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.

Facebook in principal is a social networking site, on which people can share information, make new friends, or keep contact with old friends. Because of the feature of allowing users to easily share and discuss ideas, Facebook has great potential to be used as an educational tool (Wang et al., 2012). Many empirical studies have been conducted and published in journals, and mixed findings have been reported. For instance, Mazer et al. (2009) found that using Facebook could promote the relationship between students and students or between students and the teacher, while Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) identified that students who used Facebook performed worse than those who did not use. More examples of educational use of Facebook can be found in Timonidou et al. (2013) and Yang et al. (2011).

As any other ICT tool, Facebook has pros and cons in terms of its educational affordances. Investigating on if it is useful for education is not that meaningful, but on what really happens in a Facebook-based learning environment and how to address emerging issues like privacy and identity is more important. In this special issue about using Facebook as an educational tool, six articles were included. They explore various ways of using Facebook and report on the diverse phenomena and issues emerged from the process of using Facebook for teaching and learning.

The article written by Wakefield, Warren, Alsobrook and Knight investigates students' perceptions of using Facebook and Twitter in higher education. In the first phase, they surveyed the students by using Likert-scale and open-ended questions. In the second phase, they interviewed some of the participating students, and in the last phase, they analysed the blog reflections. After analysing the data, common themes were summarised. They concluded that social media might facilitate a sense of social learning community and significantly more so if students were already familiar with and using the social media tool. However, many students had concerns with privacy if Facebook or Twitter was to be used in the classroom.

In the study conducted by Kenney, Kumar and Hart, Facebook was used as an educational community of practice by 16 online doctoral students to communicate, recognise common challenges, lend each other support, and share goals. After using the online community for 14 months, the posts in the shared Facebook group were analysed

and common themes were generated. This study found that knowledge sharing, support, and problem solving were the main themes emerged from the community. This paper further elaborated on the topics of discuss under each theme.

People in Facebook may not use their real names or identities. However, their status updates or information published on the wall may still reveal their real identities. Users, in particular young students, must develop cyber wellness awareness so that they can protect themselves in such virtual spaces. In the article written by Hughes and Morrison, young students (ages 14–15) were asked to determine what kind of persons the other author users might be based on the status updates posted. After which, students created a poem each based on their own status updates and reflected on what kind of personae they projected on Facebook. The study found that adolescents' identities could be positively shaped through the inclusion of social media in the classroom, and social media enabled the students to reflect on their online and offline identities. However, some students rejected the use of Facebook indicating that it was a distraction.

In the article written by Ritter and Delen, they surveyed 200 undergraduate students on the use of Facebook in their academic and social lives with an aim to find out: how the students maintained relationship using Facebook; if they were concerned with privacy; what activities they were engaged in; and how they used Facebook for academic activities. They found that the participants were willing to use Facebook in their coursework. However, they disliked the idea of blending their social and academic lives on Facebook. They mainly used Facebook to socialise with others by following them, but more than half of them had experience of using Facebook for academic purposes. This paper offers suggestions on how educators can integrate Facebook features into their courses to minimise students' concerns.

Kurtz investigated using the Facebook group as a space to support interactive and collaborative learning. A number of 66 graduate students took part in the research by using the Facebook Group to share information and discuss ideas. The result of the study showed that the students were engaged in interaction and collaboration in the Facebook group as well as appreciating its contribution to their own personal learning experience. Most of them would be willing to use the Facebook groups as a learning space in future courses.

Facebook is an open environment, which allows developers to add new apps freely. In the paper written by McCarthy, an app called collaborative application for education (Café) was developed to provide institutions with an established, structured and dedicated e-learning environment that met the needs of modern-day tertiary students and teaching staff. This paper describes the aims of the app, its interface design principles, and the key design components. This paper implies that educators may use existing functions of Facebook, but can also develop new apps to meet specific educational needs.

The collected articles in this issue demonstrate different ways of using Facebook and common themes emerged in using Facebook for teaching and learning in different contexts such as in USA, Canada, Australia, and Israel. I hope that these articles would arouse researchers' interest in investigating the effective use of social media as an educational tool and advance the research in this emerging area.

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