Creating an Online Community of Teachers and the Librarian for Professional Development through Social Networking Tools

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Abstract
In this article the author proposes that online social networking tools can be used effectively for the professional development of teachers as well as librarians. The authorized academic centers like ASCs (Academic Staff College, UGC) have to explore the availability and feasibility of application of such tools for the professional development. Hence one can reduce cost as well as it gives flexibility of time, space and help the professional development as per the needs of teachers. Teachers can be connected online by experts. The expertise from any corner of the world can be utilized because of its online nature.

Keywords: Social Networking, Professional Development, Web 2.0.

Introduction
Teaching faculty is the most important asset of any educational system “Many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air” said the poet Thomas Gray. It is the aim and end of education that flowers should not blush unseen and waste their sweetness. Every teacher must bring out the potential of every student. Professional development will enable the educators to develop suitable teaching strategies as per the need of the students. Professional development deepens ones own knowledge. It should also provide knowledge about teaching and learning process. The content of professional development should match the curriculum which the institution follows. Today, teachers face a diverse group of students who are different in caste, culture and learning environment.

The purpose of this paper is to examine online social networking tools and Web 2.0 technologies in the light of their application in creating online communities in teacher education, training library professionals and librarians.

Online Professional Development
Technology today has taken over everything including the way we remain connected, and the process of education cannot be left untouched by this change. The education may be pre-service or in-service. Education has progressed far beyond mere face-to-face and classroom teaching. The new ‘in’ thing is the virtual classroom and using technology to impart e-learning in institutes. This technology can be used for professional development of teachers and librarians. Teaching is one of the noblest professions. The great Indian heritage looked teachers as gurus who opened minds of their students to a world of knowledge. The librarians are considered as teachers of teachers. All over the world librarian is also considered as a teaching faculty because of the nature of providing information. Hence the online professional development is applicable to librarian also.

Online teacher professional development (OTPD) has many potential benefits for teachers, and the government. Its greatest potential benefit should be the improvement of student learning, as is the case for all forms of professional development. “Online professional development, when it is done well, has the opportunity to change teachers’ practice,” said National Academies Teacher Advisory Council (TAC) member and planning committee Co-chair Lyn Le Countryman of the Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Iowa, “and we know that teachers’ practice is the most important factor impacting student achievement.” Rose concurred, saying “Experience is the encapsulation of practice. I believe that those data, collected by a whole bunch of folks, suggest that teacher practice is probably the most important thing that we can improve to improve kids’ lives.”

The professional development helps to develop

- 24X7 access( anywhere anytime)
• suppleness and resourcefulness
• community network among teachers and across groups
• improvement of teacher retention through their professional and intellectual development

Online teacher professional development models provide high quality learning opportunities. Teachers have access to experts in a given field. They are able to collaborate and communicate online with others. Online learning allows time for reflection, expression of one’s feelings and for discourse with peers. It allows for flexibility in scheduling, timing, and the development of one’s own learning spaces. However, in our country social networking tools are not used for the professional development of teachers. It is unclear as to what is the required depth and scope of OTPD that will allow for real shifts in practice that have an impact on our learners.

Need for Online Professional Development of Teachers
Very little research has been done on the effects of online professional development on teachers and the Librarians. For that matter, not much is known about the impact of professional development on teachers in general. The effect of online professional development on teachers at different points in their careers remains an open issue. We need to know from teachers at all levels in the professional career what helps and what they need in professional development as per their experience and knowledge level. It is also observed that in India UGC and many institutions (Potential for Excellence), like academic staff colleges are providing orientation and refresher courses. The teacher attends these courses just to get the career advancement. Many a times the teacher and the Librarian like to attend short-term courses which is directly related to their curriculum and their field of work. Many a times distance, time, the geographical area where course is conducted plays a major role. A lecturer will be very happy to study if she is allowed to enroll for the course through web. The academic staff colleges should explore further what is the feasibility and the problems, effectiveness of such online programme. The growth of interactive Web technology fits in perfectly with the current professional development environment because it can reduce costs. The availability of webinar and related online-conferencing programs that enable institutions to connect teachers with speakers and authors at a fraction of the cost of holding an in-person workshop or traveling to a conference. The Indian Library Association should learn from other national associations and think of starting online professional course. Through interactive websites with blogs, Wikis, podcasts it can reach its audience.

Objectives of Online professional Development
1. To improve teachers’ understanding of learning and to change their teaching practice
2. To know whether social networking tools are effective in achieving Professional development of teachers
3. To identify the impact of online professional development on teachers practice.
4. To understand what motivates teachers to seek out online professional development opportunities

Social Networking Tools and Online Professional Development
The online course can be provided to the teachers using social networking tools such as Wikis, podcast, blogs, Facebook, voice thread, slide share, Google docs, YouTube, etc. As per the demand of teachers the professional development modules have to be designed. These modules can be accessed through the tools mentioned above. A questionnaire, an online fee back form, discussion forum, etc. will help to find the impact of these modules on the professional development of teachers.

The constructivist model of learning holds that new knowledge must be built through the socially dynamic and interpersonal interplay of experiences, beliefs, and prior knowledge each individual possesses and shares within a community of collaborative learners. In this model knowledge is the result of work of the individual to make meaning out of information and to expand individually held knowledge through the interaction of other learners in the social context of a learning community.

Through a range of activities including access to resources and information, publishing stories on the site, asking questions, having a say, access to invited guests with experience in the online environment, participants were provided with a diverse range of learning opportunities. The knowledge and skill of participants about the online environment was varied. Some had a very basic level of skills through to sophisticated questioning of the pedagogical issues associated with the online environment. Some of the key elements were planned and others unfolded as the community evolved. These included:

1. Appropriate resources: Instructional Design, professional development strategies, how to use the Web, information literacy, Models of teaching, Multiple intelligence, teaching with technology
2. Access to experts in the field
3. Forums for discussions

Most of the online tools discussed below are very user-friendly and can be incorporated into the teacher education programme without much need for any
extensive training. Teacher training activities can benefit from these tools in facilitating greater interaction and reflection on the process of teaching, in the conduct of practice lessons and field experience, as well as an understanding of theoretical foundations of education

**VoiceThread and Professional Development**

“Voice Threads might best be described as interactive media albums. They are essentially online slide shows of images, documents, or videos that enable viewers to comment on any slide (or at any point in the video) by typing, recording an audio or video comment, or drawing on the image itself. Teachers have been early adopters of the easy-to-learn technology, which has led the company to launch Ed.VoiceThread.com, a secure site just for educators and their students”, says VoiceThreads cofounder Ben Papell.

Eg: Real time book Talks from Librarians, Publishers, authors in voicethread.

The teachers will be able to comment online and this technology is easy to use. If a microphone is not available, a webcam or a text can be used for commenting. Group discussion and comments will help to brainstorming. New ideas will be generated. Presentations can be uploaded in a voice thread, videos, images, audios help to generate a real class room situation.

Free webinar on Voice thread can be broadcasted through a blog.

**Blogs, Wikis and Podcasts**

We have witnessed an increase in use of social networking tools, and collaboration among professionals through blogs, Wikis and podcasts. This can be used for the professional development of in-service teachers.

Examples of Blogs

1. AASL Blog: http://aasl.ala.org/aaslblog/ American Association of School Librarians

2. http://iflaslblog.wordpress.com/: this blog designed for the Newsletters or IFLA School Libraries and Resource Centers section

Some blogs are developed entirely for staff professional development the example are given below:

**Podcast and M-learning**

The teachers and the library professionals are very busy with day to day classroom activities. Now the education is student centered. Everything is now instant and anytime and everywhere. We moved from land line to mobile for communication. What about learning?. Podcasts can be used an online tool for professional development. Podcasts are online contents audio or video for users who wants to listen or watch when they wish. A simple mobile or a computer
desktop can be used to access the Podcasts or you can download to any MP3/MP4 system and can listen or watch on move which will be perfect for any busy educational professional of today.

- E books can be delivered to readers.
- Music Libraries can use this medium
- Videos of great personalities and their voices/speech can be converted in Podcasts.
- A teacher can record her lecture in a mobile and can be converted to Podcasts. A student who is unable to attend a lecture can use this medium.

Podcast can be used for
- teaching
- Out reach
- Promotion

Some of the examples are

The following is a list of a few libraries and affiliated organizations that are currently podcasting and offering selected podcast resources service:

- Arizona State University Libraries (podcast feed)
- Atwater Library and Computer Centre (podcast feed)
- Booktalks Quick and Simple (podcast feed)
- Boulder Public Library: Teen Webcasts
- Bridgewater State College (Selected Podcast Resources)
- Central Connecticut State University’s Elihu Burritt Library (podcast feed)
- Cheshire Public Library (podcast feed)
- Claude More Health Sciences Library University of Virginia (podcast feed)
- Cornell University Library (Selected Podcasts)
- Curtin University of Technology Library and Information Service (multiple feeds)
- Davenport Public Library (podcast feed)
- DeKalb County Public Library, GA (podcast feed)
- Denver Public Library (podcast feed)
- Dowling College Library Omnibus (podcast feed)
- Emory University Woodruff Library (podcast feed)
- GPC Decatur Campus Library (podcast feed)
- Grand Rapids Public Library
- The Infopeople Project (podcast feed)
- Kankakee Public Library (podcast feed)
- Lansing Public Library (multiple feeds) and branded version of the podcatcher Juice with our feeds preloaded!

(Ref: http://www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Podcasting)

Twitter

Twitter helps to interact and respond quickly. It is one of the tools that can be used to keep informed, to share, and to keep in tune with what friends and colleagues are thinking, doing, and learning.

Effective Use of the Twitterverse

The essence of Twitter is conversation. Libraries, however, tend to use it as a broadcast mechanism. Libraries on Twitter should encourage followers to interact with the library – ask questions, share links, re-Tweet interesting posts from others, and reply when people message you (those are prefaced with @ your account name). For professional development, look for conference coverage on Twitter. It can be an effective tool in discussing about lesson planning and preparing for practice teaching and simulated lessons.
Ning
"Ning is an online platform for users to create their own social websites and social networks. The unique feature of Ning is that anyone can create their own custom social network, for a particular topic or need, catering to specific audience" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ning

Social Book Marking Tools
Delicious (formerly delicious, pronounced “delicious”) is a social bookmark tool for storing, sharing, and discovering web content. Its tags help to retrieve similar URLs collectively. Del.icio.us lets users bookmark web pages for themselves and others check out what others bookmark, and organize bookmarks in one place for portability. Besides its well-known basic tagging and bookmarking capabilities, del.icio.us offers a built-in tool set and application programming interface (API) that let libraries do practically anything with their data. Its tag roll and link roll features – which update steadily – provide any account user with a snippet of JavaScript for any web page or blog, allowing easy access to a library’s del.icio.us links.

These social networking tools can be used for exchange ideas, update the knowledge and increase the potential of an individual. Examples of Ning used for Professional Development.

http://iteach.ning.com/

Ning’s social networking platform introduces you to some of the most engaging aspects of the read/write web: social networking (of course), user profiles, blogging, forums, photo and video sharing, and even RSS.
Libraries like the Thunder Bay Public Library, Ontario, and the Nashville Public Library have del.icio.us tag clouds rolled on their web site, so patrons can find information on any number of topics just by clicking on a tag. Other libraries like the College of New Jersey Library and University of Alberta Libraries experiment with del.icio.us link rolls to replace or supplement traditional subject guides and pathfinders (Rethlefsen).

Facebook and Libraries
Many library associations are using Facebook for communicating and for the professional development of its peers. Shane Mark (2008) Facebook is one of the most successful online social networking sites. Face Book is perceived as an online directory for providing information about people and companies with possibilities for networking and for engaging and building a library information service community. Given below is an example where ACRL is using Facebook for professional development (http://www.nlj.org.jm/acurl/papers/Monday/Mark_Shane_Scale.pdf).

There are several library-related Facebook applications that have been developed recently. Some of these are listed below:

The ability to search JSTOR from within Facebook.

LibGuides Librarian: http://www.facebook.com/apps/application.php?id=2409492434
If your library uses Springshare’s LibGuides subject guides maker for libraries...
This application allows you to display your guides in your Facebook profile and also provides a search of your library’s catalogue.

Facebook Librarian: http://www.facebook.com/apps/application.php?id=3135795462

This application is essentially a virtual librarian service which provides links to books and other resources.


This application is supposedly the most popular book application on Facebook and it lets you share a virtual bookshelf of titles you are currently reading, those you want to read, those you have read in the past, and books you won’t read.

Bookshare: http://apps.facebook.com/bookshare/

Such applications can be used by librarian and teachers to share information about suitable references.

Barriers for online Professional Development

The teachers in India have traditionally been used to face to face communication. Only a handful of them are well-versed in use of technology. Lack of awareness about the online professional development courses is also another draw back. Many a time, peer opinion is also considered for selecting a course. In case of online professional development, effectiveness and the application of Web 2.0 should be further explored through research. Each individual has their own learning style. The online mode caters to different learning styles.

LIS personnel can prove to be an important link in overcoming the barriers faced by teachers. In such a scenario, training of LIS professionals in online technologies can have a multiplier effect in teacher education institutions. They can prove to be facilitators and leaders in opening up new avenues for professional development of teachers.

Conclusion

Understanding the range of interactive possibilities and promoting an environment which encourages active participation online is vital. This can only be achieved through understanding how interacting online is different from face to face interaction. People are the most important part of the online equation. The professional challenge is developing the appropriate communication to build the learning relationship in this new environment which is rich with possibilities.

Reference

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