

Using the F2F Classroom as a Forum to Share Discoveries from Informal Technology Channels

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Abstract—Today there are many learning modalities from which to choose, formal and informal, in and out of the classroom. When learning activities are structured to employ useful affordances of the two types, a complementary mix resulting in innovative, engaged learning can be achieved.

Index Terms—Social media, hybrid learning, discovery learning, authentic learning, community of learners

In a recent class I taught in South Korea, we took advantage of the wired infrastructure and the social media channels for discovery learning outside of the classroom. Once in the classroom, we contextualized, scaffolded and elaborated upon what students had discovered on their own employing social constructivist, collaborative learning.

By structuring leaning activities to make the most of the educational opportunities offered by the informal and formal classroom contexts, authentic learning tasks were pursued outside the classroom while engagement resulted from interactions with the professor and other students during classroom discussion.

The class was a new course offered through the Mass Communications Department at Sogang University on social media and social change focusing on women's issues. Students received assignments requiring them to monitor social media channels, thereby involving them in primary research. A presidential election was underway that ultimately resulted in the election of South Korea's first female president, Park Geun Hye. There was a standing assignment to monitor election-related social media networks and report on changes in the candidates' status in each class.

There were also two major assignments in class: the first to analyze the use of social media tools related to the betterment of women's status in South Korea or internationally. Students found and analyzed a campaign available on the web and through informal social network channels. The criteria for analysis were based on lectures and readings related to attributes and uses of social media including cross cultural aspects as well as women's issues in developing and developed nations. Students wrote papers and presented their

findings to the class through PowerPoint presentations allowing them to demonstrate artifacts and material features of the chosen campaigns including website presence and information architecture, Youtube videos, Facebook communications, etc. Students freely questioned one another and commented upon topics suggested by the presentation related either to women's issues or social media use. They placed their PowerPoint presentations on our classroom website for future access and further reference by other students.

For the second major assignment, students selected a campaign of their choice – created or preexisting – and developed social media strategies with which to implement it. Again, they wrote a paper and a PowerPoint presentation to share with the class. Through their proposed campaigns they presented an impressive array of solutions to remedy many of South Korea - and the world's – current social ills including discrimination in the workplace, unequal division of household labor, inadequate support for the children of working parents, inhumane standards of beauty, and the need to better access to resources for sexual health. As in the last assignment, students freely questioned one another and commented upon topics suggested by the presentation. Through these presentations, students demonstrated that they had absorbed the basic tenets of women's social change campaigns and that they knew how to effectively and creatively use social media to disseminate information and cultivate community.

Education in South Korea typically involves memorization of professor lectures and texts. In our classroom discussions, students spoke openly about their political opinions and analysis of the political events of the day. The open discussion, critical thinking, and creativity displayed by students in this class are not typical of South Korean students' usual classroom behavior.

Why did this class have these effects on student learning and experience? As previously mentioned, it was essentially a hybrid class that made the most of student access to South Korea's wired environment outside of class and used strategies to make the most of our face-to-face time. Activities were assigned requiring students to use social media channels for discovery and authentic learning in what was essentially an exploratory learning environment (Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland, 2005). The authentic learning activities used in this

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class involved following the evidence provided by social media networks to document a presidential election unfolding in time, analyzing a real campaign, and creating a simulated campaign. Students had the opportunity to do primary research on the internet and have the excitement of sharing it in the classroom, with engagement resulting from knowledge sharing, social constructivism, and learning through examples provided by interactions with others through classroom discussion. A community of learners developed (Ormrod, 1999).

As our world becomes increasingly wired, evidence of many current and unfolding events is freely available through informal channels. Through hybrid learning combining exploratory learning in informal, technological arenas with learning through working with others in the formal classroom, exhilarating - and non-routine - learning experiences can be possible.

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- Deborah Elizabeth Cohen** was born August 2, 1952 in New York City. She received a BA in English literature from Reed College in Portland, Oregon USA in 1973, an MA in drama from New York University in New York City USA in 1976, a PhD in computing technology in education from the School of Computer and Information Sciences at Nova Southeastern University in Davie, Florida, USA in 2005, and a PMP (Project Management Professional certification) from the Project Management Institute in 2010.
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