

## **New Media and Scholarship**

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Information technology has become a common tool in most educational settings, used for a variety of reasons ranging from record keeping to content delivery. Technological progress over the past two to three decades has provided a myriad of application and hardware that can enhance scholarly activities if educators have access and the competency skills to use them.

Since the late 1990's a new wave of creative and communicative tools, often referred to as information and communication technologies or ICTs has evolved. This wave has led to the development of many new media tools that are reasonably easy to learn, and that provide the means to enhance the creative, interactive, social, and global reach of scholarship: whether one is engaging in the scholarship of discovery or of teaching and learning. This wave has also catalyzed the development of a virtual landscape where scholars engage both solitarily and in collaboration with others.

People use new social media capabilities to connect with others, learn, dialogue, and explore. Social media shape the online landscape into a platform for social connection, sharing, dialogue, and multimedia enhanced interaction to promote social networking and creativity. This new perspective from solitary scholar or explorer to social networker and participant helps educators to capitalize on the ever evolving capabilities of new media. With the advent and usability of social software applications like blogs, wikis, folksonomies, video-sharing, community software, e-portfolios, and mobile access, educational possibilities skyrocket, including the ability to harness collective intelligence.

The virtual environment is evolving into a context for professional collaboration, content exchange, mentorship and creative endeavors. Cyberspace is becoming an accessible place for the building of intellectual assets, where knowledge can be effectively identified, distributed and shared with peers. Educators are joining this growing evolution in a number of different ways, including the development of virtual communities and social networks. Communities can amplify innovation— when groups become aware of what they can do virtually, they go beyond problem - solving and start inventing together.

Modern technological advances and a drive to connect have helped to shape and forge the cultivation of professional social networks, including communities of practice. Communities of practice or COPs are distributed groups of people who share a

concern, set of problems, mandate or sense of purpose, and are of particular importance to the realm of virtually enhanced education and scholarship. Communities of practice complement existing structures by promoting collaboration, information exchange, and sharing of best practices across boundaries of time, space, and organizational hierarchies. Members are informally bound together by shared expertise and a passion for a joint enterprise.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) identified seven key principles for COP cultivation: design for evolution, open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, invite different levels of participation, develop both public and private community spaces, focus on value, combine familiarity and excitement, and create a rhythm for the community. Wenger also identified four general categories of COP, all of which fit well within education and scholarship ideals and intents: helping communities, best - practice communities, knowledge - stewarding communities, and innovation communities. COPs need to be actively created and sustained, which requires well developed relational links and abilities between the social actors, both human and technical.

The social and new media revolutions have sparked a whole new arena of educational scholarship. Educators have begun to examine the phenomena of new media and are questioning how these innovations can be applied within education for scholarly enrichment and understanding. The essence of the virtual landscape is an elusive phenomenon that has to be experienced to be understood. Although people have used writing to communicate for several centuries, the interaction afforded by cyberspace is perceived as new, as different and unique. Some have likened it to the oral traditions embraced by people before writing became the norm, yet it uses writing or typing on a computer keyboard as its medium. Yet, new media, enriched with visual and auditory stimulation in the form of video and audio mediums augments strictly textual media with multisensory artifacts as well. It behooves the 21st century scholar to explore and experience new media in a variety of contexts, using an open yet critical approach. This issue of Transformative Dialogue offers further food for thought related to the promise and situatedness of new media applied to the practice of scholarship.

### **References**

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press