Ghania Zgheib

Research identity memo

EDRS 812

9/18/2012

I have been teaching English as a second language and as a foreign language for over ten years now. Throughout these years, my teaching practices have developed and changed, especially that the technology revolution has been moving at a fast pace. What brought me into the Instructional technology field was my interest in anything that is innovative and could facilitate learning. A year ago when I was only four semesters into the PhD program, I started investing in my teaching practices what I learned in the PhD program. Hence, I started introducing more technology tools such as Blackboard, Facebook, and Dropbox in the ESL courses that I have been teaching and informally evaluating my students’ perspectives on using these tools as part of course requirements. This was a new experience for me as a teacher as well as for my students who are all international.

From my perspective, the use of more technology facilitated my communication with the students and I felt that my students interacted more with each other. I even realized that social media interaction has created a sense of community that I never felt in any of the classes that I taught before and in which I did not use social media. When I asked my students to write about their experiences using social media as part of the course, some students were satisfied whereas others had mixed feelings about it due to privacy concerns. My beliefs and experience using social media drove my curiosity further to look at how other faculty members use social media to support their formal instruction. I got more interested in learning about the instructional strategies that enhance student learning if any learning is observed through the professor’s or the students’ perspectives. Social learning theory supports the fact that learners learn and grow through social interaction, however, due to some of my students’ mixed feelings about the use of social media in my course, I am approaching my research in an exploratory strategy in order to understand sound practices for using social media in higher education as part of coursework. Moreover, I would like to understand whether faculty and students perceive social media as a tool that enhances learning or only as a social tool. More specifically, my study will try to find answers to the questions below:

* In what ways are faculty members using social media at GMU?
* What are the most common social media tools that faculty use in their teaching at GMU?
* What are the most common learning strategies that faculty assign for students to complete through social media?
* What benefit do faculty members perceive that social media learning strategies bring to their student learning?
* Do students perceive any benefit to their learning through the learning activities that faculty assign through social media?
* What specific learning activities through social media do students perceive as the most efficient to their learning?

I will try my best to separate my experience with the topic from my findings to avoid bias and for other reasons. First, I am not confident about my use of social media instructional strategies as I think I am a beginner. Second, as a student, I used social media to submit blog contributions and for group work. Both my experiences as a teacher and as a student using social media are minimal, and I don’t think I have matured enough in using these tools so I feel that I want to see how other faculty members are seeing it. Third, my perspective on using social media tools in teaching is that it brings a lot of interaction and positivity to the students’ learning which is only what I think and may not be what the end users (i.e. the students) think.

My own personal experience with the topic can help me develop the interview questions that are relevant to my field and that have not been answered by the literature yet. Due to the assumptions that I already have, I don’t think I will be surprised if I found out that students don’t perceive social media as learning tools that enhance their learning. The disadvantage that could result from my assumptions is the bias that I could bring into the study due to my thoughts that social media tools can support and enhance learning, and that is why I am still using them in my courses. I will try to minimize bias by analyzing the data as an outsider keeping in mind any diverging findings that need more investigation.