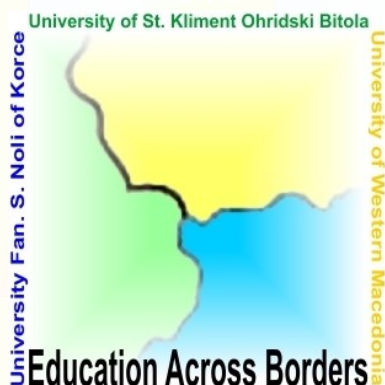


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EDITOR'S  
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EDITORIAL  
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---

KEYNOTE  
PRESENTATION

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HISTORY & CULTURE

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## AUTHOR INDEX

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## KEYWORD INDEX

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- Dobri Petrovski  
**72-77 CULTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE FUNCTION OF ENABLING THE YOUNG GENERATIONS FOR A MORE SUCCESSFUL CROSS- BORDER COOPERATION**
- Sashka Dimitrovska  
**277-283 DEDICATED TO THE USE OF LITERATURE FORMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLBOOKS**
- Vesna Stojanovska  
**538-542 DEVELOPING CREATIVITY AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AMONG GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN**
- Eleni Griva, Sofia Iliadou-Tahou, Aggeliki Maggou  
**284-292 DEVELOPING MATERIALS FOR TEACHING GREEK AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO YOUNG LEARNERS**
- Milena Pejchinovska, Violeta Janusheva  
**543-551 DIAGNOSTIC AND INFORMATIVE FUNCTION OF ASSESSMENT IN THE TEACHING PRACTICE**
- Ivana Stanojević  
**78-85 DIFFERENCES IN TEACHING OF COMMON HISTORY OF THE BALKANS**
- Konstantinos Demitropoulos  
**552-559 EDUCATING YOUNG CITIZENS. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM TO TOTALARIZATION – “UNSOSIALIZATION” OF YOUTH IN RAMIZ ALIAS ALBANIA**
- Josif Petrovski  
**197-202 EDUCATIONAL NETWORKING AS PART OF USING ICT IN EDUCATION**
- Simeon Kotsou, Ioannis Miskas  
**86-96 EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONCERNING ETHNIC MINORITIES IN YUGOSLAVIA FROM (1944-1990). THE CASE OF VOJVODINA**
- Eirini Nari, Catherine Dimitriadou, Anna Spyrtou  
**560-569 E-LEARNING TEACHER EDUCATION IN WESTERN MACEDONIA: THE EFFECT OF AN IN-SERVICE TRAINING COURSE**
- Viktorija Petkovska  
**293-298 ESP AT FYROM UNIVERSITIES: STATE –OF-THE-ART**
- Snezana Stavreva Veselinovska, Snezana Kirova  
**766-774 EXAMINATION OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS (COMPARATIVELY RURAL - URBAN ENVIRONMENT)**
- Catherine Dimitriadou, Niki Theodosiou  
**570-579 EXPLORING THE BORDERLAND OF WESTERN MACEDONIA: REFLECTIONS ON AN ERASMUS INTENSIVE PROGRAMME**
- Eleni Laskaraki, Eleni G. Gavra  
**97-105 FLORINA AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT: POTENTIAL AND WEAKNESSES ON SITE**
- Angeliki Sakellariou  
**299-305 GENRE-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN EXAMPLE BASED ON CORPORA**
- Miranda-Maria Doraci  
**580-586 GOVERNING BODIES OF GREEK LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ROMANIA. PAST AND PRESENT**
- Ciprian-Lucrețius Suci  
**587-593 GREEK LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ROMANIA CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GREEK STUDENTS AND TEACHING STAFF**
- Penelope Papadopoulou, Georgios Malandrakis  
**775-783 GREEK PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS UNDERSTANDING OF AIR POLLUTION ISSUES: OZONE LAYER DEPLETION AND ACID RAIN**

# EDUCATIONAL NETWORKING AS PART OF USING ICT IN EDUCATION

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## Abstract

In terms of recent technological revolution which returns a constant and rapid expansion of the computer technology inevitably raises the necessity to start a process of reorganizing educational institutions where Information - Communication Technology occupies important place in all spheres. Information - Communication Technology (ICT) has great potential to change the way teachers teach and students learn. Social networks as part of this revolution are certainly taking their place in the implementation of ICT in the classroom. From the time when MySpace, LinkedIn and Facebook appeared, online social networking has rapidly developed in a universal method for people from around the world to connect between them. Websites that offer social networking became every day's habit and integrated into the way people act and think. "Educational Networking" is the use of social network technologies in the educational process. In today's modern world, prospects for education are like never before. This paper will give details on the most used Social networks as a way of using ICT in education. Also an experiment will be presented where Facebook is involved in the classroom communication.

**Keywords:** *Social Networks, Educational Networking, classroom communication, educational process*

## 1. Introduction

In these modern and digital surroundings in which we live and work, at first sight it seems like it's very easy to implement all this new technology into the educational process. The use of Internet in a way of a huge storage of information where every educator and student can easily access is just one method of improving both teaching and learning. Implementing social networks as an internet services in education can bring a lot of benefits, but also some disadvantages. The fact that this is fairly new technology means it hasn't been investigated enough for its safety issues and the quality of information that stream through the service. Using these online tools can expose students to inappropriate materials and pictures, abuse and harassment outside the school and in many cases improper adult content. And this is not

occurrence just in schools. Social networks are included in our everyday lives. People think, act, work and interact under the influence of these networks. We will look upon the opportunities offered from these networks and analyze how they can be used for personal and academic development of the students.

To start analyzing social networks let's see the original purpose of their invention. Main feature is to transfer information of any type from one place to another, i.e. from one person to another. Starting from sharing small information in a closed group of students, today they became most used way of communication between each other, sharing interests, photos and music among friend, acquaintances or even people we've never met before. They became the place to meet old friends, classmates, relatives from different cities and countries and spend time chatting using audio and video, sharing pictures or even play games together. In perspective of educational use these networks offer students way to connect with other students, professors and alumni or even organize an online class.

Social networks not only enhance the communication between participants in the educational process but also improve the learning environment in a way that different languages and distance is not a barrier anymore. Traditional publishing nowadays is slow and often cost a lot due to expensive materials. Online publishing is easy, fast and always up to date. There are special designed web pages for students offering information written only by experts and with it providing valuable information that otherwise is unavailable for them.

On the other hand, not always information used from social networks is accurate. These networks present excellent way of placing misinformation and rumors in the cyber space. Searching for true and quality information is a challenge. This is where the educators must focus their attention and indicate to students where to find appropriate information.

## 2. Using social networks in the classroom

The swift growth of social media provides communication opportunities that are not found simply by visiting the faculty website. Even

though many of these websites are well designed, students are required to navigate through several pages to get to the information they need. As technology progresses, people are less willing to go through this process when more efficient methods of communication exist. The use of social media to communicate between professors, students and parents can help everyone stay up-to-date.

Sites for social networking created new social dimension where users can improve their knowledge or even learn different techniques by themselves only by following online instructions. In this paper we will evaluate some of the most used social networks by students with their advantages and disadvantages. Most of these networks even complement each other, for examples sharing YouTube video on Facebook.

Using YouTube as a teaching aid in the classroom is very common in these modern times. Showing video presentations and simulations is a better and more interesting way of learning something new. This gives students more motivation to raise their knowledge in different ways and not only by reading the textbook. Realizing that many of the educators started to implement video materials from their web site in the curriculum, YouTube created special domain only for educational purpose and it's called YouTube Edu ([www.youtube.com/education](http://www.youtube.com/education)). It offers its visitors large number of educational and instructional videos. These videos present full courses from the world's top universities, professional material from recognized educators, and inspiring videos from global thought leaders. YouTube created two programs to help schools and teachers make use of YouTube EDU most effectively: YouTube for Schools and YouTube for Teachers. YouTube for Teachers provides tips & tricks for bringing YouTube into the classroom and organizes YouTube EDU videos to align with common core subjects. YouTube for Schools allows schools to access all of the YouTube EDU content while limiting access to non-educational content. This way teachers and parents can be assured that the students can find valuable and true information. Great advantage of using YouTube as a teaching tool is that now allows easy uploading and online video editing, making it easy for anyone to edit without expensive software or great computer knowledge.

Two of the most used social networks today are Facebook (900 million registered users) and Twitter (500 million users), therefore they are the most used ones in the education too. Although one might think Facebook is the leading one, Twitter is by far and away the most used network for educational purposes due to its micro-tweeting platform. Introducing parental control as a part of their safety measures Twitter is safer than others so it becomes a more viable option for educators every day. While Twitter is mostly used by educators, Facebook is more used by students. By creating groups for most of their subject they interact more often, they help each other with home work or other assignments or even point to external web sites with more information.

Taking this into consideration we conducted a research at our Faculty. The test group consisted of 20 students attending the subject "ICT in education", which is held in fourth semester. All of them have an active e-mail address and Facebook profile and the most interesting thing is that they had no idea they were tested. The plan was to give them three assignments, but presented to them in different ways. First they were given the homework where its objective was presented only to the students that were in the classroom. They had to do a research on a given topic and write 300 words essay. Thirteen of the students finished the homework, and most of those students were the ones present on the class when we explained the homework. Next week they got the same kind of homework, but different topic. This time they got the instructions on e-mail, without knowing that we would send such a mail. Now 12 students had done their homework, 6 didn't finish in time and two of them didn't access their e-mail account during the week. The third week students got their final homework. This time we used the Facebook group which students created last year to better communicate between themselves throughout the studies. We post the assignment there. At the end of the week 18 of the students had a complete homework and 2 didn't finish in time. When we viewed the group's discussion wall it had a lot of interaction between students and a lot of useful links for the topic they were researching. This shows that all of these students access their Facebook account at least once a week and that information can be

processed faster this way. Even students who missed some classes can learn the material or can get help from fellow classmates. Of course, students can abuse our thrust by sending private mails and copy the homework from each other, but this is only a small step towards learning the proper use of Facebook or similar sites in the classroom. According to eBizMBA's list of 15 most popular social network sites for September 2012<sup>1</sup>, Facebook leads with 750 million estimated unique monthly visitors. This shows that 80% of all Facebook accounts are still active and it is the fastest way to share information.

Other way of using social networks in education are the computer games. Lately most of the sites mentioned above have integrated these games inside so users can play them, keep scores and competing with each other. Since the creation of the first computer game experts are divided whether games are good to be used in the education. Some think it is more interesting way of learning and its motivating students to learn the new material. But not everybody is agreeing to this. Most teachers and parents believe playing games is just a waste of time, and in their defense games that have an educational purpose are still small in numbers and not that interesting to the kids. With the rapid development of the internet services we can expect in near future games to be played as simulations at school. Students can be kings, managers, doctors etc, which in way can make them learn easily math, economy, law, medicine or they can develop more social skills like their characters in the games.

### 3. Disadvantages in using social networks

While we support the use of this technology in schools for the reason that quality resources are available to educators, students and parents, it is very important to show to the students the appropriate usage of these sites. With the express networking students of all ages are exposed to the world. Since the invention of these networks privacy is the main issue that everybody is concerned.

By creating own profile on most of the social network sites users are asked to enter personal

<sup>1</sup> List retrieved on 15.14.2013 from [www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites](http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites)

information in their databases. Sometimes they have to enter more intimate data, like what user like or dislike, ideals, beliefs, morals. This kind of information is open to everyone using the network, such as classmates, friends, teachers, parents and general public. Even worse, this information might be open to the eyes of future employers. Students that are familiar with these facts and risks have to learn how to manage their accounts and protect themselves. At the same time, most of the social networks offer their users an easy way to tweak the settings on their accounts and flexibility to choose what kind of information to be shown. Although most of the school principles are in talks with the managers of these sites to find the best strategies to use them in education and keep everybody safe, students are in danger outside schools, too. Whether they are working on the home computers or their smart phones, or just being with their friends outside they are at the same risk.

Even though the largest part of information that users provide on social networking sites is voluntary, users, in particular students that are young in age, are gradually more prone to reveal great deal of private information online. London Times reporter Emma Justice writes in her article about how Facebook users are comfortable sharing information online – commenting: "The fact that you can't see or hear other people makes it easier to reveal yourself in a way you might not be comfortable with. You become less conscious of the individuals involved (including yourself), less inhibited, less embarrassed and less concerned about how you will be evaluated." Lots of people found the only way to reclaim their truly private life was to log off and disconnect completely.

Facebook first appeared in North America, so they are the first to face these problems and of course the first to look for solutions. They formed special department in the National PTA (Parent – Teacher Association) to keep young people safe. While most people think that sexual predators are the main reason to keep social networks away from young students, PTA made a research where one of their members Amanda Lenhart states that this is less of risk than it is made out to be. "Mostly kids at risk already have a bunch of social and emotional problems in their lives. These kids are the ones who might engage in risky behaviors, seek out sex talk

online and knowingly meet people who are older." According to the article, "Peer-to-peer harassment and bullying are much more common threats to online youngsters," (Feldman 2011) which is a concern both online and off. Because of this controversy, networks have engaged efforts to form more secure online communities for students. Facebook, which currently has over 900 million users making it the largest social networking site, partnered with the National PTA "to promote responsible and safe Internet use to kids, parents and teachers." Facebook went on to create both safety and education tabs that provide information and resources for educators and concerned parents. MySpace also established a partnership with the Attorney General, created a safety task force, and released a list of strategies for online safety. In addition there are numerous student-oriented sites and programs created to bring safety without sacrificing social networking opportunities. This means that these fresh social networking sites try to take advantage of the massive popularity of online social networking while at the same time providing a further protected and regulated stage for social networking activities.

Teachers and other participants in the educational process are at danger too. Large number of the teachers is still using facts and materials in their lectures from sites that do not always provide accurate information. There was a story last year where a professor from Dartmouth University in USA, updated her social network profile by stating how she accessed Wikipedia to gather information for her next lecture: "I feel like such a fraud. Do you think Dartmouth parents would be upset about paying \$40,000 a year for their children to go here if they knew that certain professors were looking up stuff on Wikipedia and asking for advice from their Facebook friends on the night before the lecture?" (Young 2009) It appears that, this professor was uninformed that everybody on Facebook was able to read this post and not just her friends. That included her students and their parents. This is just one story but there are lots of similar events. Same as the students, not every educator is familiar with how social networks operate.

When mentioning Wikipedia, quality information is challenging when the quantity of information is gigantic. The online encyclopedia

(which relies upon volunteer editors and contributors) gets way more traffic than the Web site run by Encyclopedia Britannica (which relies upon experts and scholars), even though the interactive format employed by Wikipedia opens it to postings that are inaccurate, unverified, even downright fraudulent” (Kakutani 2007). But Encyclopedia Britannica is not free, and students and educators must pay membership to the site. And not everybody at Wikipedia is expert in the field they write. There was a case where 24 years old man wrote thousand of facts pretending to be a professor. On the other hand all of them were accurate. So where is the thin line that tells us what information to use and what not to use.

#### 4. Solution

As the discussion on how technology and social networks play part in the classroom keeps on running, members on both sides are arguing where to draw a line between the significance of innovation and the protection of students. As solutions that keep happy both sides continue to develop, online education resources make a new turn. Taking example of Facebook, Tweeter, MySpace, Google+, YouTube etc, there are new and improved social networks made especially for education. Sites like:

- Classroom 2.0, ([www.classroom20.com](http://www.classroom20.com))
- Educator’s PLN, ([www.edupln.ning.com](http://www.edupln.ning.com))
- Sophia, ([www.sophia.org](http://www.sophia.org))
- ISTE Community, ([www.iste-community.org](http://www.iste-community.org))
- WhoTeaches, ([www.whoteaches.com](http://www.whoteaches.com))

are the leading social sites where only proven teachers and participants in the educational process can write articles, share learning materials and teaching techniques or point to more useful information. These sites are used by teachers all over the world providing accurate information which is updated on daily bases and is always filtered for errors and plagiarism. As time goes by the number of this kind of sites will only grow bigger and will make the teaching more efficient and more interesting for the students.

#### 5. Conclusion

While using teaching techniques that involves social networks, teachers have the possibility to increase students’ involvement in their education, increase technological skills and to build better communication skills. In times of economic crises and reduced budget for education, these online tools are very useful if used correctly. We just saw that they come with some risks, but still these technologies become more widespread, and the margins of social networking keep on expanding. Without a doubt, social networking sites have changed the traditional definition of having a friend. While online forums and blogs create difficulties for communicating, so do traditional methods of communication. The challenges posed by online social networking, and the possible profit to informal and formal education, are still emerging. Social networking is not a new phenomenon, but it is something that is gradually starting to be embraced in the educational world. The technology that allows this modern level of connection has the possibility to unlock information to more people than has ever been possible at any point throughout human history.

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