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ITP Core 1  
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## **SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES & PEDAGOGY**

The Social Media Classroom (SMC) program began as an application submitted by virtual community pioneer Howard Rheingold to the HASTAC Digital Media Learning Competition co-sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation. It was released on October 6, 2008, and made something of a splash in the social media learning blogosphere. Developer Sam Rose used the open-source content management framework Drupal to build the Classroom, about which Rheingold boasts, “It’s all free, as in both ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘almost totally free beer.’”<sup>1</sup>

The Social Media Classroom is similar to a course management system (CMS) like Moodle, Joomla, Blackboard, and Sakai, but the experience of the user inside the Social Media Classroom is a much different one. The learning environment is shaped by an integrated suite of social media tools including forums, blogs, a wiki, chat rooms, social bookmarking, and video-commenting. It is therefore a fluid space that evolves as students develop content in their exploration of the rhetoric and practices of each tool, or genre.

Software built on the Drupal framework is capable of accommodating the distributed, collaborative and contingent information production practices of social media because of the flexibility intrinsic to the structure. “Drupal,” writes founder Dries Buytaert, “[has] the idea of abstraction embedded in its DNA, [and] is intentionally generalized in its approach.”<sup>2</sup> The absence of predetermined structure means that it can just as easily be portrayed as enormously

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<sup>1</sup> <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://drupal.org/getting-started/before/overview>

flexible and customizable or as maddeningly under-designed. A core assumption of the Drupal project is that content should flow freely through a site, governed by rules that the webmaster or site developer puts into place. Drupal presents as a blank slate and requires a human with a vision of a particular end product and the expertise and experience to translate a vision into a series of decisions and actions, and finally to execute the master plan, using existing modules when appropriate and supplementing or adapting as needed them with new code. As Buytaert himself acknowledges, its “steep learning curve filters out far too many smart, motivated people who could benefit from Drupal.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, what he actually means to say is that the entire Drupal community (and especially him, as the founder and President of the Drupal Association) will suffer if one of their competitors -- Joomla or Wordpress -- takes Drupal’s place as the leading open source CMS.<sup>4</sup> The limited availability of high-quality documentation is perhaps the greatest obstacle to broad adoption. As one Drupal developer remarks, “Setting up a system with Drupal is far from easy. In fact, it was be downright nasty.”<sup>5</sup>

### **existing alternatives**

Historically, the academic communities responsible for the creation, emergence, implementation and persistence of course management systems (CMS) have conceptualized them as efficient information delivery systems.<sup>6</sup> The architecture and syntax of traditional CMS like Blackboard and the open source alternative Moodle are shaped by the positivist orientations and scientific management proclivities of their designer-architects, the behavioral psychologists

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<sup>3</sup> <http://buytaert.net/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.packtpub.com/award>

<sup>5</sup> <http://funnymonkey.com/breaking-the-mold#comment-172>

<sup>6</sup> <http://enterprise2blog.com/2008/09/social-media-vs-knowledge-management-a-generational-war/>

and cognitive scientists -- and somewhat later, the instructional technologists.<sup>7</sup> These systems function in fixed and particular ways that can feel awkward to users accustomed to multimedia bling and web apps in the Cloud, but discomfort soon fades under the sheer predictability and hypnotic linearity of navigation. Although functionality can be extended by installing various plug-ins, the plug-ins will tend to operate according to same conventions that govern the core components.<sup>8</sup>

Envisioning education as simply transmission of knowledge, early CMS developers sought to build an ideal structure for transferring perfectly formed expert knowledge to the learner/customer. Content, in this control paradigm, is an object to be managed by putting it in its proper place. This approach to content and structure effectively limits what sorts of activities are possible inside traditional CMS, because the only possible ways of engaging with the content are those that were imagined at the outset, and for which structural provisions were made.

### **a bad metaphor**

Marc Prensky introduced the category of "digital natives" in 2001 to describe the generation of students whose only reality is the fairly recent one of ubiquitous digital technology.<sup>9</sup> His controversial premise was that young people "think and process information fundamentally differently" (author's emphasis, p. 1). Those "born digital," Prensky argued, interact with digital media naturally, almost as a birthright, whereas everyone else who encounters the tools of digital media after having mastered the "old" modes of communication --

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<sup>7</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_virtual\\_learning\\_environments](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_virtual_learning_environments)

<sup>8</sup> <http://digitalsolutions.ph/couchkamotereviews/newCMS>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

letter writing, the home phone, cassette mix tapes, and the like -- has a more contested and tentative relationship with these new tools and modes of interaction.<sup>10</sup>

The digital native framework has since been pursued both in academia and in the popular press. An interdisciplinary collaboration of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University and the Research Center for Information Law at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland provides one example of how this idea is being developed by leaders in higher education. Lead researchers John Palfrey and Urs Gasser are collaborators on the Digital Natives project, which “focuses on the key legal, social and political implications of a generation ‘born digital’ -- those who grow up immersed in digital technologies, for whom a life fully integrated with digital devices is the norm.”<sup>11</sup> In the recent publication *Born Digital*, they examine issues like the implications of a wired existence of notions of identity, privacy and safety, and the renegotiation of intellectual property conventions required by the exponential acceleration of reuse culture in the web 2.0 environment.<sup>12</sup>

While the general public has been a sympathetic audience to this generational explanation, scholarly opinion has recently begun consolidating in opposition to the generational model. During the past year and a half, at least four separate scholars have published critiques of Prensky’s theory of digital natives and digital immigrants. Siva Vaidhyanathan published an article in *The Chronicle Review*; Henry Jenkins developed an extensive argument on his blog *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*; Neil Selwyn has prepared an invited presentation to CILIP in March

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.ascd.org/authors/ed\\_lead/el200512\\_prensky.html](http://www.ascd.org/authors/ed_lead/el200512_prensky.html)

<sup>11</sup> <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/digitalnatives>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.digitalnative.org/#home>

2009; and Sue Bennett, Karl Maton and Lisa Kervin recently published a paper on the subject in the *British Journal of Educational Technology*.

One objection, articulated by Vaidhyathan, is that generations are not useful as an analytic framework because of the tendency “to exclude anyone on the margins of mainstream consumer or cultural behavior.” He also argues that there is considerable variation in technological expertise within the demographic group in question. Writing from his own experience, Vaidhyathan estimates that out of each class a few students will have extensive digital media experience, a sizable minority will avoid computers, and the rest will stick to Facebook. Programming skills are rare, as is basic HTML proficiency.<sup>13</sup>

Henry Jenkins ruminates on his blog *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* about the limitations of the digital native v. digital immigrant dichotomy. Like Vaidhyathan, he notes that membership in the digital native club is a privilege, a mark of relative affluence. But he also rejects the notion that the young, those who have come of age in the digital media era, somehow have a better understanding of the emerging social practices than their older counterparts who knew and operated in an alternative paradigm. Jenkins takes issue with this assertion, arguing:

[Prensky’s metaphor] tends to exaggerate the gaps between adults, seen as fumbling and hopelessly out of touch, and youth, seen as masterful... In the process, it disempowers adults, encouraging them to feel helpless, and thus justifying their decision not to know and not to care what happens to young people as they move into the on-line world.<sup>14</sup>

Jenkins’ agenda here is to re-empower adults who have been subdued by alarmist exposes like the Frontline documentary *Growing Up Online*. Programs like this one attract a

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<sup>13</sup> <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i04/04b00701.htm>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/12/reconsidering\\_digital\\_immigran.html](http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/12/reconsidering_digital_immigran.html)

great deal of attention, with their focus on cyber-bullying, public displays of precocious sexuality, and pedophilia.<sup>15</sup> While these issues are real, they are hardly so prevalent as suggested by the hysterical tone favored by the genre. The real crime committed by *Growing Up Online* is that it perpetuates an untruth -- that parents and educators are separated from their children and students by a yawning chasm of difference -- and this untruth undermines the agency of the older generation to guide or counsel or advise the younger one.

### **literacy in a participatory culture**

Rheingold's Social Media Classroom is founded on the basic assumption that all social media users need help deploying their social media tools wisely and effectively. Five years ago he began teaching courses in Digital Journalism at Stanford and Virtual Community/Social Media and Participatory Culture/Collective Action at UC Berkeley. Believing it essential that courses in online media practices utilize basic social media tools in the learning process, he required his students to create accounts with several of the freely available web 2.0 tools. Students balked. He was surprised to discover, in the context of his teaching, that most of his students' digital literacy competencies were limited to email, text messaging, and watching videos on YouTube.<sup>16</sup>

Reflecting on this experience, Rheingold realized that he realized that these so-called "digital natives" understood the internet "not as a transformative new technology but as a feature of the environment."<sup>17</sup> His own long-standing immersion in virtual communities, a term he is credited with inventing, had skewed his expectations of students' digital literacy. Much to his

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.hastac.org/node/1724>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.smartmobs.com/2008/02/23/howard-rheingold-one-of-17-winners-of-hastacmacarthur-foundation-competition/>

surprise, he discovered that the vaunted potential of web 2.0 - toward rejuvenated civic engagement, organizing for collective action, expression of agency, and so forth -- is neither understood or exploited by this mischaracterized demographic. He eventually concluded that if he was serious about cultivating participatory digital practices he would need to provide more scaffolding, preferably using an integrated approach that did not require students to maintain several separate accounts. Having determined that “there’s nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the processes of civil society, scientific or scholarly innovation, or economic production,” he resolved to offer explicit instruction in social media practices and then to model these practices.<sup>18</sup>

Literacy in the digital network is contingent upon one’s mastery of the social practices and communicative codes that characterize the various forms of participatory media that are the vehicles of information in the networked public. It is the “set of skills that enable individuals to encode and decode knowledge and power via speech, writing, printing and collective action.”<sup>19</sup> If agency is, as Rheingold asserts, contingent upon social media literacy, then:

The more people who know how to use participatory media to learn, inform, persuade, investigate, reveal, advocate and organize, the more likely the future infosphere will allow, enable and encourage liberty and participation. Such literacy can only make action possible, however—it is not in the technology, or even in the knowledge of how to use it, but in the ways people use knowledge and technology to create wealth, secure freedom, resist tyranny.<sup>20</sup>

As this quotation illustrates, while Rheingold does invest tools of social media with considerable, if unrealized, power to become the instruments that facilitate civic engagement and mobilize political organizing, he is careful to distance himself from those who would

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<sup>18</sup> <http://vlog.rheingold.com/index.php/site/video/social-media-classroom-co-laboratory-screencast1/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/dmal.9780262524827.097>

<sup>20</sup> <http://freesouls.cc/essays/03-howard-rheingold-participative-pedagogy-for-a-literacy-of-literacies.html>

position technology, in and of itself, as a viable antidote to social ills. Technology is not pedagogy. It can be a vehicle for a particular pedagogy, but the burden of enacting a pedagogy still rests entirely on human actors. Technology cannot replace a high quality teacher. It is a tool, and as such, it takes on meaning and significance when intentionally and strategically deployed. As Rheingold advises in the introductory screen cast to the Social Media Classroom, "If you want to keep up, don't try to keep up with the technologies, keep up with the literacies the technologies make possible." Likewise, he maintains, innovative tools "do not by themselves make for better pedagogies." His message is quite clear: social practices including teaching and learning constitute the foundational infrastructure of the human experience. Technological innovation, for all its virtues, is merely a vehicle for teaching and learning.<sup>21</sup>

### **the interface**

*How People Learn* describes the benefits of tools that make thinking visible. The report discusses two particular tools, CSILE (Computer-Supported Intentional Learning Environments), since renamed Knowledge Forum, and CoVis (Learning Through Collaborative Visualization). Both tools emphasize collaboration and communication among students inside hyperlinked multimedia database environments. As students navigate the digital content database they contribute their knowledge to the collective. Actions are visible to other students and the teacher. In this way, students work off of each other's contributions and teachers are able to review activity logs to develop formative assessment of students' learning.<sup>22</sup> Rheingold's Social Media Classroom also makes thinking visible, albeit through a much more nimble and sophisticated learning environment than either of the aforementioned programs.

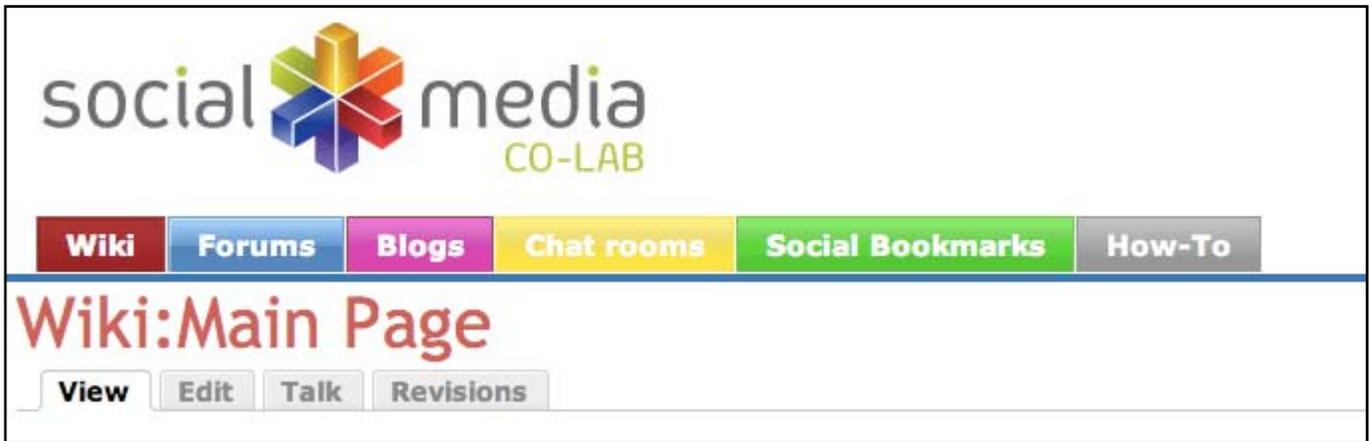
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<sup>21</sup> <http://blip.tv/file/1186946>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=9853](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9853)

Rather than requiring initiates to independently register for accounts with the various online services favored by social media mavens, it offers an integrated suite of social media tools within the architecture of the site itself. SMC integrates various new media communication modes into the fabric of the learning *environment* so as to promote their integration into the fabric students' learning *processes* as vehicles of collaborative critical inquiry and active engagement. The Classroom's visual design uses consistency in layout and color-coding of resources to help users become comfortable and proficient navigating the space, so that they can focus most of their energy on formulating critical responses to the meaningful issues and a minimum of time and effort of navigational tasks and tool operation. The color-coded and browser-based consistent interface features colored top tabs, each associated with a different social media tool.

*Figure 1*



The first tab is red, and if clicked, will connect users to the course wiki. Theme elements on pages associated with the wiki will also appear in red, so that it is always clear to users which tool is operating in the foreground. The wiki is perhaps the most expansive and flexible of social media tools. It allows students complete freedom to incrementally develop a collection of content distributed among linked webpages that represents the sum of their learning. Fundamentally a tool of collaborative knowledge formation, the wiki's defining characteristic lies in the total permeability of the boundary between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers. Editable at anytime and by anyone, the wiki is the most open and democratic tool in the social media framework.

The next tab to the right is blue and takes users to the forum. The forum is best understood as a space for the continuation of conversations initiated in class. The forums of today evolved from the message boards and bulletin board systems (BBS) favored by PC enthusiasts in the early 1980s. Forums facilitate extended and active discussions among many parties by threading conversations. While early versions were pure text environments, recently developed forum software offers multimedia capabilities. Forums offer ease of use to large and active communities. Their objective is to enable the maximum number of exchanges with the fewest clicks: "Good forum software enables you to click once navigate to the first unread post."

The forum supports asynchronous many-to-many communication with the possibility of embedded multimedia resources.<sup>23</sup>

Clicking a third colored tab whisks users into a third social media discourse model, the blog. Like the other tools in the Social Media Classroom, blogs are better defined in terms of format and process rather than content, because their content tends to vary enormously. Blogs appear as a series of dated entries with the most recent appearing first. Although he admits that “some blog posts are personal reflections, rants or arguments,” Rheingold maintains that “the quintessential blog post is a link surrounding by context.”<sup>24</sup> The highest form of blogging, he argues, is that which exemplifies Will Richardson’s notion of “Connective Writing.”<sup>25</sup>

Chat rooms are another feature of the Social Media Classroom. Chat rooms can be useful as a “backchannel” for discussion during class sessions. Students can use the chat room to pose questions, request clarification, make connections and summarize important points. By projecting the chat room on a screen in the classroom it is possible to integrate the synchronous, or “real time,” conversation taking place in the virtual space of the chat room with the discussion unfolding in the physical classroom.<sup>26</sup>

The final tool that comes standard in the Social Media Classroom is social bookmarking. Social bookmarking capitalizes on the collective knowledge of communities. Individual users bookmark websites of interest and “tag” them with descriptive keywords. By aggregating

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<sup>23</sup> <http://vlog.rheingold.com/index.php/site/video/social-media-classroom-why-use-forums/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/vircom09/wiki/blogs-lab>

<sup>25</sup> <http://weblogg-ed.com/2005/connective-writing/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.socialtext.net/medialiteracy/index.cgi?exercises>

bookmarks and tags across user communities, shared knowledge networks emerge around common "folksonomies," or informal crowd-sourced taxonomies.

### **obstacles to K-12 adoption**

Four months after the release of the Social Media Classroom, the majority the activity in the community spaces is still generated by education technology specialists and academics. Very few K-12 educators are actively experimenting with the interface. Teachers' limited preparation time and the lack of technical support services at the school or district level create obstacles to adoption of new software in K-12 education.

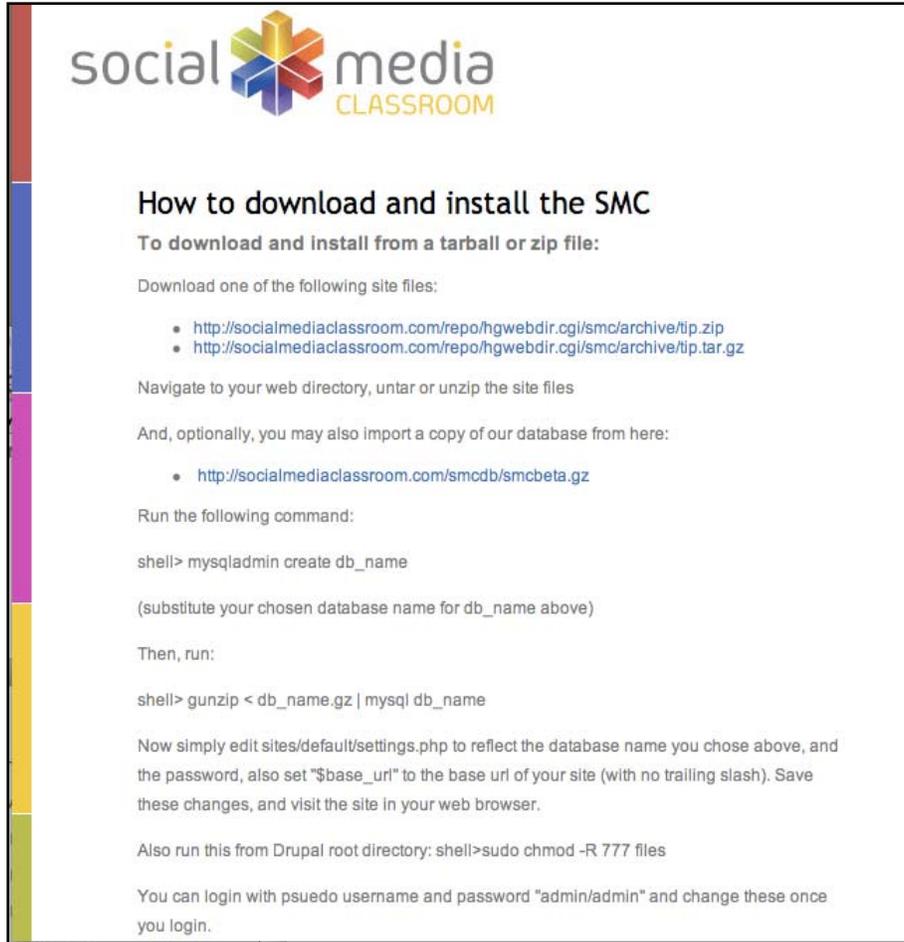
It does take some time to gain access to the site, even just to test out the features, which most people will want to do before tackling the next hurdle -- installation. There is a short application to fill out to request a username and password, which requires the usual identifying information as well as a response to the following prompt: *Tell us about yourself here. What education institution are you a part of? Or, how are you involved or interested in Social Media and education? Why will you be a valuable part of our conversation here?*<sup>27</sup> I waited nine days from the submission of my application to the receipt of my username and password, during which time I was unable to test out the user interface. This time lag is a potential obstacle to classroom adoption because many teachers will be looking for a solution that can be implemented as soon as possible.

#### *Figure 2*

To begin using the Social Media Classroom with a group of students, one must download and install several files and databases on a private server. It is not a one-click install; the

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<sup>27</sup> <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/application/webform/application-join-social-media-colab-community>



The screenshot shows the 'social media CLASSROOM' logo at the top. Below it is the heading 'How to download and install the SMC'. The instructions are as follows:

**To download and install from a tarball or zip file:**

Download one of the following site files:

- <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/repo/hgwebdir.cgi/smc/archive/tp.zip>
- <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/repo/hgwebdir.cgi/smc/archive/tp.tar.gz>

Navigate to your web directory, untar or unzip the site files

And, optionally, you may also import a copy of our database from here:

- <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/smddb/smcbeta.gz>

Run the following command:

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shell> mysqladmin create db_name
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(substitute your chosen database name for db\_name above)

Then, run:

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shell> gunzip < db_name.gz | mysql db_name
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Now simply edit sites/default/settings.php to reflect the database name you chose above, and the password, also set "\$base\_url" to the base url of your site (with no trailing slash). Save these changes, and visit the site in your web browser.

Also run this from Drupal root directory: shell>sudo chmod -R 777 files

You can login with psuedo username and password "admin/admin" and change these once you login.

instructions might be intimidating to the uninitiated. Figure 2 is a screenshot of one of two pages of the installation instructions.<sup>28</sup> It is likely that that technical installation and configuration requirements of self-hosting Drupal may be beyond the comfort level of many educators who otherwise would be interested in testing out the Social Media Classroom. According to the website, planning is underway for a hosted version of the Social Media Classroom, but at present this service remains unavailable. Rheingold's initial HASTAC/MacArthur application did not budget for hosting or a user interface consultant, but when the need for these services became evident in the project development phase during the summer of 2008, Rheingold resolved to stretch the \$61,000 allocated by the foundations to cover these expenses. He plans to reduce his

<sup>28</sup> <http://socialmediaclassroom.com/index.php/download>

stipend accordingly by what he calls “a stupidity tax.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the project’s delay to provide a hosted alternative for educators with less technical expertise is likely limiting its impact in K-12 settings.

While the Social Media Classroom is free, “as in both ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘almost totally free beer,’ ” server space, technical expertise and employee time are all *not* free, so successful implementation of the Classroom will be contingent, in part, upon institutions’ commitment to devote resources to the project. Institutions that are unwilling or unable to allocate resources to developing their web presence cannot provide the necessary support for the Social Media Classroom. Until and unless Rheingold can offer a hosted version of the Social Media Classroom, K-12 educators and faculty at smaller institutions will have to seek their solution elsewhere. They will likely turn to free tools with shared hosting, but this can be a risky move as it compromises the privacy and security of student data.<sup>30</sup>

### **privacy and security**

Privacy and security concerns aside, there are, of course, certain advantages to using free public tools like Delicious, Twitter, TeacherTube and Edublogs in the classroom. The utility of social media, and its power, comes from the collective knowledge, resources and activity of the network. When social media is cut off from the larger network, as with the Social Media Classroom, students’ experience of the leverage and reach of the network is watered down. In this sense the Social Media Classroom suffers from the “walled garden” syndrome.

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<sup>29</sup><http://www.smartmobs.com/2008/05/30/what-im-doing-on-the-social-media-classroom-project-this-summer/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://funnymonkey.com/breaking-the-mold>

All Learning Management Systems (LMS), whether they are Drupal-based systems like the Social Media Classroom or systems based on other programming languages, such as [Elgg](#), [Moodle](#), [Blackboard](#), [Sakai](#), and [Joomla](#), can be thought of as “walled gardens.” Because access is limited to users with valid usernames and passwords, the information produced within and contained by the LMS stays inside the LMS and is not publicly accessible. Practically speaking, this means that efforts to engage with bloggers outside the class will not be reciprocated because external bloggers will not be able to see the posts. Given that the social practice of blogging is about interacting with peers, participating in the public discourse, and building connective knowledge, blogging from inside a closed network could be seen as a distinct social practice governed by different conventions and rhetoric. Blogging inside a metaphorical walled garden can still be a productive activity if it is approached as reflective practice, similar to journaling.<sup>31</sup> Students can use internal blogs to take notes related to course readings, to record observations or ideas, and to reflect on their personal learning process.<sup>32</sup> This said, it is also worth noting that students could also record reflections in a simple word processor.

When teachers incorporate an online component into their instruction they must inevitably wrestle the issues of ensuring students’ privacy and security. The Social Media Classroom and other LMS specifically created for use in school settings are able to ensure online, thus providing a measure of protection against liability to teachers and schools.

By using closed LMS, teachers can ensure that they are in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA). FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records, while CIPA is

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/ewic\\_hc07\\_sppaper1.pdf](http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/ewic_hc07_sppaper1.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <http://christytucker.wordpress.com/2009/02/01/blogging-in-a-walled-garden/>

intended to protect students from accessing online content deemed offensive or dangerous while they are at school or in a public library. Both laws require schools to adopt strict internet security policies and practices. School districts that hope to subsidize the cost of their internet access with federal E-rate funding must comply with CIPA regulations, which include setting up internet filters to block students from accessing certain web content, as well as educating students about appropriate online behavior.<sup>33</sup>

But the repressive and protective technology policy advanced by FERPA and CIPA has also created some unintended consequences for the accepted practices surrounding student use of technology for purposes of collaboration, communication, and working creatively with participatory media. For example, students are typically prevented from using certain social software and media tools, like chat rooms and social networking websites. Teachers are offered closed, password-protected online learning spaces that can be easily monitored.<sup>34</sup> These decisions have unforeseen pedagogical ramifications in that they preclude teachers from experimenting with the full range of innovative web 2.0 social learning tools. Even worse, the generalized cultural paranoia surrounding cyber-predators and sexual solicitors online has encouraged our legislators to enact reactionary policy that does not serve school's long-term goals of educating young people for democratic participation.

According to the recently submitted Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force [ISTTF], lead by the Berkman Center, entitled *Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies* (2009), the internet is a far safer place for young people than many previously

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/cipa.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.thejournal.com/articles/22454/>

thought.<sup>35</sup> David Weinberger, resident scholar at the Berkman Center, dispensed with the subtleties when blogging the report's findings:

After looking at every piece of research they could find (compiling an 85-page list of sources), the study has come to nuanced conclusions that I'm about to un-nuance. First, the fears that motivated the report are overblown. There is child predation on the Net, and everyone ought to be concerned about that. But there isn't as much as we thought, and our kids usually handle the occasional creepy solicitation better than we thought. Second, although there is obviously easy access to all sorts of disturbing material on the Net, it's not as in the faces of our kids as we thought. Third, child-to-child bullying is a bigger problem than the sponsors of the report initially thought.<sup>36</sup>

Berkman fellow danah boyd, who worked on the literature review for ISTTF, blogged her dismay at how casually the findings were dismissed, despite the fact that the report was written by reputable organizations using solid quantitative data gleaned using a variety of sampling techniques across different studies. Many people, she observed, are determined "not to listen to any data that conflicts with their perception." Efforts to discredit the report, like the Attorneys' General public relations campaign, tend to focus on statistics that portray the internet as a dangerous space populated by assorted ne'er-do-wells -- hence claims of scrubbing accounts of 90,000 sex offenders off the MySpace rolls. These tactics, however, betray an incomplete grasp of the literature report's *actual* findings. Namely, that "the kids who are in trouble offline are more likely to be in trouble online;" and "offline psychosocial factors contribute to online risks."<sup>37</sup>

The problem lies, therefore, not in the technology but in the risky behaviors and destructive dispositions of some users. Yet, far too often, technology -- a trusty scapegoat -- is

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<sup>35</sup> <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/interactive/podcasts/radioberkman105>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/2009/01/14/internet-safer-for-kids-than-weve-been-led-to-believe/>

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2009/01/20/internet\\_safety.html](http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2009/01/20/internet_safety.html)

cast as the villain while the social practices surrounding the use and misuse of technology go unexamined. “The problems that exist,” boyd argues, “cannot be solved by preventing adults from communicating with minors, and they cannot be solved by filtering the content.” Instead, she frames the problem in terms of the flawed social relations that spawn social disruption, rather than in terms of insufficient legal or technological controls over online sociality. The solution, likewise, lies not in Draconian enforcement of the FERPA and CIPA legislation, but in newly strengthened social relations between parents and teachers and the young people who crave their support and guidance.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps we should rethink our approach to managing student internet activity in schools. We should teach them *how* instead of *what* or *that*. Instead of policing their use of the internet, we should teach students about responsible online behavior. We should teach them what kinds of information to share freely and what kinds of information to keep to themselves. We should educate them about the dangers of cyber-bullying. We should introduce them to learning communities that are also social communities, and we should encourage them to take advantage of these resources from home or the library. We should teach them how to evaluate the sources they find online for bias and reliability. We should teach them how to tap into the wisdom of the crowd. We should teach them how to make social media tools work, *really work*, for them. We should guide them in their exploration of diverse social media genres, and model for them the rhetorical strategies and discursive conventions that distinguish one medium from the next. We should teach them how to find the information they are looking for how to connect with other young activists who share their outlook, and how to use their youth and energy and numbers to create possibilities where once there were none.

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2009/01/20/internet\\_safety.html](http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2009/01/20/internet_safety.html)

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