

Joosten, Tanya. *Social Media for Educators. Strategies and Best Practices*. San Francisco, CA, the USA: Jossey-Bass, 2012.
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Social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and others are changing the way people nowadays communicate, collaborate and build networks across the globe. Being widely used by students, these tools are gaining recognition and popularity in education, but not as fast as they do in many other spheres of our life. Conference presentations and reports from the educational field show that the interest towards using social media in teaching has surged, but the practical implementation of the suggested innovative approaches is still outside the mainstream academic practice.

In this context, the book by Tanya Joosten, *Social Media for Educators. Strategies and Best Practices*, has been rightfully hailed by many leading educators as “a practical must-have” since it addresses the needs of two major groups of professionals still struggling with the idea of incorporating social media in their teaching. The first group is those who have thought about it but do not know where and how to start. The second group is many higher education faculty who are hesitant to incorporate social media for the fear that it might become a distraction or too time consuming. Joosten’s book has done a remarkable job by not only outlining the benefits of using social media in education to encourage the second group of teachers, but also by describing step-by-step process of selecting tools, incorporating them into course design and evaluating their use, thus providing the hands-on answers for educators in the first group.

The author of the manuscript is a reliable expert in this endeavor. Tanya Joosten is the interim director at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Learning Technology Center and has been teaching and researching in the area of social media for over a decade. She is very active in various learning technology projects, particularly with regards to online and blended learning programs.

The book consists of seven chapters organized in three parts. Part One, *Background*, serves as an introduction, as its two chapters, *Why Social Media* and *Preparing to Use Social Media*, make the readers ready for the effective use of social media tools in their teaching. Here, Joosten outlines a number of reasons why social media should be used in education and builds up the connection between the use of social media in teaching and positive outcomes for students’ learning process. She points to growing popularity of various social networking tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and emphasizes the importance of interaction for positive learning outcomes. Though this information is not quite new, the impressive feature of this part of the book is the wealth of current research, quoted by the author in support of her argumentation. Also, it is interesting to note that the book itself partially comes as a product of social media, as on many issues the author has widely used “crowdsourcing”, i.e., utilizing social networks for problem solving and outsourcing individuals for an array of solutions. Such is, for example, the definition of social media, which Joosten has generated based on the tweeted answers to her

query: “A virtual place where people share; *everybody and anybody can share anything anywhere anytime*”.

In the chapter dedicated to the initial steps leading to the use of social media in teaching, Joosten, like many other educators before her, stresses the need to sufficiently familiarize oneself with the media one plans to use, by building a professional and social networks, tracking professional conferences by hashtags (metadata, keywords), and finding a support system in one’s institution. In doing this, she suggests “to build presence”, use self-disclosure as a reciprocated form of sharing, which has the great positive effect on relationships, since social media, according to the author, “values the characteristic of being human, or having presence”. The main message of this part of the book is that it is only after teachers have mastered social media for their professional and personal needs that they can start using it in teaching: “Lack of instructor’s experience and familiarity with an emerging technology can affect students’ perception of the experience” (p.16).

Part Two of the book is a guidance on what can be done with social media, and it starts with the discussion of how social media can be used in increasing communication and encouraging contact with students. The author’s survey of her students revealed that they need to feel connected in order to learn, and institutionally supported e-mail and course management systems are failing to facilitate this contact mainly because students choose social media and text messaging as a primary medium of communication. This factor, as well as the ability of social media to provide an array of methods of receiving communication, including instant updates, current and timely information, and rich content, presents a powerful argument, in the author’s opinion, in favor of using the medium in education. The chapter shows some examples on how Facebook and Twitter can be used for enhancing communication and building instructors’ presence outside classroom, helping students stay organized, and increasing student performance and satisfaction with the course.

Another chapter of this part is dedicated to developing a richer learning experience. Since the important learning outcome of modern curricula should be building twenty-first-century skills of communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration, social media is invaluable as a tool to provide access to rich and current content. With this respect, Joosten discusses the use of such social media as YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Picasa, Delicious and Diigo. She shows how teachers can help students locate, organize, evaluate information collected via digital tools, as well as aggregate material and create their own content for sharing and collaboration.

Cooperation and feedback is the focus of the next chapter, as these are important factors of active and effective learning. While asynchronous discussion is effective in online and blended courses, it is difficult to implement in more traditional face-to-face instruction. Therefore Joosten introduces less time-demanding technologies, which can help in implementation of CATs (Classroom Assessment Techniques). CATs, or short written exercises, can be used to facilitate critical thinking, metacognition and organization of knowledge, and can be implemented by postings through Twitter, Google+, Facebook, Tumbler or other microblogging tools. The forte of this chapter, as well as of other parts of the book, is that the author provides features, tools, procedures, and benefits of the social media and teaching strategies discussed in clear, well-organized tables, which allow the readers to easily incorporate the tools and strategies in their own teaching practice. Thus, from this chapter teachers can get six steps of the

procedure for using social media to facilitate CATs or six steps of facilitating peer instruction with social media. And like other chapters, this one ends with *Considerations*, or contemplation of the needs and challenges, related to the organization of the process.

Part Three is dedicated to more general considerations regarding the use of special media in teaching. Thus, Chapter Six of this part is about institutional considerations involving social media policies and costs, the latter not necessarily being financial, but rather costs in the forms of time, human resources, infrastructure, and support. As social media are relatively new, there is no unified code of policies, with each country and each campus having their own rules and regulations. The advice for educators is to explore the existing ones and to adjust them for their own needs and circumstances, together with securing administrative support, before starting implementing social media in teaching. Another interesting idea is to create a virtual teaching center, which serves as a repository of teaching materials, frequently asked questions, sample pedagogic models, learning activities, etc., anything that the teaching community can share.

The final chapter of the book is on evaluation of the impact, which the introduction of social media has produced on learning. Specifically the chapter deals with developing an evaluation plan, identifying variables to explore, and constructing research questions. After all, the purpose of using new technology is in improving learning outcomes, not because it is cool or popular. Joosten assumes that not all faculty may be well-versed in research, therefore she presents a clear-cut blueprint of evaluation, starting with defining potential variables, choosing research methodology, participants and sources of data collection, developing instruments and research plans, and fitting the research into the academic schedule. The concluding section of the chapter examines potential challenges in the evaluation of social media and strategies to overcome these challenges.

Finally, there are two interesting appendices to the book. The first one presents a sample plan of the social bookmarking and website sharing activity connected with one topic in a college English course. The nature of the topic or course is quite irrelevant as the plan can be adopted for any teaching material with the learning objectives of searching and finding websites, evaluating, bookmarking, and sharing them in a group portfolio on the Diigo site for peer evaluation and criticism. The sample plan also shows how students are required to report their activities in the process and how those are evaluated. The second appendix supports the previous chapter about the research on the effect of social media in teaching. Based on the Likert scale of answers, Joosten suggests several sets of survey questions to evaluate Social Presence (Immediacy and Intimacy), Engagement, Satisfaction, Learning, Performance and other variables, which can be examined in order to measure the impact of a certain tool or media on the teaching/learning process.

In conclusion, the overall impression of Tanya Joosten's book on social media in education is quite positive. Definitely, it is a very good book for starters, those educators, who have only begun thinking about using social media in their teaching. Some places may seem much too explanatory or superfluous, like, for instance, the reasoning that data collection should be better completed prior to the end of the semester, as gathering information during summer vacation may be challenging. But since it is a book well grounded in available research, more experienced teachers may make use of its extended reference list, where other studies and research papers can be found. Anyway, if you are a beginner in social media,

Joosten's book is a good place to start.