

Home Schooling through Social Networking Sites

Jacob Mathew Pulikotil*

Dr. K. Anandanatarajan**

Dr. Sheela Srivastava***

*Holy Grace Academy of Management Studies, DDE, Annamalai University, Holy Grace Academy of Management Studies

Abstract

Social media has a great effect on every area of our lives. The internet has been invading homes at a fast pace due to the ease of availability and the low cost. One of the areas in which social media can be employed is Home schooling (also called home education or home based learning). Home schooling is the education of children at home, typically by parents or by tutors, rather than in other formal settings of public or private school. Homeschooling in the modern sense is an alternative in developed to attend public or private schools into every area. The internet, and more recently sites like Twitter and Facebook have proved to be excellent tools for getting information for homeschoolers. Social media is also an excellent media by which parents can contact other members who have been into home schooling and create a network to exchange information as well as interact and find solutions to problems. There also has seen a spurt of sites in the area of home schooling. Social media also has a downside for homeschoolers. By using the internet to help others home school, people may also expose themselves to those who might not agree with homeschooling or are critical of their decisions. Publishing start and ending times for school, field trips before they happen, and other detailed information may also lead people to share information which can be used by online predators. The study focuses on the role of social networking in home schooling, the sites available for home schoolers and what precautions to be followed during the networking process.

Introduction: Using Web 2.0 social networking tools, home schooling can be achieved to groups who prefer to give their kids the comfort of the home at the same time control what the child should learn. While homeschooling allows knowledge distribution intimate and meaningful relationships with parents, it may lead to frustrations both for the child as well as for the parent. Social networking is growing in popularity and is widely used for personal reasons, but also has educational and training applications. This paper will explore how home schooling can be reached through social networking, thereby causing a strong impact on how people communicate, learn and share knowledge. It will discuss on how home schooling and social networking meet the needs of parents and students. Further, it will show why home schooling should tap into social networking tools and activities while incorporating them into the home schooling system to enhance their educational activities. The paper also introduces popular Web 2.0 social networking applications, and shows how they are used to collect and share knowledge which can be later incorporated into home schooling. The goal should be to “shift focus of home schooling to support others who have or would like to have home schooling option for their children. Social networking tools can be a vehicle to share this application of knowledge.

Objectives of the study: The objective of the study is to understand the following:

- To find out the importance of social networking for home schooling.
- To find out the social networks available for home schooling
- To understand the advantages of using Social networking for home schooling

Review of literature:

Social networking: In their article on the history and scholarship of social networking, Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as: . . . web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (paragraph 4). Social networking is a user-friendly, user-generated environment. It is a medium that fosters collaboration and cooperation, both of which are required for gaining information or for an online discussion board. These skills can be enhanced in a learning environment that uses social networking. Reynard (2008) supports social networking and project-based learning when people bring in various resources and participants into the learning process. This type of learning is referred to as social learning. Social learning is defined as “any learning that occurs within a group, organization, or cultural cluster, and includes: the procedures by which knowledge and practice are transmitted across posting cycles, across different work situations and across time” (Warne et al., 2001). Social networking tools can be used to help promote social learning in an organization or community. Many people using the Internet are familiar with Web 2.0 online interactive social networking applications. These tools include blogs, wikis, and networking sites, and allow anyone to create and share information in an open forum. An article in Personnel Today magazine cites a Forrester Research report that spending on Web 2.0 tools will grow 43 percent yearly over the next five years to \$4.6 billion by 2013 (Weekes, 2008). This explosive growth supports the theory that organizations should find ways to use these tools for knowledge management. By incorporating these tools an organization or community can acquire knowledge regarding a wide variety of topics and can result in peer-to-peer collaboration where knowledge sharing will be fostered. The number of families choosing to home school has grown consistently throughout the last two decades. In 2010, the United States homeschooling population stood at 2.04 million with a growth rate of 7% to 15% per year. Home schooling or home education as many prefer it to be termed; can be defined in a number of ways.

“Home schooling is the practice of parents educating their own children themselves rather than sending them to schools for formal education. The home schooling movement is characterized by parents taking the full responsibility for their children’s education instead of delegating that responsibility to another person or institution. In this sense it is different from distance education, which still delivers the responsibility of a child’s education to an institution.”

“Home schooling is an educational alternative to conventional school practice, where parents and guardians assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children, rather than delegating that responsibility to a state or private school.”

“Home schooling occurs when a child participates in his or her education at home rather than attending a public, private or other type of school. Parents or guardians assume the responsibility of educating their child and may develop their own curriculum guidelines.”

Invariably home schooling is governed through some aspect of the Education Act and home schooling parents are required to comply with some specific provisions. To a greater or lesser degree, policy and guidelines shape the relationship between the state or territory government and the home schooling family. Regardless of the stated approach, this is generally characterized by a tacit acceptance of home schooling with a very light monitoring of programs if at all.

Why home school?

There is evidence that throughout history societies have practiced home schooling. Prior to the growth in public education in many western nations during the late 1800s, home schooling was a significant education pathway that saw parents (often with support of community members) educate their children prior to the world of work. Ivan Illich, who proposed the notion of “de-schooling” society, in his celebrated work *De-Schooling Society (1971)*, argued that schools had evolved into institutions that were detrimental, even harmful to society and to the individuals who attended them. He saw schools as further benefiting only the privileged and this in turn leads to “social polarization”. In essence he believed that schooling was not synonymous with learning for all. Thus what has evolved is a home schooling movement that has been shaped from divergent philosophies. This broad community of interest as it appears is now reaching a broader range of families and values.

Reasons for Home Schooling: The reasons for home schooling are not singular and simple. They are often multiple and complex and the reason for the initial decision is often subsumed by various others within a short time. Some “parents” make this decision (to home school) prior to the birth of a child. Others make the decision over a number of years, based often on personal experience or the recommendation of family and friends. Some parents can identify a catalyst, others not. In 1999, the United States (USA) Department of Education estimated that approximately 850,000 students were being home schooled. More recent research by Rhodes (2000) estimates this at 1.7 million or 3.4% of the school age population. In a survey completed in 1999 by the USA Department of Education, the following reasons for home schooling were identified.

SL No:	Reasons for Home Schooling	Percentage
1	Better education at home	48.9
2	Religious reasons	38.4
3	Poor learning environment at school	25.6
4	Family reasons	16.8
5	Develop character/morality	15.1
6	Object to what school teaches	12.1
7	School does not challenge child	11.6
8	Other problems with available schools	11.5
9	Student behavior problems at school	9.0

10	Child has special needs/disability	8.2
11	Transportation/convenience	2.7
12	Child not old enough to enter school	1.8
13	Transportation/convenience	2.7
14	Child not old enough to enter school	1.8
15	Cannot afford private school	1.7
16	Parent's career	1.5
17	Could not get into desired school	1.5
18	Other reasons*	22.2

* Parents home school their children for many reasons that are often unique to their family situation. Some of the "other reasons" parents gave for home schooling in the Parent/NHES: 1999 study were: It was the child's choice; to allow parents more control over what their children were learning; flexibility; and parents wanted year-round schooling. (Percents do not add to 100% as respondents could state more than one reason).
 Courtesy: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1999.

Home schooling provides other advantages that make it a good alternative to a traditional education. For instance, home schooling allows kids to learn at their own speed and is specially tailored to the needs of the student. Home schooling also allows a person to use his time more efficiently. For instance, consider a home schooled child who is talented at math, but is falling behind in science. Well, since he finishes math quickly, he can use the time that he could skip on math to catch up in science. If this same child was in a traditional school setting, he would have to sit in math and wait until everyone else was done, and then try to cram an extra half hour of science into his schedule. Other ways that home schooling increases efficiency are: the student doesn't have to travel to and from school, go from class to class, sit through attendance and discipline problems, wait for teacher availability when he needs help and wait for other people to finish when he is already done with something. Some other reasons to home school, cited by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), include the following: religious reasons, disability, special needs, to develop character/morality, school does not challenge child and transportation/convenience, among other things. It is interesting to note that modern home schooling has produced many successful and influential people. Among those noted by Christian and Home school Resource Center are: Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Pierre Currie, Charles Dickens, C. S. Lewis, Mark Twain, Daniel Webster, Ansel Adams, Andrew Carnegie, Sandra Day O'Connor, Sally Ride, Albert Schweitzer and Christopher Paolini, to name a few. Home schooling is a viable alternative to a traditional education. It produces well educated and socially involved citizens. In addition, home schooling can be successful without certified teachers or government involvement. It provides many benefits and remains an option for those who wish to pursue it.

One of the main objections to home schooling is that it is detrimental to the child's social skills. This misconception is usually based on the assumption that home schoolers are stuck in their

homes 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Home schoolers have many opportunities to meet and interact with other kids. In fact, a study by Dr. Brian D. Ray found that the mean number of home school students' outside activities (for example music classes, field trips, volunteer work, sports, etc) is 5.2 activities per student. Also, because home schoolers are not limited to interacting with only people their own age, as would often be the case in a traditional school setting, they learn to socialize with people of all ages.

Home Schooling and Social Networks: With homeschoolers being everywhere at different times, it also becomes necessary to stay connected to share their families' journeys, offer advice, provide a sounding board, feedback on curriculum, etc. There are a multitude of home school co-ops, sports clubs, and annual conferences available. Many families write blogs and participate on home school forums, both religious-based and secular; however, the advent of social media has made it possible to connect with homeschooling families across the country (and internationally) in real-time. Throughout the day, Twitter is full of live chats on every subject imaginable. These chats are assigned a name based on the topic and are preceded by the number sign, or hashtag. For example, the Home school Twitter chat is known as HomeschoolChat on Twitter. Adding a hashtag makes it easy for people to find and follow the discussion or create a separate Twitter stream using one of the alternative Twitter platforms such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck. For homeschooling, or even those considering the transition, participating in a Twitter chat provides a forum where everyone has a voice, the opportunity to contribute, and an audience willing to listen. Social media makes it possible to interact with thousands of people from the comfort of the keyboard. For those willing to make an effort to connect, step outside of their usual and familiar comfort zones, social media has the potential to be both life-changing and enlightening. Parents who home-school their children are turning to social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and blogs for information with regard to their home-schooling. The reason is that Social networks foster a better sense of community among the home-schooling group. Online social networking can serve as an important and easily accessible source of encouragement for parents who may feel isolated or overwhelmed with the challenges of home-schooling. The internet, and more recently sites like Twitter and Facebook are excellent tools for getting information to large numbers of homeschoolers quickly.

Trends in Home schooling:

1. As computers become even more affordable, the access to online resources will only continue to grow and the opportunity to reach homeschooling families via the Internet and through social media will continue to explode.
2. Some homeschooling parents are using educational consultants who visit the family at home and work with parents to set up a curriculum and monitor progress.
3. Many parents of special needs children are opting for homeschooling, especially for children with autism spectrum disorders.

As a result of tougher economic times, many families have decided to forgo expensive private education and choose homeschooling instead (nheri.org).

Technology Integration in Homeschooling: In the 21st century, Homeschoolers are integrating technology into their day to day studies through:

- Using media players to take podcast classes they have downloaded from the net

- Making use of webcams to discuss issues with other homeschooled students in other states and even other countries
- Writing collaborative fiction with other homeschoolers online
- Viewing documentaries and educational videos at the moment's via Netflix instant streaming service or Discovery's United Streaming
- Having children use Squidoo to create WebPages on subjects they are learning about
- Sharing and collaborating on assignments with Google Docs
- Using a digital microscope to capture images and create PowerPoint presentations from them
- Teaching geography with portable GPS units

In addition homeschoolers also use technology as tools for learning. Many homeschoolers are using online programs as their main curriculum. Time4Learning, for instance, is a multimedia web-based home school curriculum with around 10,000 members! Time4Learning uses interactive lessons in math, language arts, science, and social studies that are aligned with state and national standards. This "cyber schooling" framework relies on at least a basic amount of technological understanding, such as how to use a mouse, how to navigate between pages, and how to track the progress of the lessons. Because the Time4Learning curriculum includes even the Pre-K age group, that means that homeschoolers as young as 3 and 4 are gaining valuable computer skills by incorporating "cyber schooling" into their day to day learning.

Social Networks for Home Schooling: Homeschoolmomsformoms is an online community resource to connect with homeschooling mothers, share information, find and offer support. Homeschoolmomsformoms is a resource with online communities providing a forum where moms can connect, safely share information and resources tailored to their geographic area, support each other in homeschooling, and be inspired to build a stronger national home-school network. The network Homeschoolmomsformoms.com combines practical information while engaging national homeschooling families of different backgrounds. Homeschoolmomsformoms does not seek to replace other home-school online resources but rather build, engage, and encourage dialogue between families. Parents can exchange advice about methods to use, curriculums that helped a special needs child, or simply share resources. Equally relevant to mothers with older children, the sites also serve as a platform to discuss educational and political issues, and even find a call to action.

ACE is an inclusive, non-directed, fee based, homeschool support group located in Colorado with most members living in Aurora, CO, and surrounding communities, including Watkins, Bennett, Strasburg, Byers and more. The primary focus of this group is as a social outlet for parents and children. We plan weekly get-togethers and field trips. Our families have children ranging in age from infant through high school.

Agape is a Christian support group for home school families in Loveland and the surrounding area. Agape hosts monthly support meetings, a monthly newsletter, and offers many other activities on a consistent basis. Small groups meet for activities such as field trips, crafts, mom's night out, teens, etc. Testing, elective classes, and a graduation ceremony are held each spring for those who are interested. An extensive library of home school supplies, books, and materials is also available.

Homeschoogle is a social networking site started by Rick Simmons for children who can connect with other homeschoolers online. Homeschoogle has automatic filters in place to catch

inappropriate posts and all advertising placed on the site will be relevant to homeschooling families. Homeschooogle enables study groups to evolve programs where both kids and parents can find help and support from others who are homeschooling and using the same materials. Homeschooogle is a great alternative to Facebook and homeschooling parents will be comfortable of letting their children use its resources. The main focus of Homeschooogle is to provide an online forum for homeschoolers to create study groups, post homeschool friendly events, and connect with other homeschoolers who have similar interests.

Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (GHF) is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization that works to educate and advocate for gifted homeschooling families. GHF has an online education program geared to the needs and interests of gifted students. The GHF work includes a well-regarded website with resources and articles from parents and experts, an online community for support and advice, sponsorship of events with nationally known speakers, and a schedule of conferences, lectures and other opportunities. GHF also provides gifted homeschoolers with the opportunity to network and exchange ideas and resources.

Homeschooling Freethinkers is an international non-religious homeschool community promoting social networking and secular homeschool resources. On this site, homeschoolers can find lists of homeschool curricula (indicating which are secular), book recommendations, and web-links to homeschooling resources.

The Homeschool Lounge (THL) is the largest and fastest growing Homeschool social network/community on the net today. The vision of The Homeschool Lounge is to connect Homeschool Moms from all corners of the web; get advice, give advice, share, learn and laugh with those who truly understand THL. THL is a FREE network with a menagerie of resources. Members can build their own space, start or join a group or discussion, chat, upload lessons plans, unit studies, pictures, videos and more.

Advantages of Social networking in Homeschooling: Homeschooling families can use online social networking tools for a variety of purposes. They can find free curriculum, plan field trips, build community, gain support, and stay informed about homeschooling legislation or local homeschool conferences and events. Homeschool children can network, too, creating large social groups, interest and activity groups, gaming groups, etc., both local and beyond. Facebook requires users to be at least 13 years old. However, with parental participation, younger children can also benefit from Facebook's social and entertainment tools. With social networks homeschoolers can chat, discuss threads in forums, share information and tips, and even participate in online classes via blackboard systems similar to those used by colleges. Through social media and Internet groups, homeschooled students can find and enjoy many of the extra-curricular activities that students who attend school enjoy, from sports teams to music lessons to proms. Homeschooled students also participate in co-op classes and take courses at community colleges, giving them a classroom experience.

Utilizing Social Media for Home schooling: As social media continues to grow and gain significance, the technologies should be utilized by the home schooling networks too. One of the areas in which homeschoolers can utilize is the lesson plans. Here are several tips that homeschoolers should consider when assembling the lesson plan.

Creating a Hub: Home schoolers can use blogging platforms such as WordPress, or a blog stream like Posterous, among the online community created with Ning, or a Facebook page or a

Web site, from a home base where people can find and link to all the content that is posted elsewhere.

Connect the Dots: Homeschoolers can use social bookmarking tools like Diigo or Delicious to index and promote interesting contents, while helping others spread theirs. Social bookmarking helps accelerate the contents and attracts people to the site or the hub.

Managing Outposts: Homeschoolers should be clear as to which post should be sent through the hub and keep them up-to-date, at the same time use other platforms and features. Sites like Ping.fm can help post a message to multiple channels simultaneously.

HootSuite: is a Twitter tool that homeschoolers can use to manage multiple accounts, group followers and schedule tweets in advance.

Forming Friendships: Through social media, children who are homeschooled forge friendships with other kids at extra-curricular activities and with other homeschooled children.

Conclusion:

Homeschoolers can use social media to learn from each other. But since there is a lot of information available and not enough time to absorb it all. Creating a short list of social media-themed blogs, podcasts and video feeds offers manageable variety that can keep the homeschooler focused and engaged. Homeschoolers take advantage of online groups to network and share information and resources. Social media provides an excellent tool to get information out to many people quickly. Through Internet and social media, the dissemination of information has become easier, and even immediate. Social networks also offer resources, tips, books, groups and physical locations which provide more than ample amount of social, physical and external activities. The other option available is cooperative classrooms, where homeschooled families take part in one or two days each week, and a parent with a particular skill teaches a class to a group of students.

References:

- Boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 210–230.
- <http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/dataproducts.asp>
- Illich, Ivan, *Deschooling Society*, ournature.org, retrieved 2008-08-26.
- Ruth Reynard, 2008 in T.H.E. Journal. <http://thejournal.com/Articles/2008/05/21/Social-Networking-Learning-Theory-in-Action.aspx?Page=1>
- Warne, L., Ali, I., Pascoe, C., & Agostino, K. (2001b). A holistic approach to knowledge management and social learning: lessons learnt from military headquarters, *Australian Journal of Information Systems*. Special Issue on Knowledge Management, December, pp127-142.
- Weekes, S. (2008). E-learning on the social. *Training and coaching today*, Nov/Dec 2008. 15.