Editorial

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Biographical notes: Qiyun Wang is an Associate Professor in the Academic Group of Learning Science and Technologies at National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests include social media for teaching and learning, online learning, Web 2.0 tools, web-based learning environment design, and interactive learning.

Recently, there are a lot of discussions about the promise of using social media for learning. Some believe that the use of social media has great potential for teaching and learning as it enables students to discuss and communicate with others, while others caution that social media tools are primarily designed for socialisation and commercial purposes. The promise of social media for teaching and learning is questionable (Friesen and Lowe, 2012). Certain researchers take a more compromised stance and believe that the design research approach (Plomp, 2010) should be followed to deepen the "understanding of underlying features of informal learning and the design of supportive (social media) tools that promote it" [Ravenscroft et al., (2012), p.235].

Included in this issue are seven academic articles that explore the use of social media for teaching and learning. Five are empirical studies, one theoretical paper, and one literature review. The empirical studies were conducted in different contexts with varied participants: one was with school teachers, one with graduate students, and the other three with K-12 students. Some of the studies had positive findings regarding the use of social media for learning (such as the articles written by Wusk and Kingsley, and by Jiang and Wang), while some reported potential risks or issues of using social media in the learning process (such as the ones written by Kite, Gable, and Filippelli, and by Wang).

In the article written by Plomp, he continues the topic about preparing education for the information society, but focusing on implementation challenges. In his first article published in the first issue of the journal, he argued that the society had changed from the industrial society to the information society because of the rapid development and use of technology. In his another article published in the second issue, he further discussed curricular challenges by presenting two key aspects of the new curriculum: the interactive character of teaching and learning processes, and the interdependent components of the curriculum. Both aspects affect the integration of 21st century skills into the curriculum. This is the third also the last article of the series of three.

In this article, Plomp focuses his discussions on implementation challenges. He argues that introducing 21st century skills is a process of change, and a number of factors

might influence the implementation of 21stcentury skills. Among these factors stand out advocacy from the central and/or school administration, strong leadership and teacher advocacy, including the creation of professional learning communities amongst teachers. He believes that using information and communication technology (ICT) can influence the sustainability of innovative pedagogy, and a model for introducing pedagogical use of ICT in schools is presented in the article.

The internet affords users wonderful opportunities to get useful information and communicate with others. However, as a double-edged sword it may have unpredictable risks to young users as well. In the second article, Kite, Gable, and Filippelli present middle and high school students' knowledge of potential risks, appropriate use of the internet, and their behaviours on social networking sites. In this study, they found that students did not recognise the risk associated with electronic forms of communication. An alarming number of students had admitted to being bullied in school. Also, parental involvement overall in monitoring of their children's internet activities was low. Moreover, they also found that parental involvement decreased as students moved from middle school to high school.

In the third article about establishing cross-generational literacy pairings for e-mentoring, Wusk and Kingsley connected two classes (15 high school seniors and 20 third grade elementary students) from two different school districts by using the free video VoIP programme Skype. In this study, the high school seniors in a group were identified as 'at risk' or 'the failures of the school system'; while the elementary students in the other group had a high need to increase their literacy skills. After having online video conferencing for a period of five months, the inter-generational pairings moved beyond the intended literacy/connection focus as motivation increased and relationship developed for students on both ends of the screen. This study found that the student engagement, leadership and connectedness were increased by participating in this study. What happened in an exemplary pair is also described in detail in the article.

Teachers have the responsibility to educate students to live and work in the changing world. Constantly updating teachers' professional knowledge hence becomes essential (Wang and Lu, 2012). In the new information society, teachers should not only seek help from their peers within the same school, but also solicit support from other educators around the world. In the fourth article written by Trust, an online course about training teachers how to use professional learning network tools was developed. After completing the course, the participants were more likely to use the tools to ask for help from a global network of educators, and the participating teachers reported an increase in comfort and frequency of using the tools to seek help. The result of this study implies that teachers can be trained to more effectively use technological tools like social media to improve their professional development.

Microblogs (such as Twitter) have become a new form of rapidly distributing short messages over the internet in recent years. Similar to other social media tools, the primary purpose of using microblogs is for information sharing. However, it has great potential for teaching and learning as well. In the article written by Wang, he analysed 58 academic papers published in Chinese journals in the recent years. He found that the majority of the studies were exploratory research, and the minority was empirical. Most studies were conducted in higher educational settings in the disciplines of humanities, with a small number of them conducted in natural sciences. He also found that students' use of microblogs was influenced by three key factors: microblog literacy, microblog usability, and pedagogical issues.

In the article written by Jiang and Wang, Google Docs (now is Google Drive) was used to support primary school students when they were co-editing their peers' Chinese compositions. The study found that peer editing was able to improve the students' composition writing quality. The students were able to make improvement significantly in four aspects: spelling, punctuation, grammar, and use of good words and phrases. Also, this study confirmed that peer editing encouraged collaborative learning and provided valuable opportunities for learners to receive social support and scaffolding from peers.

Collaborative learning has become increasingly important in the new information society as work becomes more complicated and it is hardly possible for an individual to complete a sophisticated task alone (Wang, 2009). However, collaboration does not naturally happen in a group, and technological support is often needed. In the last article written by Rafferty, a case study of using virtual team tools like Google Sites or discussion forums to support students' group work was conducted to investigate students' experiences and perceptions of group work outcomes. The study found that the participants were more satisfied with group work when virtual team tools were incorporated. The students could more easily schedule online meetings and had lower logistic burdens after using the tools.

The collected articles in this issue demonstrate different ways of using social media and also discuss various issues involved in using social media for teaching and learning in different countries (the USA, the Netherlands, China, and Singapore). I hope that these articles would arouse researchers' interest in investigating the pros and cons of using social media for effective teaching and learning and advance the research in this controversial area.

References

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