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'Get up, stand up for your rights': a research study investigating the use of social media for enhancing the museum learning experience

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Title: 'Get Up, Stand Up for your Rights': a research study investigating the use of social software for enhancing the museum learning experience

Abstract (max 300 words)

New technologies and online services have changed the web radically in the past few years. As a result, our society has witnessed a shift to the means that were traditionally employed for communication and learning. Schools and museums are, therefore, challenged to grasp and fulfill the opportunities brought by the 'social media'.

This study presented in this round table session (part of a PhD research project) examines the case study of how school visits to museums can be enhanced with the use of social software tools. It is specifically concerned with the potential of web 2.0 technologies for extending the museum learning experience and facilitating the meaning-making process. This study focuses on the process of shared construction of interpretations around artifacts, which is assumed to enrich museum experiences and facilitate meaning making.

Museum of London (<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/>) is selected as the site of the study. The participants were a Year 9 History class (13-14 years old) in a secondary school located in Milton Keynes. The research project was designed around the theme 'Get Up, Stand Up for your Rights', which is related to the Key Stage 3 Scheme of Work 'Equality and Beliefs'. The project included a number of classroom-based sessions and a visit to the museum in March 2011.

The study presented aims to outline this research in progress and discuss initial findings. It will also raise some questions e.g. How young people participate in 'narrative' processes within web 2.0 contexts in order to engage meaningfully with museum content? to develop an agenda for future research to explore whether and how collaborative interpretations around objects on social media platforms facilitates the meaning-making process and leads to a shared understanding around these artefacts.

Extended Summary

'Get Up, Stand Up for your Rights': a research study investigating the use of social software for enhancing the museum learning experience

Social media has emerged as a prominent element in the current digital landscape and its widespread use reflects how Web 2.0 technologies have become embedded in our lives. Use of social media technologies for learning signals a departure from the use of purely educational or institutional technologies, where educators or the institutions control the technology and impose the rules. This development brings unique and fundamental opportunities for rethinking learning and education. However, there are still significant challenges related to practices for learning through web 2.0 technologies, and, the relationship between social media and education is relatively unexplored.

One expectation of Web 2.0 technologies is that they will provide the means to reconcile non-formal and formal learning to allow for a more seamless transition between meaningful activity

inside and outside of educational institutions. Another expectation is that they will enable a potential for collaborative working that facilitates 'sharing and knowledge exchange'. The study presented in this round table session is concerned with how such processes/progressions can be best supported, especially in relation to museum learning.

Learning in museums is viewed as an 'active engagement with experience' (Campaign for learning, 1999). It is the interaction with authentic artefacts that it is widely held to be the key to museum learning. Ramey-Gassert et al. (1994) consider that object-centred learning in museums enables students to be active participants in their learning, while Griffin's (2007) work showed that museum visits supported learning best when students, among others, were able to share their learning with others. Social media seem to be well placed to contribute to this sharing.

Further to that, in a museum context, social media may make it possible for people to situate objects within contextual information, enable users to make links with other objects or topics and initiate discussions among them. These processes highlight the social aspect of museum experience, advocated by Falk and Dierking (1992; 2000), and it is thus hypothesised that use of social media will lead to - and enhance - a shared understanding around objects, which will facilitate the meaning-making process.

Forms of meaning making, according to Pachler and Daly (2009), are predicated on the social construction of knowledge. Their approach draws on Walker (2007) and his notion of 'narrative trail' and it is premised on the concept of narrative as constituting an important dimension of human learning; a way in which individuals represent and organize experience in order to learn from it and make it sharable with others within social contexts (Pachler & Daly 2009, p. 6). By drawing on these research, narrative may be viewed as a conceptual tool for structuring, organizing and reflecting on information with a view to facilitating knowledge construction and to make it more memorable and learnable.

This study presented in this round table session (part of a PhD research project) is concerned with the potential of Web 2.0 technologies for extending the museum learning experience and facilitating the meaning-making process. How individuals participate in 'narrative' processes within web 2.0 contexts in order to engage meaningfully with museum content? and How students engage with Web 2.0 technologies and make sense of their experiences and how they appropriate the technologies within meaning-making processes? are among the questions examined in the study. It builds on an exploratory study (Charitonos, 2010) which showed that the process of interpreting artefacts and moving from individual reflection to group discussion seem to be of value in employing social media in museum learning. Hence, this study is about the process of shared construction and how group members (at two levels: individually and as a group) approach the challenges of interpreting museum experiences and objects.

Museum of London (<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/>) is selected as the site of the study. The participants were a Year 9 History class (13-14 years old) in a secondary school located in Milton Keynes. The research project was designed around the theme 'Get Up, Stand Up for your Rights' and is related to the KS3 Scheme of Work 'Equality and Beliefs'. It included a number of classroom-based sessions and a visit to the museum in March 2011. During the museum visit, the students in groups explored the museum's collections, by using mobile phones, cameras and digital recorders and collected evidence on an inquiry related to the specific theme. In the museum the students also used the e-learning studio to explore further the evidence they collected and started creating an elaborate piece of work (video) by writing a script and using up to date technology. The videos were finished in the school and were uploaded on the social platform for further discussion. Students' responses, comments, links were tracked/recorded and analysed.

During the round table discussion this research in progress will be outlined and initial findings will be discussed. Also, some questions raised during the study will be discussed and an agenda for future research will be provided, to explore whether and how collaborative interpretations around objects on social media platforms facilitates the meaning-making process and leads to a shared understanding around these artefacts.

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