

Book Review: *Constructivism Reconsidered in the Age of Social Media: New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. Chris Stabile and Jeff Ershler. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015. 136 pages.

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One of the great opportunities in educational technology is the analysis and application of tried philosophies in the context of new technologies. In *Constructivism Reconsidered in the Age of Social Media*, Chris Stabile and Jeff Ershler (2015) collected articles and essays which revisit the ideas of constructivism in the context of a culture inundated with social media. The collection of articles explore the implications of constructivism on both a philosophical and application level. Stabile and Ershler state that the purpose of the book is “to understand practical and useful ways to engage in social media because it has its roots in constructivism” (p. 2). Although aimed at higher education, the ideas presented in this book will support reflection for educators of all ages and all levels in diverse settings.

Ershler and Stabile (2015) suggest that learning, as a process, results in the transmission of culture (p. 5). In this light, there is a great urgency for constructivists to reconsider the Internet and social media and their dramatic influence on culture. The explosion of the Internet has grossly

altered the landscape of information acquisition and availability, effecting all educational philosophies. In the theory of constructivism, education should be focused on using content to develop ways of understanding (p. 6) and such content is now increasingly abundant and accessible. Social media allows the modification, mixing, and sharing of information, which influences constructivist learning far beyond the impact of the Internet alone. The implications of social media for constructivism include large-scale changes to how students communicate and as a result, how they develop understandings.

Technology use has become the defining characteristic of the millennial generation (p. 28). Marc Prensky (2001) coined the term “digital native” to differentiate the profound impact of technology on millennial culture. It is also noteworthy that Prensky made this observation before the creation of such impactful social media outlets as MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The authors suggest social media is not just a new iteration of communication technology, but rather “interactions that

create opportunities for the evolution of knowledge” (p. 28).

When and how to involve social media in higher education is an ongoing discussion which addresses educational practice and theory. The authors present reasons to integrate social media into educational experiences, which include the potential for students to collaborate to find personal meaning in learning, to be organized and informed learners, and for instructors to create new types of assignments (p. 39-41). Privacy and university policy are concerns worthy of consideration. However, there are great opportunities to encourage students to think critically in terms of social media since it is a context many students find personally meaningful (p. 47). The authors argue that the integration of social media is no longer optional for educators, but rather necessary to support educational goals and critical thinking (p. 56).

Learner-centered online learning is the latest iteration of constructivist philosophy in higher education (p. 57). In order to employ this educational technique well, higher education faculty must have the support necessary to develop an understanding of not only online resources, but also the cultural context social media provides (p. 68). This critical evaluation of the context is essential to promoting and maintaining student engagement as the value of social media is not limited to faculty/ student interactions.

The implementation of learner-centered online learning can be a dramatic pedagogical shift for many educators.

However, social media offers opportunities for growth for faculty during this transition. First, social media serves as a powerful reflective tool (p. 94). Social media outlets allow faculty to document and reflect upon their own and others’ ideas, and also techniques for the implementation of learner-centered online learning. Furthermore, social media allows faculty to develop vast and diverse professional support networks (p. 96). Thus the learner-centered benefits social media offers to faculty overlap and influence the process of faculty development.

Perhaps the most valuable idea presented in Stabile and Ershler’s (2015) collection is the distinction between Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 characteristics and necessary skills. Web 2.0 was a time period of social networking and Web 3.0 overlays networking with large datasets (p. 111). These datasets allow for directed pathways to information (p. 112). The distinction between social networking and social media is important. Where social networking is an avenue for social interaction, social media is defined as “virtual communities where users share web-based content” (p. 73). This distinction carries significant implications for educators as it moves social media out of the role of simple communication method. This technological shift is not on par with the telephone replacing the telegraph, but rather shows a fundamental shift in how millennials receive information. Web 3.0 presents individuals with media targeted toward their beliefs and interest. This targeting creates an inherent urgency for faculty to promote critical analysis by students of the social

media they encounter in order to prepare the students to be citizens and professionals in a society where media is not obligated to maintain any sense of neutrality.

Although brief in length, Stabile and Ershler have assembled a collection that may cause faculty to explore their beliefs toward, and integration of, social media in their teaching practices. The diverse articles will appeal to pragmatic individuals interested in pedagogical application of constructivism in today's technological age, as well as philosophical individuals interested in the short and long term implications of the Internet and social media in educational settings.

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References

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