



The use of social media
for democratic participation (SOCMED)

The creation of an online newspaper by cooperating schools

by

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Using social media to enhance democratic participation

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Brief description

The activities in this training unit (TU) give material for a seven-hour training session on how to use social media to enhance democratic participation in the classroom. The target group is secondary school teachers.

Expected outcomes

Participants

- ✓ Will explore the use of social media as a democratic medium.
- ✓ Will learn how to develop their pupils' readiness to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions and choices. (A_COOP_3)
- ✓ Will realize that social media can open their school's environment to other schools' environments and even to facilitate communication among schools from different countries.
- ✓ Will understand how the use of social media enables them to reconstruct "the world" in accordance with their own interests as a school community, rather than according to the interests of others, and how in this way, they may be strengthening democracies.
- ✓ Will experience how an online platform can be an environment which can be used for promoting the dialogue and expanding their thoughts and sharing their experiences.
- ✓ Will become familiar with the meaning of critical reader and its characteristics and to be aware of the extend those are as well feature of a citizen in democracy.
- ✓ Will experience the empowerment that comes from their role as actors of change by building a school online community facilitating communication and participation among the participants.

Activities

	Duration	Methods used
Activity 1 Getting to know each other	45 minutes	Informal exchange, drawing, freeze frame, debriefing
Activity 2 Why schools should blog	50 minutes	Pair work, group work, watching a video, debriefing
Activity 3 Developing critical literacy	70 minutes	Presentation Discussion Learning by doing Cooperative learning
Activity 4 Content for the blog to enhance democratic understanding	45 minutes	Group work, diamond ranking, debriefing
Activity 5 Synergize – how to go from blog to online newspaper	70 minutes	Group work, watching a video, presentation, debriefing
Activity 6 Evaluation / Debriefing	25 minutes	Individual reflection, filling in a questionnaire, circle time

Background and context

The present TU was developed by Eirini Papadaki and piloted on secondary education teachers in an in-service teacher training workshop called "Creating collaboration among schools by the making of an online newspaper" which took place in Greece in 2012/13.

Activity 1: Getting to know each other and start from where we are

Duration: 45 min

Expected outcome

- ✓ Getting to know each other and being introduced to the topic
- ✓ Expressing expectation of the project and the reasons why they participate in the workshop.
- ✓ Creation of a safe learning environment.

Methods/ techniques used

- ✓ Informal exchange
- ✓ Drawing
- ✓ Freeze Frame
- ✓ Debriefing

Resources

- ✓ Posters
- ✓ Colored markers

Practical arrangements

- ✓ Arrangement of the chairs in a circle
- ✓ Arrange the room for small group work.

Procedure

Step 1 (10 min)

- ✓ Shortly introduce the session, its contents, objectives and processes.
- ✓ Invite participants to walk around in the room (if you like play music in the background) tell them to pair up when the music stops and introduce themselves to their partner.

Step 2 (5 min)

- ✓ Repeat, this time ask them to get together in trios and tell their members why they participate in the project.

Step 3 – (15 min)

- ✓ Repeat one more time, again in groups of fours, ask them to agree on three expectations for the workshop and represent these in a drawing.
- ✓ Invite the groups to present their result to the plenary.

Step 4 - Evaluation (5 min)

- ✓ Ask the group to stand in a circle and upon your command express their main attitude of social media in a body posture and freeze in that posture until everybody has had enough time to take in the different expression. Allow participants to ask questions.

Step 5 - Debriefing (10 min)

How did you feel during the activity?

Did this icebreaker manage to break the ice?

Would you use it with your pupils? Why (not)?

Tips for trainers

- ✓ Reflect beforehand what signs would tell you that you succeeded in creating a trustful atmosphere (e.g. participants feel safe to truly express their opinions);
- ✓ Whatever comes your way, keep a positive attitude, remember humor and remain flexible.

Activity 2: Why schools should blog?

Duration: 50 min

Expected outcome

- ✓ Recognize the importance that pupils need to be producers of the news and messages in order to act as gatekeepers with responsibility and ethos within the democratic spectrum.
- ✓ Become aware of how the news is produced in the 21st century.
- ✓ Realize the overall benefits of having school blogs.

Methods/ techniques used

- ✓ Group work
- ✓ Discussion

Resources

- ✓ Wikipedia
- ✓ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoZNIsp3Kik&feature=player_embedded
- ✓ Gatekeeping theory: An evolution by Chris Roberts (pdf "google-able")

Practical arrangements

- ✓ Computer lab/laptops.
- ✓ Internet connection
- ✓ A4 Paper and pencils

Procedure

Step 1 (10 min)

- ✓ Introduce the topic
- ✓ Divide the group into micro-groups of 3 using a suitable group-formation activity (e.g. that of the first activity)
- ✓ Contact activity: Invite participants to share with their group members what topic they find hot enough to start an online blog about and why they find it important.

Step 2 (20 min)

- ✓ Invite participants to watch the video. ("Why the News Isn't Really the News", see link in resources)
- ✓ Invite them to talk about the following: How the message is constructed in the media nowadays and how readers should act towards this situation.
- ✓ Invite the groups to share their results in the plenary.

Step 3 - (10 min)

Ask the participants to do a Round Robin on the following questions; have a placemat for four with each space having one of the questions below. Participants are asked to answer the question and either move one place to the left or turn the placemat in the way that everyone has the next question.

- ✓ How did you feel while watching the video?
- ✓ How true is “true” when it comes to news on the internet?
- ✓ What strategies can we use to verify the “truth” of a piece of information?

Step 4 - Debriefing (10 min)

Ensure everybody knows the concept of Gatekeeper (see: Appendix 1) and debrief on:

- ✓ Why should schools blog?
- ✓ What are the benefits of pupils being the gatekeepers, the ones to decide what news is being published?
- ✓ What are potential threats of pupils being the gatekeepers?
- ✓ What can we teacher’s do to keep the dangers to a minimum?

Tips for trainers

- ✓

Activity 3: Ways to develop critical literacy

Duration: 70 min

Expected outcome

- ✓ Participants are able to develop their critical view and to express their opinions in a short, accurate and meaningful way.
- ✓ Participants will develop their critical literacy.
- ✓ Participants practice reading “between the lines”.
- ✓ They learn to express their comments as if they were a haiku.
- ✓ They figure out what kind of “comments” can be labeled tokenism democratic on blogs

Methods/ techniques used

- ✓ Presentation
- ✓ Discussion
- ✓ Learning by doing
- ✓ Cooperative learning

Resources

- ✓ A variety of media texts
- ✓ Computer / laptops with internet access

Practical arrangements

- ✓ Tables for groups of four.
- ✓ Photocopies of diverse texts of your choice.
- ✓ Pencils and papers.
- ✓ The computer lab / laptops with Internet connection

Procedure

Step 1 (20 min)

Form groups of 4 and explain the following activity. Give to participants a variety of media texts, hypertexts, visual texts as well as traditional text material of your choice and ask them to work around the following questions:

- What is the general topic?
- What does this text say about the society we live in?
- How does the text portray the subject matter?
- What arguments are at play in the text?
- What alternative ideas and arguments could be offered to those presented in the text?
- Who is this text produced for?

Step 2 (10 min)

- ✓ Give to participants a list of behaviors which are quite common in blogs and ask them to peruse their text from above and try to find typical examples for democratic tokenism: (Appendix 3)
- ✓ Ask participants to create warnings about the *tokenism* they find in the texts by only using 140 characters or less (like messages on Twitter.)
- ✓ Let them put their results on the wall and have them walk around to see the results of the other groups.

Step 3 (20 min)

- ✓ Ask them to reflect on their behavior and attitudes in the previous exercise and then using the TASK-list have them do a “think – pair - share” on what attitudes, skills and knowledge a critical reader needs;
- ✓ Invite them to agree on 1-2 items per knowledge, skill, attitudes per group and write them on flipchart cards.

Step 4 (10 min) - Presentation

- ✓ Pin a poster with a mannequin (with head-heart-hand) on a flip chart. Groups take turns to present their results or add to that of others.

Step 5 - Debriefing (10 min)

- ✓ How did you feel during the session?
- ✓ How can we say that the characteristics of critical readers are also features of a citizen in a democracy?
- ✓ Why would you (not) use this activity with your pupils?
- ✓ Do you have other suggestions to make regarding the critical literacy?

Tips for trainers

- ✓ Remember to keep humor and your positive mood and flexibility to face whatever will come up.
- ✓ For step 4, log into Twitter and browse 'tokenism' to show a few examples.

Activity 4: School blog content to enhance understanding of democracy

Duration: 45 min

Expected outcome

- ✓ Participants will increase their readiness to take responsibility and to be accountable for their actions and choices. (A_COOP_3)
- ✓ They will explore the use of social media as a democratic medium.
- ✓ They will decide on which subjects and stories are suitable for a school blog.
- ✓ They will discuss the criteria for the choices to be made.

Methods/ techniques used

- ✓ Presentation with Power Point
- ✓ Cooperative learning
- ✓ Peer learning

Resources

- [1] <https://k12teacherstaffdevelopment.com/tlb/what-is-diamond-ranking-strategy/>
- [2] <http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/>
- [3] <http://www.teachit.co.uk>

Practical arrangements

- ✓ Computers / laptops
- ✓ Access to the internet

Procedure

Step 1 (10 min)

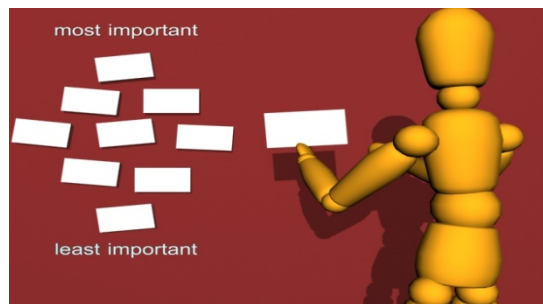
- ✓ Form new groups of fours. To organize the grouping randomly, have participants line up according to their tallness. Then count them through, every four are a group.
- ✓ Contact activity: have them share which part of the newspaper they enjoy reading the most and why.

Step 2 (10 min)

- ✓ Ask the participants to brainstorm a list of topics that they would encourage their students to write on their school blogs in order to become more aware about democracy.
- ✓ Ask them to categorize the issues that they found, e.g. public education/social issues/ political issues/daily school life/cultural issues/youth and entertainment/other issues.

Step 3 (10 min)

- ✓ Shortly, introduce the diamond ranking technique using a power point presentation (see: link [1] and [3] in resources)
- ✓ Ask them to write on post-it paper two proposals of their proposed issues on one side and the reasons why they proposed it on the other side of the post-it. Then, they will stick the post-its on a notice board or a poster.
- ✓ Next, have them prioritize their choice and find a consensus by way of using the 'diamond ranking' method for decision making. (See: link [1] in resources).
- ✓ Have participants walk around to have a look at their peers' results.



Step 4 - Debriefing (15 min)

- Did the session help to clarify your expectations about the content of your pupils' blogs?
- How will your pupils' choice of topics differ from that of you?
- How does blogging promote democratic behavior?
- Why does the blog topic have to be about democracy?
- How does the activity promote democratic behavior?
- Why would you (not) use this activity with your pupils?

Tips for trainers

- ✓ You could ask if every one of them had about the same amount of time to exchange their ideas and thoughts during group work. If they didn't, ask what strategy would help to ensure equal access and participation.

Activity 5: Synergize – how to go from blog to online newspaper

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Duration: 70 min

Expected outcome

Participants ...

- ✓ Get to know the *how* of blogging
- ✓ Get to know the architecture of a school blog
- ✓ Reflect about how blogs and other online input of different schools can be pooled to create a common newspaper.

Methods/ techniques used

- Group work
- Pair work
- Brain storming
- Cooperating learning
- Consensus building

Resources

Book:

- Gillmor, Dan. *We the media: Grassroots, Journalism by People, for the People*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media. 2004. Print.

Article:

- Coghlan David, Brannick Teresa, "Kurt Lewin The «Practical Theorist» for the 21st century" (can be googled)

Blogs:

- <http://www.blog.ottosharmer.com/?m=201301>
- <http://www.eng.feministblogs.org>
- <http://iraniansblogs.com>
- <http://loretocavan.scoilnet.ie/blog/>
- <http://www.sjt.ie/>
- <http://avs.scoilnet.ie/blog/>

Video:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmauKtZBDGI> (jigsaw video)

Practical arrangements

- ✓ Computers / laptops
- ✓ Access to internet

Procedure

Procedure

Step 1 (20 min)

- ✓ Introduce the activity.
- ✓ Form groups of four, but have them start working as pairs.
- ✓ Allocate the blog addresses (see: resource above) and ask participants to evaluate the content, the “architecture” and the comments of the blog. Make sure one of the pair gets a school blog and the other a blogger’s blog.
- ✓ Ask them to find the differences among schools’ blogs and bloggers’ blogs.

Step 2 (10 min)

- ✓ Pairs form groups of four and exchange their results.
- ✓ Next, they should find a consensus on what traits a school blog should have and write the results down.
- ✓ Collect the groups’ results in plenary on a flip chart

Step 3 (20 min)

- ✓ Invite the participants to watch the jigsaw video (see: appendix 2)
- ✓ Ask them to discuss the following topic:
 - What synergetic effects (Appendix 2) would we have if we pooled together all the comments, the blog posts, the You-Tube contributions and photos that can be gathered from the different school blogs into one common online newspaper?
- ✓ Next, invite them to think about the background structure needed to enable schools working together in creating an online newspaper.
- ✓ Have groups create posters with their results.

Step 4 (10 min) – presentation

- ✓ Divide groups in pairs. While one pair of each group remains by their poster to present and answer questions, the other pair walks around to see the results of the other groups. Change roles after 5 min.

Step 5 - Debriefing (10 min)

- What were your feelings during the process?
- What was the aim of the session?
- What is the most important outcome for you?
- Have you experienced disagreement or conflicts in their pair as they were working for creating the jigsaw puzzle and how they come to an agreement?
- What do you still need to be able to realize this online newspaper project in your context?

Tips for trainers

- Remember the different background your participants come from and try and be flexible to respond to their spoken and unspoken worries.

Activity 6: Evaluation

Duration: 25 min

<p>Expected outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participants evaluate the session regarding its initial purposes and outcome. ✓ They think about which elements they will implement in their context. ✓ They give feedback for the pros and cons of the session.
<p>Methods/ techniques used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Individual reflection ✓ Circle time
<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Questionnaire for online evaluation, (e.g. surveymonkey.com)
<p>Practical arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Computer lab / laptops ✓ Access to the internet
<p>Procedure</p> <p>Step 1 (15 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Introduce the session. ✓ Ask the participants to evaluate the whole session. ✓ Invite them to respond to the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are your feelings about the training? ▪ Which activity was the most useful for you and why? ▪ What would you do differently and why? ▪ Why would you (not) use these activities with your class? ✓ Ask them to use the platform as an evaluation tool and to work online reflecting their experience, their feelings and thoughts. <p>Step 2 - Closing (10 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have participants sit in a circle and invite them to make a final contribution by sharing their thoughts and feelings if they like. ✓ Thank them for participating, hand out their certificates and say good-bye.
<p>Tips for trainers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You may use different questions for the questionnaire, just keep in mind to focus these on what to improve in the future and not focusing on what didn't work in the past, in order to protect yourself from destructive criticism.

References

USEFUL LINKS¹

http://www.ehow.com/how_5105878_create-high-school-newspaper-online.html
<http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/democratic-participation>
<http://beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/negotiation>
<http://www.hsj.org>
<http://www.webpronews.com/is-social-media-hurting-our-culture-2012-06>
<http://www.unicef-irc.org>
http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/en/chapter_2/2_16.html
<http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents>
<http://www.redorbit.com>
<http://www.studygs.net/crtread.htm>
<http://www.eff.org/issues/bloggers/legal/students>
<http://www.stageoflife.com/stageHighSchool.aspx>
<http://www.blog.ottoscharmer.com/?m=201301>
<http://www.iraniansblogs.com>
http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/en/chapter_1/1_4.html#/14/
<http://edudemic.com>
<http://edublogs.org>
<http://www.sjt.ie>
http://www.criticalreading.com/critical_reading.htm
<http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass>
<http://www.teachit.co.uk>

¹ All links accessed in May 2015

BOOKS

Dan Gillmor: "We the media" (Free Download IT eBooks)/
<http://it-ebooks.info/book/137/>.

ARTICLES

Chris Roberts: Gatekeeping theory: An Evolution.

Peter A. Corning: What is Life? Among other Things, it's a synergistic effect (article in The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy, Vol 4, No 1-2 (2008).

Coghlan David & Brannick Teresa, « Kurt Lewin: The 'Practical Theorist' for the 21st century»

VIDEOS

(1) Why the news isn't really the news:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoZnJsp3Kik&feature=player_embedded

(2) Building the statue of liberty stop motion:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmauKtZBDGI>

Appendices

Appendix 1

Gatekeeping (communication)-Wikipedia

Gatekeeping is the process through which information is filtered for dissemination whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication. The academic theory of gatekeeping is found in multiple fields of study, including communications studies, journalism, political science, and sociology.

The theory was first instituted by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1943.

Gatekeeping occurs at all levels of the media structure—from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered, and includes media outlet owners and even advertisers. Individuals can also act as gatekeepers, deciding what information to include in an email or in a blog.

According to Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos, gatekeeping is the "process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day, and it is the center of the media's role in modern public life. This process determines not only which information is selected, but also *"what the content and the nature of the messages, such as news, will be"*.

History: Gatekeeping as a new process was identified in the literature as early as 1922, though not yet given a formal theoretical name. Formally, gatekeeping was identified in

Lewin's (1943) publication 'Forces behind Food Habits and Methods of Change'. Working during World War II, Kurt Lewin conducted field research initially among Midwestern housewives to determine how to effectively change their families' food consumption during this time of war. Lewin recognized that for food to go from a store or a garden to the dining table, there were various decision-making processes it has to pass on there. At a time when men were thought to control all household decisions, Lewin found that food does not move by its own impetus. The entering or not entering of a channel and moving from one section of a channel to another is affected by a 'gatekeeper'. The gatekeeper in this case was typically the housewife, or in more affluent households, a maid. In 1950 gatekeeping was officially applied to news. *White* looked at the factors editors take into consideration when deciding which news will make it into the paper and which news will not.

The Gatekeeping Model: Lewin identified several parts of the gatekeeping process in his 1943 article.

- 1) Information moves step by step through channels. The number of channels varies and the amount of time in each channel can vary.
- 2) Information must pass a 'gate' to move from one channel to the next.
- 3) Forces govern channels. There may be opposing psychological forces causing conflict which creates resistance to movement through the channel.
- 4) There may be several channels that lead to the same end result.
- 5) Different actors may control the channels and act as gatekeepers at different times.

Gatekeeping in the 21st century: More than fifty years after *White's* Mr. Gates study, in 2001, Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim and Wrigley studied the forces in news gatekeeping in relation to coverage of Congressional bills.

More specifically, they were interested in two hypotheses:

- 1) The routine gatekeeping force of assessing a bill's newsworthiness will be related to how prominently a bill is covered.
- 2) The individual journalist forces (education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender, and voting behavior) will be related to how prominently a bill is covered. They also predicted that the newsworthiness of a bill would be more important than journalists' personal characteristics. Surveying both journalists (for their personal characteristics) and editors (for evaluating newsworthiness), Shoemaker and her colleagues found that only newsworthiness had a significant effect on the amount of coverage given to a bill, thus their first hypothesis was supported as well as the idea that newsworthiness would be more important than personal characteristics.

Singer, however, has been interested in how gatekeeping translates to how traditional newspapers use online tools.

In both 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, she studied how the Internet was changing the process for newspapers, contending "that the power of gatekeepers seems to diminish in modern information society. The Internet defies the whole notion of a 'gate' and challenges the idea that journalists (or anyone else) can or should limit what passes through it".

Furthermore, journalists were beginning to take a step back from their traditional gatekeeping role such that many websites had sections in which journalists provided baseline information and users could manipulate according to their needs and interests like interactive maps.

Audience gate keeping: along with the Web 2.0 environment, users have been playing an ever greater role in producing and (re)distributing online news items via online social networks such as Facebook.

Shoemaker and Vos theorized such practice as ‘audience gatekeeping’.

According to their research (2011), audience gatekeeping is the process in which users *“pass along already available news items and comment on them based on the user’s own set of criteria about the newsworthiness.”*

Kwon et al. (2013) adapted the theory of audience gatekeeping to explore what channels are mainly adopted for Twitter audiences to filter and share new contents. The notion of audience gatekeeping consists with Goode’s (2009) discussion on meta-journalism, whereby user’s role in reprocessing and rebroadcasting the existing online contents are as equally emphasized as users’ original creation in nurturing citizen journalism as reshaping the existing hierarchy of journalism system.

Kwon et al. (2013) also found that re-processed news items by user-generated content websites, or social media, are more frequently adopted by Twitter users than the direct news times from traditional mass media organizations, confirming the empowering role of ordinary online users in retelling and redistributing news agendas to networked publics.

Appendix 2

Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmauKtZBDGI>

- 1) **Synergy** (Wikipedia): is the interaction of multiple elements in a system to produce an effect different from or greater than the sum of their individual effects. The term synergy comes from the Greek word synergia συνέργια from synergos, συνεργός, meaning ‘working together’. When elements interact with each other there is a flow of energy between them, perhaps in the form of nutrients, water, food or information. Synergy is when the sum of the whole system is greater than the sum of its parts (1+1=3).

Synergetic working together is used especially for groups cooperating for an enhanced effect, ‘a synergistic effect’. The opposite of a synergetic effect is antagonism.

- 2) **Collective Intelligence:** The ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.

The pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, randomly arranged, are simply a collection of material objects. When they fit together, a new whole manifests itself in the painting- a whole that did not exist until the puzzle was ‘solved’.

- 3) **Tokenism** (Wikipedia): the practice of making only a token effort or doing no more than the minimum, especially in order to comply with the law. Tokenism is the policy of practice of making a perfunctory gesture toward the inclusion of members of minority groups. This token effort is usually intended to create a false appearance of

inclusiveness and deflect accusations of discrimination. Typical examples include purposely hiring a non-white person in a mainly white occupation or a woman in a traditionally male occupation.