

## PLANNING OF JOINT ACADEMIC WORK OF STUDENTS VIA NETWORKS

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Nowadays social networks are one of the most popular services which keep drawing the Internet-audience attention. They are the universal instrument of communication and permit to solve a wide range of problems in the field of marketing, advertising and human resource management. During the last 3-5 years possibilities of social networks application in educational process are vividly discussed in pedagogic community. Except for successful marketing in vocational training sphere social networks promote development of electronic training and education as a whole offering new technical and methodical decisions. Thus, in October of 2010 London school of business and finance became an initiator of transformation from traditional training in classes to online learning with the aim of the world famous social network 'Facebook'. New school courses allow learners to get a high-quality lecture material by effort of a simple mouseclick. Students from all over the world can subscribe for online lessons absolutely free of charge and take the course at a suitable rate for themselves. The program teaching material is presented in the high-quality video format. Except for taking lectures learners can keep in touch with teaching staff of the school, participate in debatable panels where the leaders of various business industries are also invited for topic discussions [1].

Engineering feasibility of the idea has proved to be easy. School experts developed the special plug-in for Facebook – LSBF Global MBA™ <http://apps.facebook.com/lsbfglobalmba/>. Thus, on the basis of already available software product (Facebook) an accessible and eminently clear system is designed. This example obviously demonstrates that many foreign experts considering the development of electronic learning years ahead, the organization of this learning and its methodical support stake not on LMS (learning management system), but on popular social networks. Dan Pontefract in his article 'The Standalone LMS is Dead', writes: "Those organizations (and frankly public learning institutions) that are clinging to their standalone learning management systems as a way in which to serve up formal ILT course schedules and eLearning are absolutely missing the big picture. Sadly, there are too many organizations like this out there." [2] And Richard Kuletta believes that: "Traditional independent of learning management system are constructed on the model generated during the industrial epoch. The weak points of this model are its universality within an educational institution and its uniformity within all educational institutions". [3] The first of the problems – universality – means that developers try to combine in one application all tools and options for on-line learning. The given approach is grounded on an assumption that the only one application can be so flexible that it can provide all functional range which is necessary for efficient educational process realization. Unfortunately, as many multipurpose products such LMS trying to make everything never does a good turn. The problem of universal nature of such traditional LMS is that they are nonflexible instruments proposing educational institutions, teachers and students an alternative "you are either for us or against us". Even the systems with an open code, such as Moodle, do not allow (without essential settings) to use the components of other developers; so you will be compelled to use the preparation system of the Moodle content, testing system of Moodle, progress journal of Moodle etc. In addition to the limited functionality the universal nature of traditional LMS implies that one manufacturer should provide the elaboration and maintenance of all technology achievements up to the mark, in all areas of on-line educational process. Such model was acceptable those days when functionality of on-line learning was limited by an access to educational documents and text debatable forums. But since on-line educational process has become more social and therefore inseparably linked with technologies for teamwork, the attempts to unite all demanded functional under one digital roof are doomed to failure. For the past five years we indeed can observe the mode changes and forms of people

communication in the Internet, and such social networks as Facebook (globally) and "Vkontakte" (on Russian scale) have managed to realize technologically that the modern young man requires, viz. social tools for general use and interfaces for planning of his own educational and working space. In connection with studying opportunities of social networks usage in education, the West tends to urgency of the theory of social training which consists in supposition that people study most effectively when they cooperate with other learners within the same topic or subject. Satisfactory evidence of necessity of social interaction in the course of training is expounded in Richard J. Light's research from Harvard university. Light has found out that one of the strongest factors of students' success in learning is their ability to create or participate in small research groups. The students who studied at least once a week in groups turned out better prepared in the subject, than students studied independently [4]. In social learning the focus of instructors' attention should begin to move from the content of the subject toward people interaction while the content is around them. For this reason foreign experts in the field of electronic training appeal to developers of software products to create LMS integrated with popular social services. But software developers still consider the experts' opinion. Yet an effective and tested bunch of learning management system and social networks does not exist today. The pedagogical community has to apply to Facebook and 'Vkontakte' and experiment with organization of social (joint) learning of pupils and students [5]. It is possible to mark the following advantages of social network usage over other kinds of web technologies.

1. Customary environment for students. The interface, ways of communication and the content publication are studied by users thoroughly. It is caused by qualitative usability (convenience and clearness) of the system as well as active and long-term experience of using (70 % of users visit networks more than 1 time a day).
2. Variety of communication forms. Wiki-pages, forums, surveys, polling, comments, subscriptions, sending personal messages provide large-scale of teamwork.
3. Single-digit identification of users. Frequently in social networks a person goes under his own name or surname, rarely - under a nick (pseudonym). In other Internet services it goes on the contrary.
4. The participants' activity can be traced through the news line. This tool allows the user not to become puzzled in variety of information streams and to carry out effective monitoring of updating of varied content. Students have an opportunity to be well informed about all changes occurring in the course of study, to trace academic activity of mates and the instructor who in turn observes and coordinates the students' work. The organization of co-education via the social network 'Vkontakte' was carried out during four semesters with students of the humanities of Tomsk state university. Joint collaborated training is an approach whose training is based on close interaction of learners, or sometimes between learners and the instructor. Participants of the process acquire knowledge through active joint information search, discussion and comprehension. Co-education includes such formats as group projects, joint designing, and the like. Virtual educational groups created in the course of training ('IT for philologists' <http://vkontakte.ru/club15910647>, 'The humanities problems of computer science – practice Web 2.0, [http://vkontakte.ru/gpi\\_web20](http://vkontakte.ru/gpi_web20) etc.), were used as additional (to usual classes) form of interaction of students and the instructor. Such combination has turned out an efficient form from the viewpoint of organization of students' project works and forming the skills of self-organization of students, their interaction and cooperation. For organization of joint project activity of students the following technique was used. After receiving the tasks and directions from the instructor, the student's group is divided into several micro-groups. Then each group works independently under the task until all the participants sort it out and fulfill it successfully. The success of general task performance depends on the results of activity of each participant of the micro-group. The social implication of such training model is obvious: the role of each student in the performance of general problem is emphasized. The group consciousness, positive interdependency, social skills are developed. Representation of tasks, self-organization and interaction of students are realized through the learning group of the social network 'Vkontakte',

and the result of coeducation is represented in the collective blog which has been created by the participants independently by means of the service <http://blogspot.com>. As an educational task one group of students [http://vkontakte.ru/gpi\\_web20](http://vkontakte.ru/gpi_web20) was appointed to analyze the concept 'Web 2.0', and another one <http://vkontakte.ru/club15910647> – to choose independently a theme of the project work. In both cases student's communities were divided into micro-groups in which their joint study was carried out. The results have been presented in the form of collective blogs: 'The taming of the Shrew Web 2.0' <http://web-for-life.blogspot.com> and 'Homo Filfakus: unofficial site of philological faculty of TSU' <http://filfak.blogspot.com>. The participants of each micro-group were connected to corresponding blogs with rights of "author" and could present their own part of the work in the cyberspace. The instructor's role in this process is general coordination, consultations and estimation of the activity results. Such mode of teaching demands appreciable organizational skills: it is necessary to make efforts to design the course structure, formulate the tasks, accurately and promptly diagnose the problems arising during students' teamwork. Despite the same methodology in organization of academic activity in two groups of students, the training purposes were different. In the first example (concept research Web 2.0) the training purpose was to research the offered theme, the problem statement, and problem-solving search. Students were not offered ready answers; they should find the answers independently by their joint efforts. Such method promotes the improvement of results quality of all participants and growth of their skills while drawing information only from experts frequently forms the sense of helplessness by working with unfamiliar concepts and situations. The result was put to comprehension not only within one micro-group, but also in scale of the whole group of students and through mutual reviewing of project works.

In the second group (independent theme choice) the training purpose was to form the skills of work with Internet technologies with intentionally selected content which is equitable to the interest of all participants of the group. The students' activity had more creative rather than traditional research character. However in both examples the micro-groups were responsible for achievement of common purpose, and each member of the group was in charge of his own contribution to the general work. We offer to examine the experiment results by example of two virtual learning groups.

1. Clarity of ideology and interface of social networks for majority of students enable considerably to save time by their immersing in the environment of electronic training. It is not required the stage of students' adaptation to new communicative space.
2. Application of forums and wiki technologies in virtual academic groups allows all participants to create jointly their own networking educational content (glossaries, articles, discussions, multimedia libraries, and etc.). Apart from the shaping of cooperation skills it stimulates independent cognitive activity, reduces the production cycle of yielding concrete intellectual or creative result, and develops criticality of thinking.
3. The communicative space of social networks provides a high degree of students' cooperation between one another and with the instructor. Their academic activity is not limited by class work but extends beyond the framework and provides the continuous educational process. Knowledge acquisition is occurring not due to transference from the instructor to the student, but in the course of lively conversation of all participants of academic process.
4. A positive assessment of this form of academic activity and its results by the students themselves. Among the advantages of training by means of social networks students mark out: interactivity and a continuity of academic process, possibility of task fulfillment at any convenient time and place.

It is necessary to note several troublesome points by using social networks in educational process: 1 - high time consuming and cumbersome degree by the arrangement and support of training course in the conditions of educational process continuity for educators; 2 - frequent absence of open access to social networks from educational rooms at schools and high schools; 3 - presence in social network environment counter-attracting factors during educational process (active communication, swift flow of information and abundance of entertaining content); 4 -

absence of convenient toolkit for organization and management of educational process, for example in comparison with learning management system (LMS); 5 - openness of educational process to all the Internet-community that is unacceptably or uncomfortably for many educators; 6 - impossibility of educators' work assessment by existing universal criteria for labor remuneration.

Decision of the revealed problems:

As for disadvantages by use of social networks in educational process it is necessary to note:

1. A high degree of effort in organization and support of educational process in the conditions of continuous teaching for the instructor;
2. Frequent lack of access to social networks from classrooms of secondary and high schools;
3. Occurrence in social network area the factors drawing students' attention away from the educational process (vivid communication, prompt information stream and an abundance of entertaining content);
4. Absence of convenient toolbox for organization and management of educational process, for example in comparison with learning management system (LMS;)
5. Openness of educational process to all the Internet-community that is for many instructors unacceptably or uncomfortably;
6. Impossibility of instructors' work valuation by means of existing universal criteria of payment.

The solution of revealed problems is possible only by deeper study of educational potential of social networks, development and approbation of efficient techniques and their application in educational space, elaboration of customized applications for social networks dilating capability for organization and management of study, definitions of criteria of an impartial assessment of work results with use of similar technologies and fair rating of the work. It stands to reason to turn social networks into high-grade educational medium, it is necessary to overcome a great number of difficulties and problems of various nature; it takes experts in IT and teaching staff to make general efforts.

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