Using formative assessment and social media for effective learning

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Abstract

In the interest of improving teaching and learning methods, the use of formative assessment in schools has, over the years, become the focus of a number of research review studies. Several of these studies have also shown how the emerging use of social networking has developed to a point where it has become a useful source that teachers could employ to promote student achievement. This paper addresses a critical view of the current findings and reports how educators want to push both of the fields forward for further developments specific to the realm of education. Some of the key elements presented here suggest that student engagement is highly connected to the teaching styles, assessment practices and socialization influences. Connecting the student's world to education is a way to support the issue of improving student learning. Due to the dramatic increase in the use of social media amongst today's youth, schools need to embrace these and incorporate them in their education strategies in order to improve the overall teaching process and prepare for life after school.

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1 Introduction

For a long time, assessment has been seen as a way to find out what students have learned. The teachers would mostly use summative testing in order to clarify whether standards were being met and then grade their students based on these results. However, these kinds of tests did not help the teacher identify where the students were lacking of knowledge during the educational process since they were often being used at the end of a task or the main teaching focus instead of having smaller examinations during the work. Another aspect considering this issue is the problem of using the same assessment process, which can disadvantage the same candidates time after time because individual students have individual strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, the teachers' tendencies of having bigger tests once in a while for the purpose of measuring learner achievement (summative assessment) increased the students' test anxiety, which in turn would make some of them feel insecure towards school life (Hembree, 1988). One of the aspects of teaching competence is 'the ability to manage activities and interactions successfully in the sense that learners know what they need to do and why they are doing it, are motivated to work actively, are monitored and guided when help is needed and can work undisturbed by discipline problems' (Hedge, 2000, p. 31).

Many studies have been conducted on assessment for learning over the years as opposed to assessment of learning, a term which was first coined as 'formative assessment' in 1967 by Scriven. Furthermore, Bloom used the term in 1968 to consider formative assessment as a tool for improving the process of teaching and learning. However, Black and William (2009) suggested that its definition was too restrictive. Instead they proposed that 'practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited' (Black & William, 2009, p. 9).

Bennett (2011) informs us that although research suggests that the general practices associated with formative assessment can facilitate learning, the term does not yet represent a well-defined set of instructional proceedings. The term 'instruction' means the combination of teaching and learning - any activity that is intended to create learning, and it is this latter sense that is intended here. In order to push the field forward, more work on developing theories of action is needed. Moreover, teachers need concrete instantiations in order to implement formative assessment effectively in classrooms (Bennett, 2011). In addition, it is crucial that

the teachers acknowledge their students' progress and difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their own work to meet their (students') needs, which is mainly the whole purpose of formative assessment, and at the same time, to prepare them for the world into which they will graduate. A research study explained the work as the following:

'Ideally, information gathered in assessments and evaluations is used to shape strategies for improvement at each level of the education system. At the classroom level, teachers gather information on student understanding, and adjust teaching to meet identified learning needs. At the school level, school leaders use information to identify areas of strength and weakness across the school, and to develop strategies for improvement'. (CERI, 2008, p. 4).

One of the highlighted key elements of formative assessment in the research study CERI (2008) was 'the establishment of a classroom culture that encourages interaction and the use of assessment tools' (p. 7).
In many cases, teachers of all subjects are in benefit when using helping tools that are appropriately adapted for their classes in order to promote student achievement. Therefore, using different tools to support teaching and learning is in many cases suggested.

Several studies have shown how educators want to take social networking one step further and not simply link people, but to actually use it as one of these helping tools to facilitate learning (Steven, Baule & Julie, 2012). In the language teaching classroom, this approach is a key method to provide students authentic material that is available online. Furthermore, it seems clear to almost all that social networking and digital realities are converging on all aspects of modern life, and given that assessment practises are connected to the overall teaching and according to Bennett (2011) are lacking of instructional proceedings for the purpose to facilitate learning, why not combine formative assessment with social media in order to keep up with the development of society and at the same time support learning? This question is the main topic that will be further developed throughout the end of this paper.

2   Meeting goals for lifelong learning

The literature on formative assessment, motivation and student interest is reviewed in this section. These topics have been selected, not only due to the fact that they are connected to one another in the way that they aim for the same goal, improving the teaching and learning

process, but also because they are seen as important aspects in schools. However, these are still in need for improvements on the giving of instructional proceedings field. Furthermore, these concepts have great potential to be further developed and combined with other findings that are emerging in society, for example, social media. Exploring the current state of social media in connection to the above mentioned topics may shed some light in the relation to the issue of how to integrate these in schools in order to support learning, which is the main focus of the following subsections.

2.1 Formative assessment

A number of studies have been conducted by Black (e.g. 1998, 2010) focusing on formative assessment and the very important issue of what makes for effective learning. Black and William present in their well-known paper 'Inside the Black Box' (2010a) that learning is driven by what teachers and pupils do in classrooms. For assessment to work formatively teachers need to avoid their natural habit of grading their pupils' tasks and instead use the results to adjust their teaching in order to improve and accelerate learning. Therefore, teachers need to make a clear distinction between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. Focusing on formative assessment (assessment for learning), the concept is viewed as something that is 'essentially feedback, both to teachers and to the pupil about present understanding and skill development in order to determine the way forward' (Chappuis, 2009, p. 5). If the teacher intends to use a task for formative purposes but then uses the results for grading, it is seen as a wasted opportunity because how can the learner then change the future outcome if there is nothing more than a grade given (Chappuis, 2009). In addition, there is no factor that decreases the student's motivation for learning more than the one of continually receiving bad grades. However, there is a concern among educators whether the students will be less likely to complete tasks if they are not being graded, but, numerous academics still agree on the fact that the best grading practices 'address student achievement and provide accurate, specific, timely feedback designed to improve students performance' (Hanover research, 2011, p. 9).

Black and William (2010a) pointed out that 'the giving of marks and grading function are overemphasized, while the giving of useful advice and the learning function are underemphasized' (p. 84.). Teachers may experience difficulties to ignore the constant need of putting grades on their students, instead of leaving these on 'hold' and only focusing on the formative practises. In addition, earlier studies have stressed the power of formative

assessment with feedback for supporting student achievement and motivation to be essential in the learning process, if it provides specific information about the work related to standards or learning progression, suggest strategies for improvement, rather than grades and social comparison (Nolen, 2011). Formative assessment and feedback would then provide the students an opportunity to get a better understanding about the gap between their current and desired performance.

Educators (Black, 2010b; Hedge, 2000) have presented self and peer-assessment as compliments that could be used to serve a formative function. These can be used as strategies in the classrooms to promote a metacognitive thinking among students and to give them a chance to be more involved in their learning. These strategies are becoming more and more popular in schools, especially for the upper secondary students. In the language teaching classroom, starting a new term by having the students compare their own language levels with the global CEFR scales is one way that has been suggested to promote the self-assessment strategy (Dragemark & Oscarson, 2010). Moreover, self-assessment provides learner autonomy, which encourages the students to monitor and notice their own progress. This aim could also help the teachers to prepare their lessons when understanding which areas the students are struggling with and at the same time by giving the students an opportunity to choose the learning focus from their own needs. However, the peer-assessment compliment differs from self-assessment in the way that it most of the time requires to be taught. The students are usually more serious when they assess themselves because according to Farell (2002) 'they are generally most motivated by what is going to contribute to their final mark' (p. 9). However, they might not be as critical as needed which in turn makes them blind to the areas they actually need to improve. On the other hand, when assessing their classmates, they are more likely to see the areas that person has missed, but, confusion may occur if they do not know how to bring the evidence to the table because of their lack of experience. Furthermore, if a student dislikes another classmate then maybe s/he will assess that person with a negative attitude. To avoid these issues, Black and William (1998a) presented a strategy called 'Two stars and a wish' that could be used as a supportive solution. The assessor of the assignment must identify two things that their classmate did well (two stars) and one specific suggestion for improvement (the wish). However, since it may not be familiar to the students, the teacher, as mentioned before, must explain how it works. This strategy has had very good critics and because of that it is being used by many teachers in upper secondary schools and even at universities. It is also important that teachers talk about the criterion related goals with their students before starting the new course in order to be

clear about what is being expected from them. This could be achieved by rewriting the goals in order to make them easier for the students to understand. In many contexts, general goals are set out in the national curriculum and it is left to the teachers to interpret these in specific objectives (Hedge, 2000).

The paper 'Inside the Black Box' states that assessment can affect the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, therefore, the connection between the teachers' assessment practices and students' motivation and engagement should be more put into focus (Black & William, 2010a). The important aspects of *how* to give the assessment; in form of grades or feedback, *when* to give it; should it occur publicly or privately, and *why* is the assessment being given; what is the purpose of it, are important for the teacher to think about beforehand. Therefore, in order to promote learning, according to Black (2010b), the heart of the formative interaction is the active involvement when the learner produces evidence and is used to guide further improvements. The evidence that the teachers collect to adapt their teaching to meet student needs must be consistent with established principles for effective learning. Black (2010b) summarized four basic principles as the following statements:

- Start from a learner's existing understanding.
- Involve the learner actively in the learning process.
- Develop the learner's understanding of the aims and criteria for effective learning.
- Promote social learning, i.e. learning through discussion. (p. 360).

Teachers have a variety of assessment alternatives to choose from and it is important that the assessment methods they decide to work with are capable of accurately reflecting the intended targets and that these are being used as teaching tools along the way to proficiency (Stiggins & Chappuis , 2005). If we take a closer look at the first and second statement and their meaning, we notice that none of it can actually happen if teachers do not seek comprehension about their students' background knowledge. A deeper understanding is required for teachers to provide their students the guidance they need in order to take their learning one step further. However, the third and last statements are more useful for the teachers when, for example, choosing tasks and planning the lessons so that they can organize and prepare their material to fit the different classes they are teaching. Students are sensitive to what teachers tell them and could quickly draw life-shaping conclusions about their future as learners and

over some time already decide if they are capable of succeeding or not (Stiggins & Chappuis , 2005). Some students may get on the wrong sides of these decisions and in order to help them achieve a better vision of their learning selves, teachers must do their best to make them believe they are actually capable of succeeding and make them aware of the fact that success does not come within a few seconds and that quitting should not be considered. By choosing to follow the four summarized basic principles above, the issue about the students becoming discouraged for their learning could already be avoided from the beginning.

2.2 Motivation and student interest

Students' experiences of assessment practice are an important source of information that is closely linked to the overall teaching context and classroom environment (CERI, 2008). Teachers may find themselves in many different roles in relation to the courses they teach (Hedge, 2000). However, when using different assessment methods, they usually notice if the students are willing to work with each other, if they are encouraged and motivated enough to be more involved in their learning, if they are excited about the themes and tasks they are currently working with, if they are not afraid to speak their minds without doubting themselves, and so on. All of these aspects go hand in hand and need to be thought of when teaching a classroom with students that have different background stories and, because of that, learn in different ways (Hedge, 2000). Along with teachers using their own experience, reflection, and observation, they can also ask students directly by using simply presented questionnaires about their motivations for learning, the ways in which they like to learn, the problems they have with learning and their reactions to past classroom experience (Hedge, 2000). Furthermore, whether teachers can actually motivate their students into their own learning and increase their matter of interest about their teaching subjects has in recent years been brought up as an appealing topic.

To many psychologists, interest is nothing more than the lay term of intrinsic motivation (Schiefele, 2011). For example, Deci and Ryan (1985) explained the word interest as 'an important directive role in intrinsically motivated behaviour in that people naturally approach activities that interest them' (p. 34). In the educational aspect, Dewey (1913), who has been seen as the forerunner of modern interest research, pointed out that it is fully possible for the learner to be present physically but yet absent mentally and it is left to the teacher to insure his mental attendance by 'a sound appeal to his active interests' (p. 8). Effort and interest in education can be seen as being both complimentary and oppositional according

to Dewey's observation (1913). Whether students exert effort or not is usually explained as being a choice or decision that is made by the students about whether success is possible, this in turn follows how much work they are willing to put into the subject. Furthermore, effort without interest needs to be appealed to. However, interest differs from effort in the means that it does not need to be appealed to because the subject already has the student's attention, which in turn encourages effort and supports learning (Dewey, 1913).

As earlier discussed about Deci and Ryan's definition of the intrinsic motivation (1985), there is also the aspect of 'extrinsic motivation' which refers to having motivational factors that are external. It has been described as being one of the reasons for engaging in a task, such as doing a task not for its own sake but to reach some desired end state (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), for example to earn a reward or avoid a negative outcome. None of these do necessarily mean something negative for the student; the motivation just comes out of different perspectives. However, extrinsic rewards, such as feedback of reinforcement, could be used to guide the students through the main activity in order to help them enhance the task as intrinsically rewarding. The other way around works as well, for example, to use a task out of students' interest and then reinforce the outcome by giving feedback for further developments. In addition, a small success can spark confidence, which in turn encourages more effort to learn. If each try brings more success, their academic self-vision will begin to shift in a more positive direction (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).

Furthermore, how a student approaches different subjects can be expected to vary depending on their earlier experiences and basic abilities for that subject. Teachers need to understand where their students stand on their levels of knowledge and their socialization influences at the beginning of the course in order to make the classroom environment work successfully. Moreover, teachers need to teach their subjects in a way that would not cause any more confusion, but instead facilitate and support learning. Adapting the teaching styles to the student's preferred and best way of learning is the most giving way to achieve this aim. However, it is easier said than done because we all learn in our own ways which means that this is not a simple task. Varying the lessons has been said to be the key solution to this concern and should therefore be kept in mind at all times when teaching.

2.3 Developing the theory of increasing student interest for effective learning into practice

In the following subsection, theories about how teachers can work with the desirable changes in society and how they could develop these into practice are further discussed. With the

approach to improve the teaching and learning process, we start with the aspect of giving feedback that serves formative functions in schools.

Feedback delivered rarely is far too infrequent and broadly focused to be helpful. This suggests that students need to be informed about their progress after each and every task they work with through continuous classroom assessment (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). Therefore, teachers are seen to be placed at the centre of the relation between assessment and school effectiveness. When teachers manage to increase their students' confidence, then the belief that learning is possible will eventually come to them. However, the main concern for the teachers in this case is the issue of *how* to put the theory into practice.

In recent years, throughout the higher education sector, teaching and learning has developed to become more student-oriented and mediated by technology, (Laurillard, 2002, cited by Bull, Quigley & Mabott, 2006). Moreover, Steven et al. (2012) argue that social networking could be used as another set of tools to try to engage students and support learning for both students and staff and which should be more included in schools. For example, one teacher decided to capitalize on her students' love for Twitter, which is an online service that enables users to send and read short massages called 'tweets', and began to send out these tweets to remind students to come to class and be prepared for the assignments that are due. This initiative of action was claimed to have increased success in the classroom by 35 percent (Steven et al., 2012). However, some people still think of social networking as something that should be ignored when being in school despite numerous reforms and increased investments in computers and networks.

Educators want to effectively use online social networking to support the goals of education, but, the question that often comes up is: why should schools embrace social networking? Steven et al. (2012) state that in order to be successful, 'schools have to be a reflection of society' (p. 3). Therefore, schools need to embrace the technologies used in the society in which students will graduate. Instant messaging, chat, blogs, social networking services, and video-sharing services are all examples of tools that slowly force the users to become active contributors rather than passive absorbers by helping customize media and technology for their own purposes as well as those of their communities (Steven et al., 2012). People are exposed to authentic material everyday from around the world without consciously thinking about it, which is a useful source not only to language teaching but also the overall teaching of different subjects in school. Furthermore, social networking builds collaboration skills that students will need in the workplace; and students have come to be very enthusiastic about social networking technologies. Therefore, teachers are in benefit if they try to

capitalize on that enthusiasm in order to motivate their students to become more engaged in their learning.

Critics have pointed out the downsides when working with social networking, which is a vital issue for educators to be aware of. It is important that students learn how to work appropriately and safely in this environment in order to avoid any complications that may occur and, according to Steven et al. (2012), schools are 'the best place to teach students how to navigate the vast electronic environments of the world' (p. 10). In addition, there are a number of social networks that have been adapted to be used in educational settings. However, if teachers want to use their students' preferable services that they have in common and are more used to, then they need to learn more about that specific option, if s/he does not already, and then have an open discussion about task involvements and restrictions. Moreover, it is essential that teachers know when to draw the line for not getting too personal with the students and their private social networking accounts in order to avoid complications.

Steven et al. (2012) explained the following when discussing the benefits of using social media during written assignments:

'Writing is key to most social media. One of the advantages of utilizing social media for writing assignments is that the assignment has a real audience in the case of a social network. Several studies have shown that students produce higher-quality work when they know the writing will be seen by a larger audience than simply their teacher. Students who know their work will be seen by their peers and potentially by a wider audience will generally step up their efforts'. (p. 54).

In the language teaching perspective, this announcement confesses the use of social media to be a useful source for increasing student achievement. However, general concerns of social networks being a risky tool to use in the classroom still need to be discussed with students, more specifically about restrictions and inappropriate behaviour.

Furthermore, one of the key findings of research on educational technology was that children and teens are excited about using technology and that they would spend more time on educational tasks when those tasks involved technology (Steven et al., 2012). Moreover, when students spend more time on a task, they usually learn more, which in turn would be beneficial for those who do not fancy using traditional methods. This view can be seen to be a possible solution to increase learner achievement and improve different teaching styles and formative assessment practices for motivational purposes.

3   Social networking for schools

With the increased use of technology such as in using smartphones, tablets and laptops, young people seem to spend most of their time online. It has become easier for users to express themselves online by showing pictures, using smileys, posting song lyrics etc, rather than the traditional face-to-face spoken communication and paper-based writing. In this section, the positive and negative effects of using social networks in schools are mainly discussed.

Steven et al. (2012) argue that to most students, particularly by the time they are teenagers, social networks are an integral part of their lives and for schools to embrace these technologies is a way to 'integrate education more directly in the world as students are viewing it' (p. 51). This has come to be seen as an important source that can increase student engagement and skill development if using it correctly.

In spite of the fact that 48 percent (Tech and learning, 2011) of educators have pointed out that students have a higher desire to learn when using Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, networking services, instant messaging, etc, schools are still not embracing it as quickly as they might (cited by Steven et al., 2012). Furthermore, earlier mentioned studies (e.g. Steven et al., 2012) state when students are able to incorporate social media into their school work, it is a strong possibility that 50 percent of their participation and engagement increases. One teacher left the following comment on the Huffington Post story (2011) when the subject of using social networking in schools was brought up:

'I created a teacher facebook page, many of my students are 'friends' and I notify them over facebook when I have a new assignment/discussion. Simply put, it's getting the students eyespace and attention and it works'[sic]. (cited by Steven et al., 2012, p. 52).

Early cognition studies (e.g. Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985) determined comprehension depends a great deal on one's engagement; therefore, student engagement is the primary reason for why social media should be more and better integrated into instruction in schools, especially since opportunities are available like never before. However, teachers who are not careful with their use of sites and material can fall into inappropriate relationships with the students and students among themselves. For this reason, critics feel unsure about the whole aspect which often makes teachers come to the decision to remove social networking from classrooms despite the positive effects they have on students.

One of many solutions to the above mentioned critic is to collaborate with the staff in order to make sure that the social media tools are appropriate and safe for the students involved. For example, deciding to only use tools that allow them to fully moderate the conversations among their students, agree on choosing the same suite of tools that will work for most applications and stick to them in order to share thoughts and material, etc. Furthermore, school districts could also develop staff education programs so that the staff is aware of how to utilize social networks in the instructional process, if they do not already, and to provide information on Internet safety that covers the following points:

- How to develop profiles and avoid disclosure of personal information.
- Risky behaviours and addictions.
- Cyberbullying – how to react, and how to report any dangerous behaviours.
- Introduction to basic social networking tools.
- Clear guidelines about potential penalties for misuse. (Steven et al., 2012).

The authors also suggest that when this process has been established, schools must educate parents on their role in supporting social networking. This could be done by, for example, creating brochures, or talk about it at parent-teacher meetings, in order to explain what to watch for in their children's Internet use and inform them on how to get more involved and follow up on the development of using social networking technologies for educational purposes (Steven et al., 2012).

3.1 Integrating social media in schools

Famous networks are making more efforts to create safer online communities for students (Steven et al., 2012). Facebook is one example of these that has partnered with a parent-teacher association (PTA) in order to promote responsible and safe Internet use to kids, parents and teachers. If some material available is seen to cause any disruptive reactions, members can report it to the Facebook crew and make them remove subject of the matter. However, although Facebook's popularity continues to increase, it is important to discuss what it can bring to the overall teaching for the purpose of increasing learning. The challenge of using Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom is 'to use them in a way that enhances learning, not simply because they are available' (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012, p. 92). Furthermore, the growing use of the Internet has also moved media language towards

'multimodal kinds of textual organisation', also referred to as 'multimodal discourse' (Durant & Lambrou, 2009, p. 5.). In short, the term implies how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to language, for example using images, music and sound. These changes are yet incomplete but it is an interesting concept for language teachers to be aware of since it has been said to be growing.

'Material can [now] be presented in more vivid ways than in the past, which may encourage students more actively' (American Psychological Association 2009, p. 456). This is often achieved by sharing videos, pictures, quotes or other types of postings with your members (referring back to the subject of multimodal discourse mentioned before). Online collaboration on an assignment should be considered when working with social networks in order to share knowledge and build better communication skills. However, another challenge for educators involves 'the distinction between entertainment and true intellectual engagement' (American Psychological Association, 2009, p. 456). To support the development, teachers must have a clear definition of the reasons behind their choice of working with social networks and, most importantly, what they want to achieve with its use.

Steven et al. (2012) argue that social media is 'the cutting edge of professional development' and that new ideas and instructional uses for technology are 'evolving through social media conversations everyday' (p. 97). Moreover, when using social media in a workplace, there is a strong possibility that it will build personal development and career advancement among staff members in the way that it improves awareness, and provides means for users to quickly interact over the Internet, in this case for teachers to share thoughts or updated lesson material with each other. Its use will also allow less hurried conversations and for thoughts to be expressed more clearly and openly because one will have more time to reflect upon their sayings rather than if it would have been a face-to-face communication setting. There is an amount of information about how to use social media to support one's professional development by simply searching for it on the Internet.

Although the positive outcome of the results when using social networks in schools, some teachers are still excluding the use of it in education because of the risks that they might carry with them. However, a number of educators argue that the educational benefits of social media far outweigh the risks, and there is a concern among these that schools are missing out on an opportunity to incorporate learning tools the students, in many cases, already know how to use. Once a school has determined to use social networking, Steven et al. (2012) point out seven basic guidelines that the organisation could start to consider when beginning with its implementation, which are the following:

- Provide a reliable technology infrastructure.
- Have the school's leadership model the importance of social networking.
- Update the district's technology-use policy to encompass social networking issues.
- Develop the necessary staff development to ensure staff understands how to use social networking to support learning.
- Provide instruction to students to ensure they have all the tools to be safe users of social networks.
- Communicate to parents about how social networks are being used.
- Establish methods for ongoing monitoring of social networking and other technologies to ensure staff and students are safe and appropriate. (p. 16).

4 Discussion

Formative assessment is referred to when teachers decide to adapt their teaching styles in order to meet students' needs based on their outcome of previous assignments, and working with the aspect of what makes for effective learning in the present time. It has been pointed out that good teachers have always taken a positively critical approach to appraising and developing their work from the possible implications of research, especially from studies which are based in the teaching classroom (Hedge, 2000). Furthermore, society keeps developing as the years go by and it is the school's responsibility to keep up with the changes in order to prepare the students for the world into which they will graduate. It is important that the students know where they are headed in order to participate actively in their own learning, which is treated to be the main focus of using formative assessment practices in schools.

Teachers need to teach their subjects in a way that would not cause more confusion, but instead facilitate and support learning. Therefore, due to the fact that teaching and learning has developed to become more student-oriented and mediated by technology, educators want to effectively use online social networking to support the goals of education (Steven et al., 2012). In order to make it possible, schools need to embrace the technologies that are being used in the society which in turn would also increase student engagement and skill development when knowing how to use it properly.

As we notice when reading this paper, the findings show that formative assessment, motivation and the use of social media in education go hand in hand and should therefore be considered to be combined. Educators suggest that teachers could, for example, create a private group on Facebook in which their students become members and start posting school related material with the purpose of students commenting on them, ask questions or just be informed about an upcoming lesson. Students could also post some of their own material, or just questions, as long as it is school and subject related. Online collaboration on an assignment would allow them to share their knowledge with each other and, as mentioned before, build communication skills (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). This would also facilitate the teachers' work if students themselves are able to answer their classmates' questions, the only thing the teacher needs to do is to check that the answer is right. In addition, since students are more connected to their social networking accounts than ever before, it is more likely that they will read the information that the teacher has given in the social networking group than if s/he would do it in the school platform or send it as en e-mail. This would also decrease students' excuses for not having read the current information about their subjects.

Formative assessment practices have been essential to rising overall levels of student achievement and motivation and research has shown that 'it is perhaps one of the most important interventions for promoting high-performance ever studied' (CERI, 2008, p. 2). However, teachers need to guide the students through the process in order to actively build their understanding of new concepts, instead of just absorbing information. In short, teachers need to help their students achieve the required skills for 'learning to learn' by:

- Placing emphasis on the process of teaching and learning, and actively involving students in that process.
- Building students' skills for peer- and self-assessment.
- Helping students understand their own learning, and develop appropriate strategies for 'learning to learn'. (CERI, 2008, p. 2).

One of my reflections considering this topic is whether social media could be used as a primary tool to improve assessment practices as well as the overall teaching, since these are connected to one another. According to the research studies reviewed, the easiest way to have students engage in their learning is by connecting their world to their education. The indication 'their world' means here what they are likely to enjoy and independently spend much time on outside the classroom walls. Sobel (2004) refers to the concept as 'students'

bright shiny faces' which could be found in schoolyards and communities, (p. 1). Furthermore, to answer my question put out at the beginning of this paper, due to the conclusions drawn from analyzing a number of studies that touches the subject, the answer is much likely positive. The possibility to combine formative assessment, and other assessment practices, with social media in order to keep up with the development of society and at the same time support learning and improve the overall teaching contexts is generally feasible. However, the piece that is still missing in the field is concrete instructions on *how* to precede this in the classroom. For further research on effective learning, teaching and assessment strategies, developing theories about this concept into practical proceedings should indeed be encouraged because of its increasing growth. This future development concerns not only language teaching, but also all subjects being taught in schools. It is the teachers and schools decision whether they think that social networking is something to engage in or not. However, the findings on several research studies presented in this paper suggest that schools should definitely integrate the concept in the education system since social media lies nowadays in many people's interests.

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