Go Social; be Universal

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ABSTRACT This article illustrates the unprecedented invasion and domination of Social media in the arena of language teaching and learning. Today social media has emerged as a bridge that connects traditional formal teaching with the present day revolutionary, multidimensional and informal means of online learning through social media networking. It is time to re-consider the roles of teachers as they should start thinking beyond traditional approaches and also be avant-garde in the use of technology and latest interesting tools of teaching with entertainment like facebook, twitter etc. The several social networking sites that provide a platform for learning English are also listed out. The educators need to view it as an opportunity to develop professionally by going beyond the precincts of the classroom and reaching out to the tech savvy students beyond hours with a sophisticated advent of informal and real life learning.

In this Information Age powered by communication technology exponential changes mark every sphere of life and there emerged a gadget driven generation. Smart phones, ipads, laptops empowered the present generation making them mobile and tech savvy. This leads to a need of thought shift in parents and educators as well. The revolution has come to language teaching, a challenge for the teachers to make the students learn English with interest and entertainment. Hence to correlate with the students effectively, they have got an excellent tool like Social Media, which like all other teaching techniques, should be used judiciously in the learning process.

Social media or network is "a group of internet based application that built on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user generated content"(Georgescu). Initially social media was used only to get connected with friends and share the daily deeds with them but now many educators have been a part of networks of this type, where they have a scope to share and discuss their ideas with different people of the same interest. Originated in the world of Social Networking, the Social Media has already been integrated into an informal education system for decades, i.e.teleconference and distance learning before it has evolved into a more sophisticated system, e-learning. This section explores tips for effectively using media, describes how to involve students in creating media on their own and notes a number of common mistakes to be avoided. The dramatic growth of social media creates new opportunities for engaging students. These include social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter along with blogs and wikis.

There is also a controversy of using new Social Media such as Facebook or WebChat. Social networking has emerged as a very powerful tool that connects the people and a very powerful medium of sharing thoughts, feelings and emotions for any educator irrespective of their subjects. It emerged to be a double edged knife. As Charles Dickens said "It was the best of times, the worst of times" the Wisdom, mania both can be shared through it. .It depends on the people who use it. Social networking can also be used for education making it an "education network" as Steve Hargadon calls it. The people are inhibiting a digital landscape facilitated with an "open and connected" (Zuckerberg) web.

Social Media, the so-called Social Network as referred to in the relationship among users, are rapidly growing types of digital media. They emerge in various forms to bring people together as communities: Blogs (e.g.,WordPress), Social Networks (e.g.,Facebook), Microblogs (e.g. Twitter), Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), Video Podcasts, Discussion Forums, RSS Feeds and Photo Sharing (e.g. Flickr) as examples. The popular social media among teenagers, who are the majority of the social media users, include Facebook,Hi5, Twitter, Linked in, and Foursquare respectively. The top five online activities include e-mailing, reading news, sending private messages, reading reviews and sharing content.

So, why not use this trend of popularizing of online communication also as a means to attract young people to learn languages in a captivating, interesting, entertaining, informal and laid-back way?

There are numerouslinks which give chances to the teachers for engaging their students out of their classroom with fresh mind and new interest. The skills of the language, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing can be consolidated only through practice. In an environment where English is not the language spoken outside the classrooms, continuous practice is necessary. The print and electronic media, the newspaper, radio and TV were the materials for practice. But now the scenario has transformed to online learning, where by joining a community a learner will have access to all the various sources at a mere click of the mouse.

Here are some links using which the students can be involved with some of the activities as the educators will be planning for the hours beyond classroom.

Twiducate is a website where the teacher can register himself or herself. The members can connect, collaborate and embed. They can share their unforgettable moments of flashes of inspiration, ideas, emotions and feelings. They can embed videos, pictures and audio files. Afterthoughts, discussions, reflections all can be shared. Feedback also can be given, paring and sharing of ideas, pointing out resources, updating all can be done with a click, in addition to inserting images, links, documents, pictures and videos. The teacher can create a class code and the students can log in, solve problems and collaborate.

LiveMocha.com is a complete social network at its core. The site boasts over 6 million users and was named as one of

Time magazine's top 50 websites of 2010. In a Facebook like fashion, one's personal profile appears with one's picture and friends list. One can build one's own profile and indicate which languages one wants to learn and which languages one already knows. Live chat is available with anyone that is online and people use the chat to practice their language of choice.The USP of Live Mocha is that it provides "online instructor led conversation" classes designed to help the learners become fluent in English quickly and effectively. Live group lessons are focused on conversation practice with the teacher and with other English learners from all around the world. They provide the learner the instruction, support, and practice needed to start speaking English with confidence. The site also provides practice in reading and writing. But the primary focus is on speaking.

Conversation Exchange/ Language Exchange and Talk and Learn—The focus here too is on speech. The learner can create his profile, upload pictures, make friends and chat with other members in English. He can also find Language Exchange partners from around the world to practice English with face-to- face conversation. This induces cosmopolitanism, the newly developed culture.

Palabea offers community based language learning with virtual classrooms. Users can find friends and interact with them by audio or video conferencing, receive video and podcast lessons by accredited institutions, record their own lessons and upload videos to the site, and use translation tools powered by Babylon. The user interface of this site resembles a fun game like environment and offers very intuitive features for chatting and finding new friends.

Along with English some networking sites provide an opportunity to learn many languages.

Polyglot Club is one which gives opportunity to make friends with the entire world and make their own community where they can form own chartrooms and can share ideas on teaching as well as learning methodologies, upload videos even share videos of experts for reference and most importantly can get online corrections of their errors in language and also they can attend real life events around the world.

My Happy Planet - Learn other languages from a native speaker and share own language skills with people around the world. Here there is a scope to learn about cultures and languages through different lessons created by its members.

Vimeo is an educational resource like You Tube where one can find a lot of informative and educative videos on any topic. In both You Tube and Vomeo one can upload, download and share the videos for one's benefit.

Skype is also another medium where people can have online discussion with different people and educators after the class hours.

Some other links like the above that provide practice in vocabulary and help enhancing our language ability are as follows:

Shared Talk - Perhaps one of the best places on the internet to practice a language. Learn English or help someone learn language by developing the building blocks of effective communication like grammar and vocabulary.

English Baby - This site specializes in idioms and phrases. Great video and free lessons on those are shared as idioms are considered to bring sophistication and decoration in the English language.

Wordsurfing - Video collections and opportunities to communicate with other students with lots of new words and games on words.

Babble.com is an excellent social networking site to develop one's vocabulary. It is easy to learn words and expressions related to a particular topic or situation, almost register based.

The mind mapping on Jonathan'senglish.com provides an opportunity to learn and practise related words.

Twitter is a great place to learn new vocabulary. The resource persons like teachers and learning site managers tweet words and expressions explaining the meaning and usage. Quizzes and exercises provide the much needed practice.

Practice itself incorporates grammar.Busuu lays focus on grammar giving access to grammar guides by leading publishers like Collins.

There are also websites for translation.
Duolingo - Helps the word translate websites into one's native language and at the same time, this might help one to improve one's English and also this can be fruitful in terms of self study and self analysis.

As can be seen the use of social media to enhance teaching and learning effectively complements pedagogical approaches to learning. Effective instruction builds bridges between students' knowledge and the learning objectives of the course. Using media engages and aids student retention of knowledge, motivates in the subject matter, and illustrates the relevance of many concepts. The discussion is varied by many studies. In the end, it is time to re-consider the roles of teachers and learners as well as their effective and attitudinal effects on Social Media used for education, since it will be or is now unavoidably integrated into our daily lives. Social Media can be a component of active learning strategies such as group discussions or case studies. Students can also create their own media. For example, student video projects can be a powerful learning experience. It can be a possible strategy for teachers to use social media who emphasize the cost effectiveness of using free social networks and the value of incorporating "real-world experiences into the classroom," as said by Adam Renfro as well as the ability to encourage compatibility between students.

Sometimes it is found that the students are not interested in class may be the classes go too long or stressful. Even the teachers fail at a point to give their best performance because of elongated hours so in that case they have an advantage of this type of social networks. Microblogs which contain only limited characters are very useful to plan short assignments which can be posted to the students in a mode of competition or as quiz to other educators for learning through entertainment. So Social Media as a whole gives us the opportunity to upgrade ourselves, boost ourselves and innovate so as to give a new interesting angle to our teaching as well as learning of the English Language.

Not only has the learners, the digitized social community phenomenon definitely triggered English language teachers too to conduct research through the uses of Social Media. The research topics on social media are wide and varied. Some studies focus on the use of specific media, i.e. Blogger and Facebook to aid students' assignments, or Webinar (Seminar on the Website) to discuss and share intriguing teaching materials. For example, the British Council conducted a research project on "How the Internet has affected the preferred learning styles of young people wanting to learn English around the world". The result revealed that 69% of learners said that they found the Social Network had helped them learn more effectively because of its informality and relaxing atmosphere (Dalton, 2009). As a consequence, these new media and their impacts on English learning should be carefully investigated and monitored. So responsible and innovative teachers are upto enhancing their traditional teaching methodologies with the skill of getting their students engage into their lesson beyond class hours.

So let's resolve to socialize more and more so that each individual can attain universality not only in teaching but also learning with interest and entertainment.

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