

Social media as an opportunity for pedagogical change in music education

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Abstract

Many higher education institutes have been utilizing Learning Management Systems in their teaching. These systems and the ways they are used, however, usually implement a traditional product oriented approach to teaching. Social Networking Platforms and online communities are an integral part of most music student's everyday life. SNP's are used for creating connections, but also for sharing one's music, providing information, as well as for learning. They can also introduce a student centred approach to learning by offering ownership of the environment to its core users, and by creating a need to communicate and contribute to a community of practice.

1 Introduction

During the last few years, an immense transformation has occurred in the way in which people use the Internet. The World Wide Web has changed from a "read only" media into a "read/write" media. Web based environments are not only used as a way to deliver information, but also as a natural part of everyday life, both in formal and informal settings. Individuals have become creators of information and audio-visual content, forming their own networks and communities of practice, and reflecting on the content using novel web-based platforms. This change has been as much cultural as technological, and has also been reflected in the ways in which people listen, practice and learn music, and how musicians collaborate (Draper 2007). Social technologies, such as online communities, video mediated communication and social media services like Facebook and Youtube, are moving the ownership of online environments towards the users, and in doing so have increased their sense of presence and participation. They have also created possibilities for people to distribute expertise and learn from one another (Attwell 2006, Downes 2005, Siemens 2006). This way on-demand based learning has been found common in informal contexts, such as garage bands (Green 2001, Westerlund 2006).

In informally functioning communities the relations amongst members are often horizontal and reciprocal; many activities seem to take place naturally (DeSouza & Preece 2004: 582, Salavuo 2006). The motivation for participating in different activities within these on-demand based environments seems to be internal. As a whole, the institutional sector is lagging behind informal cultures of practice when it comes to introducing new ways of communicating and creating content

as well as forming social networks with the help of technology. Although educational institutions are getting accustomed to using Learning Management Systems (LMS) in their everyday practices, they often rely on old paradigms (Attwell 2006) where the teacher is still seen as the sole authority that passes knowledge down to disciples with “empty minds” (Bereiter 2002: 13–16). New web-based services and tools, and the ways in which they are being used, have qualities that seem to better serve the ideals of emerging learning theories of the information age (Siemens 2006). Social technologies can aid in expanding educational activities beyond traditional classrooms and performance oriented lecture–exam models. Thus, they offer unprecedented pedagogical possibilities for evoking a crucial change in online music learning and teaching practices.

One of the biggest challenges facing institutional music education is to create supporting structures which acknowledge the existence of non-institutional and hybrid learning environments, and which allows institutional music education to take advantage of the positive characteristics of those environments (Hargreaves et al. 2003: 157–158, Salavuo 2006). Understanding the overall learning environment and context of musical conduct is vitally important when developing the conditions and pedagogical basis for learning. If these possibilities are ignored, there is a great risk of school becoming increasingly irrelevant for students and the ways in which they learn and communicate (Attwell 2006). It is generally argued that there is a lot to learn from the way in which learning and creative activities take place in on-demand based and informally functioning web-based environments.

2 Theoretical ideals and practice in online music learning

Current educational theories underline that learning and development occur through specific activities, which take place when participating in communities of practice (Wenger 1998). A self-directed learner can sense the ownership of his or her learning and the learning environment, and actively create supporting structures through networking and constructing community ties (Eales et al. 2002, Garrison 1997). Traditional educational practices emphasize the acquisition of information and the gaining factual knowledge rather than building knowledge that is new to the community (Bereiter 2002) or processing information in a critical way, as in transformative learning (Mezirow 1991). Knowledge has been seen as something archived in a database and passed down hierarchically instead of a skill to be developed through active participation in a community or through interactions within a community (Bereiter 2002, Downes 2005, Weigel 2006: 59). The idea of the collaborative processing of knowledge, alongside the culture of contributing one’s own creative work and ideas, are contradictory to traditional practices of education and often alien to the existing learning

culture. In the context of online learning, the traditional course model has frequently simply been copied or extended to the Internet (Attwell 2006, Weigel 2006: 55). Institutions have emphasized creating flamboyant content instead of forming communities of practice and developing learning processes, so transforming the learning culture to foster collaborative and learner centred activities (Anderson 2004). It is time for online music education to move from the culture of consumption to participatory learning activities.

The existence and importance of informal settings of learning and musical practice have been acknowledged in music education (Green 2001, Folkestad 2006). Music students are of course involved with musical activities both in educational institutions and during their spare time. Community music has been a recognized concept in the field of music education research (Veblen et al. 2002, Koopman 2007). These communities have expanded or moved online and new types of music related and user centred websites and communities surface constantly on the Internet. However, the significance of informally functioning online communities and social networks, and the effect of online environments in many musicians' daily lives have been undervalued. Rather than just trying to define the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning, research in music education should concentrate on viewing the agency, ownership, intention and motivation behind learning and musical activities (see Maehr et al. 2002), and put less value on how educational practices are structured, or in which settings the learning activities are occurring (Folkestad 2006).

Reasons to participate in choirs or orchestras are often social (Veblen & Olsson 2002: 731). Garage bands and online communities are examples of communities of practice, where people share common goals, interests and procedures, and often learn implicitly by following others' playing, discussing about music related subjects, and commenting on each other's work (Faulkner 2003, Green 2001). Social participation in a group and the joy of accomplishing something can motivate one to develop one's own musical abilities (Hallam 2001: 69). The nature of the social and cultural environment is crucial for creative activities (Loveless 2002). A sense of belonging to a community can catalyze accidental learning activities, as well as encourage creative music making. New conceptions about learning as networked activity emphasize connectivity and metacognitive skills as essential elements of lifelong learning (Siemens 2006). The Internet creates possibilities to externalize one's own music and ideas for other musicians and communities, and lays ground for lasting connections and actively learning and music making communities. The significance of networking, utilizing each other's expertise and the creation of lasting connections, is often over-

looked and the whole ideology is contradictory to the instructivist or industrial age models of education.

2.1 Modes of Internet assisted learning in formal settings

At the beginning of this decade, most educational institutions had started to incorporate Learning Management Systems (LMS) or Course Management Systems (CMS)¹ as a means of extending or supplementing their face-to-face instruction, and thus implementing blended or hybrid learning (JISC 2005, Sharpe et al. 2006)². They were designed from the standpoint of social constructivism to engage students in collaborative knowledge building activities, in which peers could utilize their diverse expertises. One of the goals was to expand collaboration possibilities beyond class meetings, get rid of the use of e-mail as the way to post notices and communicate, to track student progress, and to provide an easy way to share lecture notes. In certain subjects, such as music, the possibilities of multimedia were to allow multiple forms of representations to enhance and deepen learning experiences (Crow 2006, Salavuo 2005).

Salavuo has divided the use of LMS's into three categories:

- 1) Collaborative learning activities
- 2) Visibility and presentation of information
- 3) Control & administration of teaching and studying (Salavuo 2005: 83).

One would assume that especially the possibilities to present information and supplementary resources in multiple media formats, as well as engaging in discussions around these contributions, would be most beneficial for music education.

2.1.1 The use of LMS's in higher education

In higher education institutes, learning management systems have proven to be useful and popular by allowing the participants to be aware and in control of what is taking place in a course, and in allowing access to supplementary materials (Alexander & Golja 2007, Delialioglu & Yildirim 2007, JISC 2005, Katz 2006, Mackrill 2007, Salavuo 2005,

¹ The concepts LMS and CMS as well as VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) are used to describe comprehensive systems, which are designed to facilitate, manage and, deliver platforms and content, which relate to particular courses. The systems include numerous separate tools, such as discussion forums, calendars, content production tools etc. CMS stands also for Content Management System, and thus the acronym LMS is used in this article. The most popular LMS's include Blackboard, WebCt, FirstClass and Moodle.

² According to a recent survey conducted of Finnish music teachers, 78% of schools are using some LMS (Kopp 2007: 51).

Sharpe et al. 2006). Numerous studies reviewed by Sharpe et al. (2006) show this tendency: the added value of online environments is in the ease of accessing lecture notes and course information, as well as in the ease of returning assignments to personal online folders. They are used mainly for the sake of convenience rather than meaningful pedagogical benefits (Caruso 2004: 8), such as knowledge building activities or the formation of communities of practice to extend collaboration beyond face-to-face meetings (Ausburn 2004, Bricheno et al. 2004, Sharpe et al. 2006). Online environments have thus brought about a fairly minor shift in how learning and teaching take place in most higher education institutions engaging in blended learning (Bricheno et al. 2004).

The ways of use may relate to a culture of learning, and not only to the properties or usability of certain media. This culture seems to preserve instructivist or transmissive models of learning rather than practicing social constructivist or connectivist pedagogies (Sharpe et al. 2006: 59). LMS-assisted teaching has been accused of merely transferring old paradigms to new environments, where they do not seem to fit very well (Attwell 2006, 2007). The educational approach and design is vertical, from the top-down rather than the bottom-up or horizontal, and the activities are usually restricted to occurring only according to pre-defined and pre-set assignments. Many of the studies where the use of LMS's has proved to be successful in promoting active and collaborative learning have been designed by educational researchers (see Sharpe et al. 2006, Stahl 2002) for students of technology or education (e.g. Alexander & Golja 2007, Gunter 2001), and in courses where support by hired and skilled tutors is available (Mackrill 2007).

2.1.2 Student and teacher perceptions of LMS use

There is evidence of blended courses being more interesting or appropriate for students than online or face-to-face courses (Salavuo et al. 2006, Sharpe et al. 2006). In general, students in higher education institutions seem to be satisfied with these systems in controlling their studies and in accessing materials to supplement face-to-face meetings. In fact, the more the systems are being used, the more satisfied the students seem to be (Alexander & Golja 2007, Katz 2006, Mackrill 2007, Salaway et al. 2007, Sharpe et al. 2006). If the LMS is used only in a few courses, the students do not see it as relevant to their learning and daily activities (Salavuo 2005, Mackrill 2007). The popularity of online lecture notes may stem from the possibilities to skip a lecture or not pay attention during the lectures (Matheos et al. 2005), and also from the fact that the notes usually contain the facts that are required to pass an exam. Thus, this supports the exam-centric educational model, and students view the tools as beneficial in fulfilling curricular expectations.

Technical problems, badly designed environments, a lack of a sense of community, lack of understanding the use of these environments, and enough face-to-face activities have been cited as the most important reasons for low participation in online courses in higher education (Ausburn 2004, Jafari et al. 2006, Salavuo 2005, Song et al. 2007, Von-derwell & Zachariah 2005). Students and teachers may not find the on-line environment as a space for collaborative activities in formal education, and may use the time allocated to online learning for other tasks (Ausburn 2004, Salavuo 2005: 239–241). Also, it seems that students quickly turn to other assignments if they run into something either technically difficult or otherwise unapproachable (Salavuo 2005: 161).

2.1.3 LMS's in higher music education

Based on the limited research in the field of using web-based tools and platforms in music education, it seems that the practices of online and blended music education differ substantially from many other subjects. Video technology has been used for years to provide possibilities for teaching or even playing together from a distance³. Learning management systems have been traditionally designed for text-based interactions, even though other media formats can be used as in any WWW-page⁴. The locality of the learning environment alongside copyright issues, seem to be the most influential affordances that hinder online collaborative activities in music education (Salavuo 2005). Music students seem to spend a lot of time together anyhow, so the kind of interaction intended by the collaborative web-assisted learning ideology is not seen as necessary. Current copyright law in Finland, at least, makes interaction around copyright protected musical contributions expensive and laborious with reporting responsibilities.

For many musicians, and the music faculty, online environments can seem distant: we often hear resistance based on the argument that musicians like to play together. From an educational designer's viewpoint, web-based environments are not intended to hinder face-to-face musical activities, but to enrich the total educational and musical experience, and most of all, create a basis for deep, self-directed and collaborative learning activities. However, the wide-ranging expertise

³ Although it offers tremendous added value, pedagogically video mediated distance education does not as itself differ from traditional classroom based instruction. Still, some colleagues report increased motivation and a sense of ownership of one's learning in video mediated distance courses (e.g. Cameron 2007).

⁴ In a case study, problems with embedding Sibelius notation files on the LMS turned out to be very problematic, and caused interaction to diminish (Salavuo 2005: 145–146).

of music students is not taken advantage of in a typical LMS-based course. Social networking platforms on the other hand allow us to bring out this expertise in profile pages, in private ad-hoc networks, and beyond.

2.2 Online music communities

Online music communities such as iCompositions.com, restation.net, acousticfriends.com, ccmixter.org, and mikseri.net (plus numerous others) have become popular channels for amateur and independent musicians to engage in various musical activities. Sometimes these activities extend into collaborative processes of playing, remixing, and composing. The number of online music communities is growing fast, and many musicians may have uploaded their music onto several sites. People are recommending music to others, and learning about new bands through listening services such as last.fm. The social interaction can be both tacit and explicit. Members of online music communities seem to be motivated by the need to get their music heard by others and to get feedback, and even more by the possibility of hearing what kind of music others are making (Salavuo 2006: 262–264). They participate in order to establish connections, not to get rich and famous. We have found notable learning processes taking place in the discussion forum of an online music community (Salavuo & Häkkinen 2005).

Activities in online music communities include

- Uploading one's own music, expecting feedback.
- Listening to music contributed by peers, providing feedback.
- Discussing, asking questions, providing answers, engaging in arguments.
- Recommending music.
- Connecting together to engage in joint project.

Attempts to integrate formal and informal fields of musical practice include the Musical Futures Project⁵ in the UK, among others. We designed an online music “micro community”⁶ for Swedish-speaking minorities in Finland on the basis of research on both formally and informally functioning web-courses and online communities (Salavuo 2007). The participants displayed a lot of enthusiasm and a clear need to have their music heard by others, and especially to get feedback on their contributions. However, the social dimension was not strong enough,

⁵ <http://www.musicalfutures.org.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.funkdammen.fi>

and the users wanted more MySpace⁷ or Facebook⁸ –like personal pages and better possibilities to interact with other users.

2.3 Social technologies and Web 2.0

Social networking can be viewed as a core characteristic of musician-ship. The networks have formed around local music scenes among artists within the same or similar genres. They rely on distributed knowledge and distributed expertise, and cognitive diversity (Brown et al. 1993). Within these networks, people have always been learning reciprocally. In the age of the Internet, social contacts are not dependable of geographical location but, for example, the musical genre one is into, instruments played etc. But the local dimension is possible, as we are trying to prove with Funkdammen, and as could be with MeetUp⁹: Communities are formed on the basis of interests, and on location, so people with similar interests can actually meet face-to-face. A fairly recent trend is to build personal pages on social networking platforms (SNP's), like MySpace or Facebook, and by integrating different so called Web 2.0 platforms into mashups¹⁰. For instance, one can add a blog element, a Yackpack-voicechat¹¹ to a web page; display songs recently listened to in their last.fm player on their blogs, promote their music in Facebook with a third party application, or add a Google Map¹² to their sound sample database.

For most adolescents, an online presence and membership of social networking websites seems to be obvious and essential. A recent study shows that American 9–17 year olds use SNP's as much as they watch TV (NSBA 2007). Nearly all US college students have Facebook profiles (Ellison et al. 2007), and use SNP's regularly (Salaway et al. 2007). The TNS (2007) and Lenhart & Madden (2007) studies establish that people use SN-websites to stay in touch with people they have met face-to-face, make plans with friends, re-establish new contacts, as well as for entertainment and finding people with similar interests. Ellison et al. (2007) found that college students use Facebook to connect with peo-

⁷ <http://www.myspace.com> → music

⁸ <http://www.facebook.com>

⁹ <http://www.meetup.com>

¹⁰ A mashup means the integration of several platforms or applications, or data visually into one interface. In the field of educational technology, mash-ups have been around for a while as “learning objects” which were combined in LMS's.

¹¹ <http://www.yackpack.com/>

¹² <http://maps.google.com/>, <http://freesound.iua.upf.edu/geotagsView.php>

ple they have met socially, and especially to keep in touch with old friends.

People exhibit their identities online by uploading photographs, video clips, publishing their musical preferences, listing their friends and comparing their media preferences. Musicians can invite their friends to their gigs or present their new songs. They create communities within SNS's, mainly in order to keep up to date with what others are up to, what kinds of ideas they may have, and to look at different media they produce. Today's college students seem to be willing to publish their work online (Lombardi 2007). The NSBA (2007) study reports that nearly 60% of the teenagers who use social networking talk about education topics online, and more than half discuss issues related to schoolwork. 12% of the respondents upload music or podcasts, which they have created at least weekly, and 22% have posted videos of their own creation online. Nearly one third of surveyed students have their own blogs, where more than half of them contribute on a weekly basis (NSBA 2007). Active Internet users read several blogs on a weekly basis (NSBA 2007), which they can see updating in their rss-reader, Netvibes.com or iGoogle page. They also link to other blogs, and thus direct users to others with similar interest. Social bookmarking platforms like del.icio.us reveal interesting things people find online. These activities could just as well be taking place among teachers within a school, or in different schools, among students and so on. These activities are also about distributing your workload, and making others benefit from your work and expertise.

Many musicians have profiles on MySpace and Youtube, and they publish their songs, post information about upcoming performances and new music, as well as follow what their colleagues do around the world and comment on their works. Thus, they display their creative work, their expertise, and create networked relationships based upon them. More and more people create, edit and remix their own media (Salaway et al. 2007, NSBA 2007)¹³. User generated content and its externalized representations, e.g. music composed and played, ideas, and knowledge, make up the foundations of social networks and online communities. They relate to showing off ones' creative material, to discovering and connecting with networks of people and organisations, gaining novel career opportunities and discovering support groups, platforms etc. (Bebo 2007, cited in Attwell 2007). Musicians can also distribute, exchange and develop their musical ideas and engage in music making

¹³ According to Salaway et al. 2007, nearly one third of American college students use software to create or edit video and audio files.

collaboratively by using online tools, such as online sequencers¹⁴. Complete or unfinished works can be exhibited or even sold in their SNP-pages.

Musicians usually display in their SNP profiles:

- Songs in mp3 format or excerpts of songs.
- Videos of performances or music videos.
- Pictures of their band (performances, promotional pictures).
- Blog posts about their life as musicians (upcoming performances, new songs, studio sessions etc.).

For many, the culture of social media seems eccentric, and perhaps exhibitionist. But many misunderstandings about social networking activities exist, and many educators are looking at social networking with fear or ignorance (Boyd 2007). A survey of Finnish music teachers revealed familiar misconceptions towards Internet use. Online learning is seen content centred, and online activities as asocial, and as a counterpoint to face-to-face teaching (Kopp 2007: 51). At the same time, when one can admire the possibilities that for instance video mediated music lessons, lectures and interviews¹⁵ provide for self-directed life long learners, one must beware of viewing these forms of delivering materials as online learning suitable to all students.

3 Towards learner centred and networked music education

A transformation towards learner centred and process oriented learning requires a change in the learning and teaching culture and in the ways we perceive learning, creativity, assessment, and more generally the educational goals. Social technologies, along with novel theories of learning may aid in this process towards lasting change and provide a basis for a lifelong development of one's musicianship. But taking advantage of the emerging possibilities requires pedagogical understanding, as well as realization that school culture is not discrete from the culture of musical practice outside school, and transformation in society. As Graham Attwell (2007) expresses, 'any movement towards learner controlled teaching with exploratory approaches to learning, including a more blurred edge between the formal and informal inevitably requires fundamental change in institutional organisation and

¹⁴ Free tools, such as Splice (<http://www.splicemusic.com/>) or Kompoz (<http://www.kompoz.com>) can act as social workspaces for musicians around the world. People can engage in joint projects, or contribute and use samples and loops provided by any user.

¹⁵ E.g. <http://www.youtube.com/user/Berkleemusic>. Also, commercial music schools that offer video based instrumental lessons are starting to appear.

practice.’ The keywords in utilizing web-based social technologies in music education are participation, presence and ownership. As learned from online music communities, the motivation to learn in ad-hoc communities is often internal and activities defined by the members, who express a need to learn and create. So, communities of practice (Wenger 1998) are more likely to form, when participation and sense of presence are endorsed, and ownership provided for the community.

According to a report by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, ‘..the focus should now shift toward enabling more informal and emergent social practices and projects. Emerging social software and its use as tools of personal agency and community building offer great promise for the distributed development of knowledge sharing practices’ (Stuckey & Arkell 2006). Social technologies can enable distributing the workload associated in creating and searching for information and learning materials. By sharing our expertise, and making that expertise visible, we could make knowledge building activities, work, and learning more meaningful and easier to manage. Connections between people are valued as a way of sharing knowledge and coping with ill-structured problems (Stuckey & Arkell 2006). Connectivism (Siemens 2006) may turn out to be a useful theory in trying to design and develop conditions for learning in social networks and with social technologies.

Social technologies often provide ways of making activities, and one’s expertise, visible to others in one’s network. In music education, making one’s musicianship visible in online environments could be a basis for new collaborations and growth as a musician, and a starting point for life-long learning. Students could start building their online portfolios onto a service, which is or is not supported by the institution. They could publish their out-of-school musical activities in these ePortfolios, and this work could be credited. Data could be moved from and to this portfolio from online course environments, calendars, online grade systems, wikis, blogs, data repositories and so forth. The users could determine what to publish, where and to whom. Thus, they would sense the ownership of their learning environment. These platforms could then be linked to other schools and communities, thus endorsing participation in national or even global networks. This would promote the development of skills needed for lifelong learning (Klamma et al. 2007: 72–73). We are starting an ePortfolio and social networking project, where students can publish their musical works, and clips from concerts they engage in during their spare time, as well as documents they create for their classes. In the field of music education, a social networking platform or a mashup of different services could include possibilities of:

- Sharing your music and ideas, thus establishing an online musical portrait.
- Showing what you do to the outside world (parents and beyond).
- Sharing what you find through social bookmarking platforms.
- Establishing connections with others doing things you find interesting.
- Finding new people to collaborate with, and finding out what others know and can do, so they can act as a resource for future learning.
- Finding information, getting assistance in occurring problems from people, from resources you've been directed to by others.
- Sharing lesson plans, materials and teaching ideas, experiences, discussing classroom problems etc.

The intention is not to imply that every MySpace page is pedagogically suitable for learning, or that conduct in Facebook always includes learning or meaningful creative activities. Instead, it means that the users of SN-platforms often seem to use and get accustomed to use the tools in similar collaborative ways to which the LMS's were initially supposed to be used. The SNP's have been built from the user centric view, and incorporate tools that institutional learning environments should take advantage of. As educators, we benefit from understanding the dynamics of the attention-grabbing effect of Web 2.0, so that we can harness it to education (Mason & Rennie 2007: 200). Students can be attracted to meaningful learning activities by also encouraging informal interactions in the learning environment. What would school be like without recess?

Certain properties make SNP's more appealing and pedagogically more suitable for higher music education:

1. Their learner centred nature
 - a. The environments and applications implement a bottom-up approach to learning, thus students are more in control of their environment.
 - b. Students are familiar with the interfaces and the metaphors used
 - c. Students maintain ownership of the learning environment, albeit within the boundaries of curricular obligations.
 - d. SNP's offer better possibilities for on-demand-based learning, with customizable properties, and mashups.
2. Increased possibilities and support for collaborative activities, such as,
 - a. Personal profiles, visible to their networks, allow the bringing out of their expertise and the building of a sense of community through common interests. This provides op-

- opportunities for participants of a community to learn from each other as well as learn by teaching others.
- b. Excellent support for multimedia formats, and embeddable applications as a starting point for collaboration, for presenting, and for distributing their music.
 - c. Formation of ad-hoc study groups that resemble communities of practice and the growth of informal interactions.
 - d. The use of third party platforms to create their unique environments by way of mashups presents new opportunities for collaboration.
 - e. They help in sharing the workload, such as searching out information through the use of social bookmarking.

Learners participating in online learning situations are individuals with their own learning styles and methods, different histories, backgrounds, skills and critical thinking abilities (Gan & Chu 2007: 214). Thus, trying to implement a one-for-all course model cannot be an obvious solution. Ownership, or at least a sense of actually being an important part of a community, is a key issue in designing learning environments – online and offline. This includes the right to modify the environment to suit one's needs and learning styles. This has been made possible in many SNP's, such as Elgg¹⁶ or Ning¹⁷. Students already actively using SNP's may be reluctant to use tools and platforms that seem different and old-fashioned in usability compared to the tools they use in their everyday life (Jafari et al. 2006). They are increasingly using their own tools in ways that have not been planned for by the teachers (Sharpe et al. 2006). On the other hand, some of them may want to keep their distinctive SNP's and Instant Messengers part of their private life (Boyd 2007, Salaway et al. 2007). But then again, it can also be seen that many students still expect the teacher to give them all the information they need in a digested form in order to both cope with their future job and, especially, to receive formal certification. In music education, the master is often blindly respected, and students sometimes ignore the possibilities for reciprocal peer learning. The learning culture is often very formal, and the students are keen to act only for credits and for what is required in order to obtain a good grade. Are these students adequately prepared for life long learning in a changing society?

In some educational institutions, social media is becoming an alternative platform to LMS in many on-demand-based online activities and learning. Certain American colleges have MySpace pages and Youtube channels, which they use to publish announcements and broadcast

¹⁶ <http://www.elgg.org>

¹⁷ <http://www.ning.com>

videoed lectures (Linh 2007). We have founded for Finnish school music teachers, and have started our first online course for music education students using a social networking platform instead of the LMS supported by the university. The course design is based on the ideas of connectivism (Siemens 2006), and communal constructivism (Holmes et al. 2001). The focus is on learning skills needed in work and later life, instead of memorizing and testing factual information.

Creating meaningful activities, and activating students to take part in these activities online, can be problematic. Thus, institutions should build systems, which resemble easy-to-use SNP's, allow students to be self-directive and innovative, and promote forming communities of practice. Students from one department at the Sibelius Academy turned to Facebook to engage in collaborative ad-hoc, but school related activities, when the LMS in use wouldn't allow them to do so. Meaningful and usable applications do exist currently, but the problem is in integrating them into the overall infrastructure, and especially to the user ID management system of an educational institution. The cognitive load created by the use of several new applications and platforms can be eased with a single sign-on, the use of rss-syndication, embeddable applications, and common interfaces. In fact, one of the main purposes of using technology to augment learning is to ease the cognitive load, not increase it (Jafari et al. 2006, see also Merriënboer & Ayres 2005). But we have to keep in mind that despite rumours, not every student is highly skilled in the use of technology.

Collaborative activities within social networking sites may be hard to assess, especially when the culture of networked learning is contradictory to traditional ways of assessment. Problems relate also to the fear of plagiarism, and the difficulties of assessing participatory collaborative activities. Traditionally assessment has been directed towards the end product, not the process. A move toward collective assessment and peer review is not always acceptable (Attwell 2007). The teacher's role is to be a facilitator who also challenges students to be innovative, critical and creative. It is of course important to keep a distance (Berg et al. 2007: 34), but a show of interest and support when needed can be very motivating. Teachers in different schools can help each other as well by networking and forming communities of practise online. George Siemens (2007) describes the teacher's role as one of a network administrator and curator, who 'acknowledges the autonomy of learners, yet understands the frustration of exploring unknown territories without a map'.

4 Conclusion

In education, technology should be viewed as a medium for pedagogical development. Learning management systems seem to be better suited to the industrial age model of instruction rather than to educating dynamic and life-long learners for the information age – or the connected age, or whatever age will follow (Zelenka 2007). According to Moore et al. (2007: 51), educational institutions should become ‘creating learning environments that challenge students to become actively engaged, independent, lifelong learners inside and outside of formal learning spaces should be the critical aim of change in teaching strategies’.

Applying the ideals and goals of current conceptions of successful learning to traditional schooling is a difficult undertaking (Koopman 2007: 159). But collaborative activities, authentic tasks, and the distribution of expertise, are often self-evident in informally functioning environments, such as garage rock bands, or online communities with an active participation rate (Westerlund 2006). There is a clear need for online environments, where musical collaborations can spring up and develop also accidentally, where ideas are exchanged and the expertise of the members capitalized. Perhaps we can learn from environments that have been constructed to function on informal basis and open the fences surrounding educational institutions, as with the Funkdammen and Musical Futures projects, or courses using the Ning SNP.

Social technologies present an opportunity to integrate activities, which take place in informal and formal environments, and provide all users the possibility to act as constructors of knowledge, instead of just receivers. These platforms could act as an essential part in everyday teaching and learning – or at least their functionalities should be incorporated into those online learning systems or intranet systems used currently by educational institutions. They could provide access to information, but also to people who might be able to help you with your cause or perhaps learn with you. Actively learning networks of creative people could function as a basis for life-long learning. Of course, this requires that you understand the culture of Web 2.0 and the social media, and are able to function within it. The key to the successful implementation of social networking in formal learning settings is to allow students to use their own tools in learning or to integrate popular and familiar tools with the overall learning environment. This means providing possibilities for an online presence and participation and ownership of one’s learning environment.

The change towards more meaningful activities that result in a deeper learning requires rethinking the practices and the learning culture of music education, and education in general. For educational institutions, this represents challenges in bravely executing pilot projects in the

form of action research. These projects should take into consideration the technological possibilities, existence of resources and the predominant culture of learning and teaching, aiming for dynamic change.

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