Processing First-Year College Writing via Facebook Pedagogy in Linguistically and Culturally Diverse First-Year Composition Classes

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Abstract

Facebook has a potential to critically engage students and merge their roles as writers and readers in a digital environment. Facebook reinforces students to share diverse cultural and individual rhetorical appeals, situations, and strategies. In this pedagogical setting, not only do students share a complex set of linguistic and cultural codes, but they also become technologically and cross-culturally competent human power. Facebook pedagogy encourages students to contest, question, and negotiate their cultural literacies and their prior experiences in first-year composition classes.

Web 2.0 has become one of the leading means of communication in the twenty-first century's digitized world, which includes various social networking spaces, such as Facebook, blogs, vlogs, Wikis, Twitter, podcasting, and Skype. These social media have been extensively used in businesses, sciences, politics, and education alike. Web 2.0 refers to web collaboration, content creation and dissemination, and day-to-day digital interactions. Based on these theoretical grounds, this article largely discusses how instructors can use Facebook in writing classes to energize students' writing, and how instructors can make culturally and linguistically diverse students collaborate, cooperate, create, and disseminate their cultural and prior academic contents.

Facebook and Facebooking

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook (called it "thefacebook.com") while he was a sophomore at Harvard University to keep record of his friends. Later, thefacebook.com was changed into "Facebook." As soon as it gained popularity at Harvard University, other adjacent colleges and universities in the Boston area requested to join it. Within a few months, Facebook connected more than 30 colleges to its network (Shelly, 2011, p. 174). Gradually, Facebook became an incredible social networking media resulting in enormously broad participation among college students, administrators, and staff.

Lenhart and Madden's (2007) study shows that almost half (48%) of social network-using teens (n=935) visit the sites either once a day (26%) or several times a day (22%). Similarly, it was estimated that there were as many Facebook users between the ages of 35 and 49 as there were between the ages of 18 and 34 in 2009. In December 2009, Mark Zuckerberg stated that more than 350 million people signed up on Facebook, and the number of Facebook users has more than doubled in 2009 (Shelley, 2011). The data clearly indicates that Facebook's revolutionary digital communication brought substantial transformation in cultural and academic patterns in the postmodern digital world, and considerably transformed pedagogical theories and practices in academia.

Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009) state that "[s]pending time on social networking sites, such as Facebook, appears to be part of most U.S. young adults' daily activities" (p. 228). The studies about Facebook demonstrate that students tend to share ideas/thoughts, create contents, and disseminate them on Facebook. This setting demonstrates that students can amplify their information/contents in a single click. In other words, unlike the traditional pedagogical tools, instructors can use the new digital pedagogical tools through which their students can create contents and share them in a wink. Facebook, in the digital world, seems to be one of the easiest means of pedagogical tools that instructors can use in first-year composition classes to enhance students' understanding about other students' invention strategies, organization strategies, rhetorical choices, and writing skills.

Potentials of Facebook in Writing Classes

Using Facebook, in first-year writing classes provides the right opportunity at the right time since college students invariably communicate on Facebook. They seem to persistently post messages, write their notes, journal, and post information on their status, and chat on Facebook. Not only do students constantly post contents, but they also use a variety of Facebook applications (apps) for various purposes. For instance, students regularly interact, create/co-create contents, check messages, and share information on Facebook. Students, from this stance, write more outside the classroom or in informal settings than they actually do in the classroom. The rationale behind using Facebook in writing classes classes is to make students

read and write more in this space. Students communicate quicker on Facebook than they usually do on Angel, Blackboard, and emails.

Facebook is a more interactive space than other digital tools, such as Angel, Blackboard, and emails. Because of the communication aptitudes, students seem to help each other on their assignments, projects, group works, and reading responses. It also has potential for enhancing students' writing in multiple ways. For instance, in the traditional pedagogy "[s]tudents mostly interact with the instructor by asking questions or submitting work, and they tend to have little correspondence with other peers" (DePew & Lettner-Rust, 2009, p. 174). Facebook shifts the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy to a student-centered one, or the mantra of the digital pedagogical landscape is that instructors should not occupy the center space. Instructors do not need to continually respond to each student's general questions and concerns. Instead, students themselves respond because their peers, more often than not, are available on Facebook at almost any time, and seem to respond to their peers questions and concerns right away.

The importance of digital literacies, such as reading, writing, revising, and exchanging multimodal information in online environments is inescapable in the twenty-first century digitized world (Cooper, 2007). It is obvious that "the composition classroom should immerse students in analyzing digital media, in exploring the world beyond the classroom, in crafting digital personae, and in creating new and emerging definitions of civic literacy" (Clark, 2010, p. 28). Digital literacies have become "social practices through which we define meanings and values and discover the effects of digital literacies [which] is an important goal for students"; moreover, teachers should "enable them not only to survive in this world but [also] create better worlds for themselves and others" (Cooper, 2007, p. 186). Thus, teachers cannot be satisfied to exclusively focus on teaching the production of academic texts. The use of Facebook and blog/vlog should not be limited to preparing students to write something about themselves, instead it should be extended to making them digitally literate.

Facebook pedagogy encourages students to bring their cultural artifacts, narratives, and prior literacies together in digital and physical environments. In this pedagogical landscape, students tend to enter into other cultural and digital discourse communities where they learn to contest, question, and negotiate in intercultural, interdisciplinary, and cross-cultural/disciplinary settings. Facebook is a media to mediate students' complex cultural and individual relationships where they appear to know the differences between their selves and their audience's, such as their cultures, world Englishes, concepts, and rhetorical strategies.

Facebook has potential to blur the boundaries between the physical and virtual classroom spaces and the traditional concept of writing. For instance, when students are absent from the class, they can still participate in the digital classroom discussions, writing responses, and digital peer reviews in both synchronous and asynchronous settings. Facebook invites both international (multilingual) students as well as monolingual students as ethnographers, historians, and ambassadors of their cultures. Diverse students bring their cultural narratives and their individual experiences in the class through Facebook. They share concepts of rhetoric as a social, historical, and political act.

By bringing such narratives and experiences, students engage in a dialectical interaction in digital and physical environments. Both native English speaking students and international students will question their cultural and linguistic differences and individual experiences (Limbu, 2011, p. 24). This digital dialogical participation suggests that realities are not stable, singular, or mechanical, instead they are flexible and evolving. Students understand learning is framed as an open inquiry, and this notion makes their learning process/research more accessible. It connects their previous experiences to their new scholarly work, making their research and writing activities less foreign in new academic settings (Purdy, 2010).

Facebook also reinforces students to work not as individual beings, but as a collective power. In other words, Facebook merges local and global elements as they can publish and share the contents with their local and global audience. Facebook has potentials to engage diverse students "to communicate in the digital world using a full range of rhetorical skills … to analyze and critique both the technological tools and the multimodal texts" (Handa, 2004, p. 3). Such digital information and communication energize students' learning processes as they enhance their writing skills.

Facebook Applications in Writing Classes
Facebook applications include poke, messages, events, discussions, friends, game requests, photos, groups, notes, links, and video/s. Students can utilize these applications to inform, educate, explain, and entertain their audience in multiple ways. Students also can use these applications based on their needs and purposes.

For instance, in my writing classes, students use "poke" to establish their virtual and real relationships with their newer friends. They use "Event," another powerful application, to invite friends to attend physical and virtual meetings to discuss their group projects and presentations. "Group" application is used to create certain groups of students where they can share ideas, interact, question, comment, and critique on topics they like to discuss. This application is not only interactive and dialogical, but it is also democratic, inclusive, and representational, for every student can bring his/her own cultural narratives/literacies and prior academic experiences in this space.

Facebook discourse is a virtual one, but affirms people's trust and understanding from where people learn to pose problems and settle their personal and professional issues using several applications such as "video," "Doc," and "Chat."

Facebook applications are user-centered and students can easily navigate them. In my writing class, I get my students to post their reading responses, project inquiry questions, project outlines, and drafts. Peers from their groups comment on their contents and they revise and edit according to the comments, if desired. Moreover, when students work in groups such as group presentations or group collaborative works, any of their group members can revise the texts, edit them, and add information. This setting tends to blur the roles/spaces of writers and readers. On Facebook, students can chat with their colleagues/peers which facilitate their content creation, writing strategies, and rhetorical strategies.

Facebook interaction "has an immediate impact on their lives and their interests, [that allows] them to put their new skills—like research and multimodal composition—into play immediately for audience that may include their family, their friends, and even wider publics" (Clark, 2010, p. 32). Therefore, such digital pedagogical landscape extends students' understanding of communication, writing, organization, revision, and response in a larger scale. Facebook applications consist of one-to-many communication approaches, where information amplifies (Pempek et al., 2009). Overall, this pedagogical setting prepares students to become better critical digital literates, designers, collaborators, and contributors.

Facebook Pedagogy

Web 2.0 tools (blogs, vlogs, Wikis, Facebook, and Twitter) are "free" or "open source tools allowing students to work within their own cultures and discourses (Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007; Hocks, 2008; Limbu, 2011).

Instructors should incorporate digital tools in their writing classes and introduce them to students in this digitized twenty-first century webbed world. First-year composition instructors should introduce new digital pedagogical tools; teach all available means of persuasion, and all available approaches to communicate in effective and productive ways (Selfe, 2009, p. 645; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007, p. 8). Digital pedagogical tools help students deconstruct the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy and reconstruct a more student-centered learning where they can bring their own lived experiences and cultural narratives to create their identities in first-year composition classes. For instance, I help students create their personal blogs and Facebook accounts where they write and share their ideas with other students who come from different cultures, linguistic backgrounds, and geographical locations. This provides students a platform to share their contents as well as kindle ideas and organize and deliver them.

I use websites/blogs and Facebook in my writing classes. Students share their ideas, interact, collaborate together, and create their contents on Facebook and blogs/websites. Concerning teaching activities or time structure, I spend the first few classes introducing courses, syllabi, projects, and website constructions. I share my ideas on how they can use different navigation tools to create their websites/blogs. After I show my students how to use different software tools and navigation tools, I get them to create their personal websites, Facebook accounts, and dropbox (www.dropbox.com to save documents online). Gradually, I get them to add/create different pages to their websites depending upon their needs, such as "About Me," "Syllabus," "Reading Materials," "Projects," "Classmates," "Citation Styles," and other useful resources.

Although students of the twenty-first century are digital natives, instructions on the use of different multi-modals, web creation, and online document saving and sharing are always essential, for many students are not yet familiar with software, hardware, and other multimodalities (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004; Cooper, 2007; Pandey, 2007). Instructors should know that students need help in framing their understandings critically and analytically so that they can question their own judgment and look at their work from the perspectives of audience who are different from themselves (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004). Since students post their documents and share their documents, Facebook (digital) notes or digital documents look far better than traditional regular students' physical class notes. For instance, students post their reading responses, audio-visual responses,

and other reflections, and when they want to see their as well as their colleagues' contents, they can visit at any time.

In terms of peer review, I get students to either post their drafts on Facebook as "doc," or on their regular websites, and their peers review the drafts and write comments on Facebook. By reading peers' reading responses, students learn to develop, organize, and reframe their own discourse (Bazerman, 2008).

Concerning students' responses, compared to the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy, instructors do not have to struggle too much to respond to each student's readings on Facebook. For instance, I provide my students reading response guidelines, and students tend to follow them. After reading students' reading responses, to ensure that I read students' questions, concerns, and responses, I usually mark them "like" (on their postings) so that students are informed that I read them. Regarding peer reviews, I give some guidelines, and I get each student to peer review at least three-to-four peers' papers. It means each student gets at least three-to-four peer comments on his/her essay. When students read their peers' papers and read the comments, they almost already know how they have to shape their essay (because of the comments and the peer-review guidelines). Finally if I feel students need more feedback, I either give them collective feedback in a regular class, or talk to them individually at the one-on-one instructor and student conference.

Creating Spaces

On Facebook discourse, diverse student populations construct and reconstruct their prior cultural literacies and imaginations in various forms of narratives, comments, descriptions, and elaborations which are culturally reflexive and individually subjective (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). Facebook in teaching and learning generates cross-cultural, intercultural, and global cultural understanding that master interpretive syntheses and critical analyses of the realities in infinite ways, and can possibly transform the individual self and social conditions by illuminating cultural gaps in the shared narratives and stories (Bruner, 2002; Chavez Chavez, 2003).

Facebook pedagogy tends to expand the construction of linguistically and culturally diverse students' norms and values in first-year composition classes (Fairclough, 2006). Students on Facebook participate in cultural codes, geopolitical materials, and world Englishes. Facebook makes students' prior concepts of languages and cultures fluid and arbitrary because they realize that their writing is a process and always in the making. Students come to understand that there is no one universal, eternal, and authentic reality, but realities are multiple, and are socially, culturally, and ideologically constructed. Students understand that they also can create their cultural and linguistic identities.

Conclusions

The practice of Facebook is a complicated and arbitrary. Facebook pedagogy also invariably demands students' engagement into a dialogical environment within non-linear digital production. Facebook has the ability to help students and teachers remap traditional learning boundaries. Due to Facebook's amplified interaction with dynamic socio-cultural and geopolitical codes, students seem to immerse in the makeup of the intercultural spaces within and outside the Facebook community. Facebook pedagogy informs communication as a space where invisible cross-cultural blind spots are addressed in first-year composition classes. Facebook allows students to enter into a relationship of understanding other discourse users, and it allows them to create complex cross-cultural contents in first-year writing classes.

First-year composition teachers should have familiarity with new media technology. They also have to share their pedagogical strategies, technological skills, and recent pedagogical issues in the field with other instructors. In so doing, instructors can create safer spaces where international students, other language minority students, and native English speaking students' prior literacies and cultural narratives are validated equally. Although I advocate for the revolutionary use of the social network (Facebook) in first-year writing classes, social networking sites tend to distract students both inside and outside of the classes. Teachers and students should require a sound knowledge of possible risks and disadvantages while using any Web 2.0 tools in the class. Based on my experience, digital pedagogy is one of the best mediums to teach writing.

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