Why Teachers Like Facebook or Two Teacher Educators, One Facebook Group and 200 Teacher Trainees

What are the consequences when participatory media is used in learning environments? How will traditions of formal education interact with, and shape, the use of participatory media? These questions serve as points of departure for my PhD-project “New Arenas for Learning: Teacher Trainees’ Use of Participatory Media as Tools for Learning”, in which I study teacher trainees’ use of participatory media within the learning environment of a Swedish teacher education.

Currently I am conducting the first out of three planned studies at the selected Swedish teacher education. While the main corpus of previous research suggests that Facebook to date has been of little educational use (Hew, 2011; Madge et al, 2009; Selwyn, 2009), some studies highlight the educational potential of a tool that most students are using frequently and the possibilities to support new forms of communication between students and teachers (Lampe et al, 2011). The current study explores how, and why, a class of Swedish teacher trainees use a Facebook Group as a platform for learning and communication related to their education. Informed by a socio-cultural perspective focusing on mediated action as the main analytical unit (Wertsch, 1998), an ethnographical method is used to gather and analyse the conversations taking place in a Facebook Group consisting of a larger group of students (200+) and two educators. The conversations included in the study are taking place over a period of two months, April and May 2012. The students are doing their second semester of the Swedish teacher education, studying to become pre-school teachers. Following the tradition of ethnography, observational notes and textual and visual data are collected from the Group. In the final part of the study, semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected participants to gain further insights of specific issues regarding how students and educators use (or don’t use) the Facebook Group as an arena for learning.

The present study is focusing on the teacher trainees’ use of the Group, but in this paper I intend to discuss the views and experiences of the teacher educators.

The Group was initially created by the two educators, meaning that the Group is neither an example of a formal online learning environment (like a VLE) created by tutors, nor is it a learning environment organized by students without any educators. This Facebook Group is instead an example of educators and students using participatory media together to support learning, communication and ultimately, the process of creating the identities of both educators and students (cf. Erstad et al, 2009).

The following questions are addressed in the paper:

Why did the educators create the Facebook Group?
How do the educators appropriate the Facebook Group as an arena for learning together with the teacher trainees?
How is the Facebook Group used in relation to the formal online learning environment used at the teacher education?
References


Madge, C., Meek, J., Wellens, J., & Hooley, T. (2009). Facebook, social integration and informal learning at university: 'It is more for socialising and talking to friends about work than for actually doing work'. *Learning, Media and Technology, 34*(2), 141-155. doi: 10.1080/17439880902923606
