Her answers show that students continuously participate through social networks, and it is easier to teach a new way of using them rather than imposing a technology they are not going to use later. Noraida Domínguez-Flores claims it is important that faculty members learn to identify the technologies where students are currently interacting, communicating, sharing, and creating new knowledge, to use them as their learning resources. The fact that students are meanwhile using a technology should not be the only reason to decide which one to use; the reality is that it is necessary to consider the possibilities the technology offers to develop an effective learning environment, where diverse activities can be performed.

'Learning' has undergone a revolutionary connotation lately (from 'transfer' into 'development') also mentoring has shifted from the more naïve meaning as 'someone being led by another person' to the more intriguing understanding that it is a two-sided process (Suls and Wheeler, 2000). Quite obviously nowadays young mentees enter an organisation as experts in a certain field of like ICT. It is then the mentor's task to provoke the mentee to give up scruples and start thinking how to make these new techniques subservient to the existing enterprise (Burke and Lawrence, 2011). As we know from ICT evolutions in the last three decades, this is not a straightforward process of emulation or integration; in fact, it is a process of transforming existing practices into a totally newly-apprehended way of working (Dillenbourg and Tchounikine, 2007). We may imagine that mentoring is a delicate job; it demands both from the mentor and the mentee to develop new skills and strategies as also the needs and necessities evolve. In the article 'Mentoring 2.0: how PR educators use social media to create and maintain relationships with students', Rowena Briones and Melissa Janoske carried out in-depth interviews with educators revealed that they believed that social media help to perform a better guidance through a less formal correspondence and a more altruistic attitude of sharing resources. In summary, the authors address the issue of meeting new roles of mentoring and coaching soon because the ICT tools have opened the road to combine the more functional – with the more socio-emotional interaction.

The article 'Student-teacher relationship in the Facebook era: the student perspective' focuses on student-teacher relationships that may finally prove to be quite essential for students' academic development and their broader satisfaction as well. Arnon Hershkovitz and Alona Forkosh-Baruch showed in the study findings that there was not an abundant communication between the Israeli students and teachers via Facebook; however, once the communication emerged it proved to be useful. Typically, students see Facebook as an estate for sharing emotions amongst youngsters and only allow teachers to enter if they tend to befriend in the f2f condition. The tendency for taking its communicative benefits was more dominant than the threat of negative side effects. As conclusion we may say that indeed institutions are cautious on allowing teacher-student communication. However, the right for free communication seems to win in this respect.

In the fourth article, 'Using social networks as a catalyst for change in global higher education marketing and recruiting', Joanne M. Kuzma and Warren Wright share with us their findings: social media created euphoria in the fields of marketing and advertising, it is now clear that it just caused a drastic need to change; no longer marketing is just 'spotting your customer'. Social media urge marketeers to start dialogues with potential customers, or even better; to start dialogues to those who will actually meet the customers. We are still in the phase that a large part of the marketeers have become lazy as they still believe that by exploring social media they have found the silver bullet and it is not. Social media so far triggered the wrong attitude in marketeers; but also social media are still struggling with early hiccups like unsure life cycles and vulnerable to hacking and privacy issues. The same principles and standards can be used to recruit new students. Its main message is that slowly higher education institutes are recognising the potential of using social networking for their scouting, marketing and recruiting students. As additional remark the authors claim that at the moment those who are responsible for the recruitment are not yet qualified to use the Web 2.0 yet and that universities should be rubricised in geographic and ethnographic areas in order to make more precise predictions.

In the fifth article, ‘Challenges facing higher education: faculty’s concerns about technologies of social media’, Sehnaz Baltaci Goktalay highlights that social media provide outstanding and new opportunities to higher education; however, it will bring some threats and risks as well. While traditionally the challenge was to enable the spread of knowledge and understanding, higher education is now pushed to seek its added value to the more intricate processes of learning (von Glaserfeld, 1995). If looked at the venue of large scale, realistic simulation programmes like SimCity and Flight Simulator, it is clear that in terms of experiential learning those computer programmes offer an ideal bridge between the book and the real urban planning and the real airplane piloting task. Simulation programmes do not supplant the more traditional instructional events; they just complement it and help the student in the delicate transition from receptive learning to experiential learning in semi-realistic environments. One step further than the visual/auditive like in SimCity and Flight Simulator is the extra sensations like the kinaesthetic, haptic and tactic feedback. It is not the question if these programmes like the recent sophisticated business games will conquer its place in university curricula; it is the question how these simulations need to be embedded in surrounding instructions, theoretical lessons and encompassing competencies.

In the fifth article of this special issue the focus is on students’ approach to social networking in educational contexts and Sehnaz Baltaci Goktalay to answer if and how elementary school students use the Web 2.0. It turned out that five types of learners could be distinguished: viewers, communicators, collaborators, information seekers and producers. The main conclusion was that students tend to take the more passive (receptive) role in social media arrangements. The conclusion is that we all should find better ways to stimulate students for taking a more active stand and re-conquer ownership on their learning. Indeed the term co-designer may be appropriate here.

Tutoring has been the overall metaphor for sophisticated teaching for a long time, even in the era of so-called intelligent tutoring systems in the eighties and nineties. The rationale behind this concept, if students’ prior knowledge, misconceptions and learning style were identify, it would be possible to arrange an ideal adaptive learning dialogue. Though essentially it is a correct and complete assumption, its main rationale did not hold. At the end of the nineties the euphoria on the flexibility of hypermedia won from the ambition to build a satisfying model of the student. As the international community jumped on the non-discursive style of browsing according to the hypertext metaphor, we see nowadays (12 years later) a strong demand for conversational interaction styles like underlying the ones in tutoring systems thirty years before.

In the article ‘Affective tutoring systems in a learning social network’, Ramón Zatarain-Cabada and María Lucía Barrón-Estrada question, if is whether we can undertake system-generated meta-communication to moderate web-based communities and social network environments. In the case of regular formal education the needs and opportunities are quite dissimilar from the case of corporate learning as well as from societal learning processes.

Regular education faces the combined instructional- and developmental learning goals: instructional in terms of declarative and procedural knowledge, skills, strategies and learning styles; while developmental learning mainly focus on cognitive repertoire and higher level thinking skills similar to once are available in the complex problem solving.

The last article of this special issue ‘Social networks impact: the case of Jordan youth’ focus on social networks as spaces for informal teacher professional development. Ibrahim Al-Oqily, Ghazi Alkhatib, Ahmad Khasawneh and Marwah Alian open the awareness that virtual learning communities are evolving all the time. Its role stretches across several stakeholders like teachers and school leaders as well. In this article, the professional growth in teachers and in teacher forums is regarded. Ibrahim Al-Oqily, Ghazi Alkhatib, Ahmad Khasawneh and Marwah Alian concluded that the notion of social networks has triggered behavioural scientists to the idea that the inter-personal cognitive awareness is of greater importance than imagined earlier. It is even the ideal place for letting new conceptual disciplines to start.

Overall conclusions

As a conclusion of this special issue as a whole we may say that social media help the various stakeholders like students, teachers and administrators to regain ownership on their learning. This is in line with the ongoing trend to shift education from its transfer into its developmental role. Remaining question is if and how teachers will reposition themselves into learning communities for mutual learning to cope with this rather drastic transition. Social networks have been acknowledged to play a decisive role in describing and predicting human relationships, group formation, power distance, etc. As we have now web-based implementations of very large-scale social networks, it is essential that research on network structure concentrates on the question if network formalisms are valid representations of the underlying social structures.

References

- Burke, K. and Lawrence, B. (2011) ‘The accidental mentorship: library managers’ roles in student employees’ academic professional lives’, *College & Research Libraries*, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp.99–103.
- Dillenbourg, P. and Tchounikine, P. (2007) ‘Flexibility in macro-scripts for computer-supported collaborative learning’, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp.1–13.
- Festinger, L. (1954) ‘A theory of social comparison processes’, *Human Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp.117–140.
- Suls, J. and Wheeler, L. (2000) ‘A selective history of classic and neo-social comparison theory’, *Handbook of Social Comparison*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York.
- von Glaserfeld, E. (1995) *Radical Constructivism: A Way of Knowing and Learning*, Routledge Falmer, London.