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# Managing and presenting information through Facebook: Supporting the development of academic literacy

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## Résumé

In developing their academic literacy skills, students entering higher education need to, among others, gain insights into how to manage the information they encounter in their studies (Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012). They need to be able to interpret the course content, search for supporting sources and present their own ideas and interpretations adequately. In order to support students in this process, they need to be given the opportunity to put their newly acquired skills to the test and engage in language learning activities. By integrating a social network site as a peer collaboration space – where an abundance of information is at their fingertips – students can be supported to look for, process and present information to their peers in an online environment (Peeters, 2015; Peeters, 2016).

In order to investigate information management via social networking in language learning, a research project was carried out at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). In the two-year project, Facebook was integrated as a collaborative online space in a four-month academic writing course for first-year majors studying English literature and linguistics (2013-2014, 2014-2015). Students were instructed to collaborate on three writing assignments and exchange tips and tricks with their fellow students through the Facebook forum in order to complete the tasks successfully. No tutor was present on the forum.

Through topic analysis (Li & Yamanishi, 2003) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010) of the more than 6,000 online conversations, it has been found that students, additional to engaging in organisational, social and educational mediation (Peeters & Ludwig, 2016), search for and generate learning content themselves and share it on the Facebook forum. First, more than half of the resources shared, e.g. thesauri, manuals and supplementary literature, are meant to support their peers' writing practice. Second, photos and memes – i.e. popular pieces of media which are shared extensively – are used to entertain their fellow students and to strengthen social bonds. Finally, students generate content, e.g. summaries, mock tests, as well as their own written work, and present it with a particular purpose in mind, like addressing questions posed by other students or providing argumentation in a discussion.

Students search for additional resources and purposefully compile materials which they present to their fellow students. By providing them with a chance to share their ideas, opinions and personal work, this paper contends that integrating the Facebook forum in the L2 academic writing course supports students' development of their academic literacy skills; giving them the opportunity to practice and extend their newly acquired skills and to gain insights into managing the information at hand, additional to the instruction they receive in class.

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