Social Media Tools for Teachers:

A Professional Development Proposal

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The statistics are staggering — 98 percent of ages 18 to 24 use social media. Among all adult online users, the usage penetration percentage is 91. (Experian Simmons, 2011). Among wired teens, 73 percent use social networking websites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Clearly, social media has entered the mainstream, and "it is imperative that we understand the realities of children's lives with media." (Gutnick, Robb, Takeuchi, & Kotler, 2011, p. 8). For teachers, ignoring the ubiquity of social media could be a missed opportunity for enhanced learning. Rather than prohibiting social media from the classroom, one can argue for its incorporation as a potential learning tool. As evidenced in the usage statistics, students are already motivated to use the tools. However, educators may need training to recognize the tools and learn how to use them. To be authentic, that training should not just deliver content. Instead it should enhance and encourage self-directed lifelong learning, supported by a community of practice.

We propose a professional development (PD) for elementary school teachers, which takes a social constructivist approach to social media tool understanding as it may relate to classroom instruction. The hands-on, collaborative environment proposed in this approach should allow education peers who participate to experiment and discuss classroom application, and to sustain that discussion and self-directed learning through an online community, all of which could lead to sustained incorporation and successful practice.

Literature Review

Plenty of research studies have proposed that the most effective way to develop and conduct PD for educators is to make it "continuing, active, social, and related to practice"

(Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 703). Researchers argue for PD opportunities where "knowledge is gathered … through practice and shared communication" (Armfield, 2011, p. 115) in an ongoing learning process. However, in reality many training and PD sessions for teachers remain short-term and didactic, focused on one-way, one-time delivery of content without authentic engagement.

Because social media as a learning tool is a relatively new concept with a dearth of focused research, this literature review encompasses a wider approach to PD. It focuses on incorporating participation and situated learning into training, and the natural path that leads to developing a PD with social constructivism at its core.

Making PD Participatory and Action-oriented

According to Knowles (1990), one of andragogy's tenets is that adults learn most effectively when they participate in and experience knowledge. A PD developed to encourage participation should trigger the experiential learning cycle, where active experience and observation lead to reflection, concept formulation, and action through application and testing (Papa & Papa, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009). In addition, scaffolded participation could encourage sustained engagement.

In the proposed PD, we suggest that learners first participate by learning the tools in a hands-on, action-oriented training. This active participation requires a mental commitment and application of knowledge in order to show proficiency in the PD's performance tasks. But the learning only begins there. To develop understanding through the group, the PD encourages learners to build on the experience by sharing ideas with peers in the training class, initially through face-to-face discussion, then expanding that participation through an online community of all participants who've taken the training. Truly engaged and proficient participants also may

serve as future instructors for the training, thereby extending and activating the learning even more. This participatory theory aligns with constructivism, where learners build their own knowledge.

Incorporating Situated Learning into PD

As already discussed, the proposed PD incorporates an online community as an extension of learning beyond the face-to-face training session. It is a critical component for authentic learning because, as Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed, situated learning in communities of practice enables individuals to work with others on genuine problems within their profession. Communities of practice are also an inviting environment for self-directed and collaborative learning (Monaghan, 2010) as well as guidance and feedback on application of learning (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009), all of which could help sustain the PD's effect on the learners. An added benefit of educators actively using communities of practice is that it may also help instructional designers better understand how professionals continue learning (Webster-Wright, 2009), which could improve PD design and creation in general.

A Social Constructivist Approach to PD

Researchers often link instructional technology with a constructivist approach to learning, because the tools encourage learners to build or construct knowledge. By extension, the instructional approach of technology training could affect sustained incorporation into a classroom. If trainers merely teach the skills to use the technology (i.e., according to a behaviorist-inspired learning model), teachers may use the tool but not realize its potential for deeper integration. Matzen and Edmunds (2007) propose that when training teachers using a constructivist approach may encourage them to use the tool in the same way with their learners, thereby more fully leveraging the capabilities. Additionally, the social constructivist approach

opens the door to collaboration and interaction that supports group learning, persuades learners to take responsibility for the direction of their learning (Ruey, 2010), and dovetails with the tenets of adult learning theory. As such, applying a social constructivist approach to this PD is a practical, situational approach that should yield evidence of success.

Details of Social Media Tools for Teachers PD

In order to meet established goals and foster an optimal collaborative learning environment, Social Media Tools for Teachers encompasses scaffolded sessions and interactive activities. These modules integrate Web 2.0 tools and allow teachers to experience both creating collaborative spaces and integrating them in daily lessons. Because the social media tools are not content-specific and most age groups have some experience with the various sites, the PD is not grade-level specific; teachers and administrators from all levels of elementary school are encouraged to attend.

The two-and-a-half-hour PD session is organized to promote the following understandings: Participants will understand four free existing Web 2.0 tools that can be used in positive ways in the classroom, and will learn strategies to enhance instruction and increase collaborative learning opportunities for themselves and their students. Specifically, through mini sessions, teachers will learn how to use the social tools Twitter, Today's Meet, Google Moderator, and Wikispaces in order to help extend learning outside the classroom and into channels that may appeal to today's students. While satisfying one technology credit to meet a district requirement, the goal for participants is to incorporate at least one Web 2.0 tool into one subject area to foster student learning or collaboration, and to share that experience with other PD participants through an online community.

Program Design: Pre-session Survey, Introduction, and Website

Before participants arrive at the proposed PD session, they will answer a short online survey about their professional and personal use of social media tools, in order for the PD facilitators to gauge their comfort and skill levels. Through the survey, participants also will have the opportunity to express impressions they have regarding use of Web 2.0 tools in the classroom.

The PD instructors will use the survey results to group the participants into homogeneous or heterogeneous mixes, which will dictate the level of detail and the speed of instruction each mini session will cover. A heterogeneous mix of participants may foster a mentoring collaboration in the small group, while a homogeneous mix may be better for whole group learning. A group of four instructors will facilitate the proposed PD, which will host no more than 25 participants at a time, allowing for smaller groupings when the PD breaks into mini sessions for each Web 2.0 tool.

The face-to-face portion of the PD will begin in a whole group setting, where instructors co-teach and lead the discussion on simple definitions of Web 2.0. At the forefront, the instructors will facilitate a discussion about any misconceptions or doubts voiced in the survey results. Topics covered might include whether or not social tools foster collaborative learning, the fact that participants may not have considered them for anything more than personal use, or the impression that social tools can get teachers into trouble when it comes to students. Facilitators should allow plenty of time for healthy debate on these topics based on the experiences of participants.

During this introduction, participants also will be informed of the PD's objectives and will be guided through a pre-designed website called Social Media Tools for Teachers (see

Figure 1 for a screenshot), which has been created specifically to help new users understand the four Web 2.0 tools the PD addresses.

Figure 1. PD website featuring Web 2.0 tool tutorials found at http://socialmediatoolsforteaching.weebly.com/ (Password: Fies)

Beyond the actual training in the PD session, the website will serve as a handy reference if more explanation is needed or participants need an overview of the PD. After the training session, participants can continue to use the site at a self-guided pace to refresh the training and find relevant information specific to the tool they plan to utilize. The website also connects them to a Social Media Tools for Teachers Wikispaces page that was created to connect the growing community of session participants in an extend learning and collaboration opportunity beyond the PD training session.

Because it is a relatively simple tool to use, the instructors will introduce Today's Meet to the whole group right after the introduction. Participants will be given an overview on how this tool can help guide organized conversations in class as well as facilitate online discussions.

Tasks to complete will include participating in the discussion as well as going through the process of creating a Today's Meet page. With multiple instructors in this session, individualized instruction will be possible if needed.

Program Design: Mini Session Rotations, Group Discussion and Reflection

After the Today's Meet session concludes, instructors will conduct each subsequent lesson with a similar outline. Predetermined groups will rotate through three more sessions, each lead by a different instructor teaching a different tool. The seating arrangement in the PD setting should maximize collaboration while still utilizing the tools, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Group seating for technology collaboration

Each of the three mini sessions will last 30 minutes, covering the tools Google Moderator, Wikispaces, and Twitter. Each mini session will include an introduction, demonstration, and participant registration, and instructors will measure success by the number of participants able to register, use, and navigate the site. While not designed to allow time for lesson integration ideas, the mini sessions will serve as a starting point to ensure access.

Participants will collaborate on lesson integration ideas later as the whole group reconvenes and in individual reflection.

After each group has rotated through all of the 30-minute mini sessions for each tool, participants will come together for a final reflection. Because participants will have learned procedures and followed detailed instructions, ideas for lesson implementation may not have been a focus in the rotations. As such, the whole group session at the end of the PD will serve as a collaborative discussion on how teachers might implement the Web 2.0 tools in their classrooms.

To allow for individual reflection, a predesigned Wikispaces community page will help foster continued collaboration. Instructors will ask participants to visit the Social Media Tools for Teachers Wikispaces page and to contribute ideas that align with the curriculum. This Wiki will serve as an organized bank of ideas where participants can share and receive feedback on their ideas using Web 2.0 tools. Teachers can post ideas based on grade level and content area. Participants can elaborate on their ideas and use the Wiki periodically to gain new ideas on how others have integrated the tools into their classrooms. One of the PD's success measures will be the number and quality of contributions to the Wikispaces community after the PD.

As additional reflection for instructors and to better serve ensuing sessions of the PD, a short survey incorporating Google Moderator will be conducted to gauge participant's reactions towards the PD as well as gather data on basic Web 2.0 knowledge.

Evaluation Plan and Conclusions

The Social Media Tools for Teachers PD is a one-time face-to-face session but the Wikispaces page will serve as a perpetual resource where participants can share and collaborate. Evaluation will come immediately following the PD mini-session rotations to ensure

accessibility and tool use, and in the form of contributions to the Wiki to ensure lesson integration.

The rotations through mini sessions will help meet the short-term objective of Web 2.0 tool technical mastery. Instructors will direct participants to sign up for each tool, begin a page in Wikispaces, start a room in Today's Meet, set up a series in Google Moderator, and Tweet and Retweet using Twitter. Measurement of long-term objectives will be more complex and subjective. Instructors will ask participants to post their Web 2.0 tools integration experiences on the Social Media Tools for Teachers Wikispaces page. Their projects and classroom use may showcase implementations with small groups or school-wide projects. Posting on the Wiki will give the PD instructors evidence of use and allow instructors to showcase others' authentic projects to future PD participants. Evidence from the Wiki will also inform instructors if a specific tool is being underutilized. Evidence from discussion spaces will help instructors evaluate why the tool is underutilized, allowing for adjustments to be made to the actual PD agenda.

One more opportunity for continued engagement is inviting participants to return to future PDs to teach the mini sessions for tools with which they have experienced the most successful implementation in the classroom. This will offer an opportunity to speak to actual projects and classroom use, lending greater authenticity to the PD. If for example, a teacher has had successful implementation with Google Moderator, he or she might return and teach that session and share experiences with the class.

The PD's objectives are simple: Participants should leave with the basic knowledge of how to use four Web 2.0 tools. The sessions will teach set-up and basic navigation and ensure future access. Perhaps the greater benefit of the PD will come as teachers begin to utilize the

tools and share with others. The community of learners may prove to be where most learning will take place. To model for the participants, the PD curriculum itself will integrate the Web 2.0 tools as much as possible, using Google Moderator in the surveys, and linking the others' Tweets and conversations from Today's Meet in the Wikispaces page. Participants will have multiple opportunities to use and practice with the tools before they leave the PD so that future use feels more attainable and supports participants' self-efficacy.

As previously mentioned, situated learning within a community of practice most benefits the adult learner. This proposed PD should supply participants with the knowledge base necessary to create and grow within their profession by utilizing Web 2.0 tools. The intention is to create lasting communities of practice where learners share ideas, voice concerns, and learn from one another.

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