

PDP and social media

Personal Development Planning (PDP) can be understood by looking at Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. This article places this widely regarded theory alongside the use of social media by learners. It demonstrates how students' use of social digital media can promote reflection on active learning as an effective developmental environment.



About the Experiential Learning Cycle

The Experiential Learning Cycle is typically represented by the learner's passage through a four stage learning cycle,

- **Concrete Experience** - a new experience is encountered or an existing experience is revisited.
- **Reflective Observation** - the experience is observed and reflected upon and any inconsistencies between experience and prior understanding are reflected upon.
- **Abstract Conceptualisation** - learner reflection results in a reformulation of an existing abstract concept.
- **Active Experimentation** - the learner applies and evaluates their conceptualisation to a new situation.

Kolb says "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"
(Kolb, 1984, p. 38).

Social media Experiential Learning Cycle scenarios

LinkedIn provides a metaphorical shop window for both the professional and the aspiring professional. How it can be connected to the dynamic reflective learning cycle may, at first, seem problematic. Do we really want the world to see us as vulnerable learners?



Figure 1. Connecting Personal & Professional Development Planning to the LinkedIn University concept using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.

LinkedIn allows us, as reflective aspiring professionals, to show the world how we are capable of continuously developing and refreshing our learning and practice. Employers need graduates who are capable of adapting to changing conditions, especially in the rapidly evolving digital world.

This paper addresses how we can safely make good use of social media to help us update our professional status.

The following section looks at how social media can inform learning at the different stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle. This will be followed by a single scenario in which social media is used to underpin a whole iteration of the cycle.

Examples of how social media might be used within a learning cycle

Exploring with social media

'Exploring' is an often-used term in education, but it loosely describes active experimentation and involves the learner as the key player in their own learning - *doing* things autonomously on their own or with other students. It particularly relates to finding and making artefacts in the context of PDP.

Social media can be brought to bear in many ways to support the active explorer. Here are some brief examples. The learner,

- conducts a search for images available under a Creative Commons licence by using Flickr's advanced search tool;
- prepares for their flipped class by reviewing a set of videos shared with them by their tutor on YouTube;
- finds infographics while browsing and saves these to a Pinterest folder they have set up for their module;
- revisits notes in a variety of media made collectively by last year's class saved on a Padlet board;
- accesses the short Jing screencast produced by their tutor which summarises health and safety procedures for the Lab.

Capturing with social media

The idea of 'capturing' here represents the student's creative synthesis - their pulling together of ideas into a coherent form. This is where the learner responds to the ideas they have received as they now formulate an articulation of their learning, moving from an abstract

conceptualisation to a constructed, concrete representation of their learning. It is the equivalent of the traditional essay in the learning cycle.

Digital and social media are so diverse that the variety of tools and methods can be overwhelming. Equally, disciplines with different learning contexts, have access to a wider variety of media that can help students to make more authentic concrete connections to their learning.

Social media can be brought to bear in many ways to support the synthesis of thinking and the making of presentational artefacts. Here are some brief examples. The learner,

- writes a blog post in which they demonstrate, with illustrations, how the principle being considered in their academic assignment is being used in practice. In the post the learner provides links to five sites where alternative approaches are used in business;
- makes a video documentary using a collection of interviews shot with the YouTube Capture app on their smart phone;
- uses Animoto to create a campaign video for their project wiki;
- records a series of interviews with public health workers and clients and adds these to those produced by peers which they distribute on Soundcloud as a podcast;
- aggregates a portfolio of web-based articles using Scoop.It!;
- shares a photograph of their studio-based assignment using Instagram.

Feedback with social media

Feedback is inherently dialogic - there is at least a producer and a user, but other roles and models sometimes characterise formative and summative feedback in other configurations. From a learning perspective, to be successful, feedback must generate reflection so that the learner is able to self-regulate their approach to learning and, if necessary, further develop their understanding.

Feedback, therefore, is a form of interaction and social media is a particularly interactive space. Here are some brief examples for how social media can be used to promote feedback on learning to support reflective observation. The learner,

- reviews their own work uploaded to Slideshare and tweeted on Twitter. They note 33 views, 5 likes, and 2 downloads of their work. There are also 2 comments on the presentation including a question from what appears to be a student in Canada;
- modifies their dissertation title, having posted a draft on Twitter.
- establishes a learning set using a Google+ Circle involving a self-defined peer-tutoring group;

- uses Storify to bring together social media artefacts from a class field trip. Building a narrative around the artefacts shared by peers allows the learner to re-immers themselves in the rich experience of the trip. The Storify is added to their portfolio.

Reflection through social media

Continuing from the opportunities afforded by making and receiving feedback, reflection through social media describes a conceptual reconstruction which addresses learner transformation resulting from experience.

The learner, at this stage, is asked to reflect on their progress and build new abstract conceptualisations of what they have learnt. The learner,

- externalises their thinking in the form of a reflective blog post using Wordpress or Blogger. They begin by presenting coherent learning points. Their involvement so far has challenged their original conceptualisations and they are now ready to draw conclusions and make new hypotheses;
- uses the learning set's Facebook Group to display digital poster infographics side-by-side;
- works with the team to produce a podcast documentary based on the group assignment, but first they brainstorm ideas in Padlet in the week leading up to the semi-structured discussion.

A social media scenario around the learning cycle

The ideas above demonstrate how social media may be brought to bear at different stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle. The following fictitious scenario illustrates how a social media learning environment can be used to support an entire iteration of the cycle through one formative-summative task.

Scenario

Jill arrives late to the briefing session but has already opened the assessment briefing document where she has typed questions for clarification. She's repasted these into her Evernote account and will use these to check she's clear about everything by the end of the session.

'Ping!' - "It's OK. Just started"

She looks over to her mate @oscargottrail who raised an eyebrow! She knew they'd only started - all the cursors are still at the top of the Google Doc.

Jim, their tutor, speaks up. "Let's work through the assignment brief. Feel free to edit the Google Doc as we go if you can access it. First though, I'm setting you a fun little formative task just so you can begin to see what the standard is..."

Explore

It was useful coming today. Jim had played a video he'd found on YouTube. "I quite like this, but it's all a bit literal. I think you can be more imaginative. There's plenty on the topic here. What I want you to do is to have a bit of a look round using Google or whatever you like. Find blog posts, videos, infographics or a Storify. I'm open to ideas here. Find at least five resources on our class topic and do me a review of what you find in your groups. 300 words for each artefact you find. I want you to discuss the relative qualities of the resources you find and nominate the best one. Look at content, argument and style."

Capture

Initially Jill's group had decided to find one example each and add a 300 word critique to their shared Google Doc. Jill had complained. She wanted to do something more engaging. She persuaded everyone to use the Doc to share links to their examples but to then meet up for a discussion and to then record this and share it via SoundCloud.

It went quite well - just under ten minutes. They concluded the discussion by having a vote for the most useful example. Quite lively!

Feedback

Having shared the Google Doc with Jim, he was able to review the links and outline descriptions quickly before following the students' link to SoundCloud where he listened to their recorded discussion. As he listened he added feedback into their document as a comment. This alerted everyone to his review.

Quick on the heels of their specific feedback, all the students received a link to some generic feedback on Screencast-o-matic. Jill's group met to discuss the feedback and the forthcoming summative activity.

Reflection

All the feedback had been useful. They'd even got a feel for what some of the other groups had done.

"OK. So I think we should do something similar for the actual assessment to the one we liked the best. We know its flaws, so all we have to really think about is producing a new,

better version of the digital poster we liked. We said the one we found was too wordy and a bit monotonous. The essential concept metaphor was good. Maybe we can develop that a bit?" The group chatted for a while and came up with an infographic design and a voiceover script. There were five dimensions to the framework they created and they each chose to speak to one.

The finished piece of work was well constructed. It was better than all the examples they had found in their original formative exploration (well, in their opinion!). It was colourful, lively and explained their assigned topic well revealing their deep conceptual understanding.

Conclusion - from social media to PDP

The example usages of social media in this article show how social media can enrich the learning environment.

In the introduction I asked, "Do we really want the world to see us as vulnerable learners?"

Looking at the various examples there are many opportunities, even in group work, for the learner to talk about what they are doing and why, and to reflect on how they are learning with confidence. At any stage it is possible for the learner to reflect on their response to the activities and their sense of achievement. Throughout the examples there are many opportunities to provide links directly to resources they have found, or even to artefacts they have made themselves if they feel confident enough to share them.

If they had been set a more traditional assignment, such as a multiple choice Blackboard quiz or an essay, it is more difficult to see how students will find a way in to write something meaningful or evocative in their PDP portfolio. Social media, however, can help to engage the learner actively and authentically in an online space, thereby making it easier for them to find ongoing connections from their work to their LinkedIn PDP portfolio.

Reference

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

by Andrew Middleton

© The Higher Education Academy 2015