

Being Example: A Different Kind of Leadership, Looking for Exemplary Behaviors

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Abstract. Creating applications that focus on students to make them understand the value of society, and to be an active member of it, is important, as it is needed to educate them correctly in academic environment, near to the formal learning process applied till now. For this in this paper we present a platform named “Being Example: A different kind of leadership” that encourage students to participate and communicate with all the school students to interchange and discuss educative problems they have. “Being example” platform is the extension of the presented platform “Looking for Leaders”, it encourages students to be leaders, by performing good actions and promote their peers to follow them, and not to just because of the skills they have.

Keywords: Educational Systems, Social Networks, Human-Computer Interaction, Students Behaviors, Secondary Schools, Educational System Evaluation.

1 Introduction

Students often demonstrate their desire and ambition to succeed in their studies, in order to be rated by their teachers, parents or managers [1]. The idea of this paper is to improve the methodology for secondary schools to introduce online social networks as a part of their system, and to offer services to the educational community (students, parents and teachers) for the construction of a training school experience that allows the development of values, attitudes, socio-emotional skills, and ethical standards [2]. As a result, this creates a social life where all members of the educational environment participate, share and develop completely. From one side, students will learn to be citizens, how to vote, and to be responsible for the improvements and changes of their own educative system; under the supervision of the management team of the center and the school board. This methodology intends students to have responsibilities through their participation (voting, debate, leadership, etc.) in their own school system.

The improvement comes to give answer to several surveys that were done after using the prototype presented in [2]. Its main improvement reside in adding a new type of leadership concept, not by calling leader to some users but by pointing them as an example for one or some of the student's actions.

This article consists of 5 sections: starting with the introduction, followed by the state of art. Third, we discuss one of the surveys that were done to the students (looking for weaknesses). The fourth section presents the new added functionality. Finally, we end the paper with the conclusions and future work.

2 State of Art

According to Danah Boyd [3], social networks are Websites that give users a range of services based on Web technologies that allow individuals to: build a public or semi-public profile with relationships system, to have a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and finally, view and navigate through the list of users' connections with those who share a connection in the system. The shape and nomenclature of the connections listed above vary from one social network to another.

2.1 Social Networks in Secondary Schools

In education, the ability to keep in touch a large group of students is the first characteristic that high schools should take advantage of. When teachers make use of Internet technologies in their teaching process, especially when they have a large number of students; raise the effectiveness of the educational task, thus, this variety in the sources of information for teachers and students, since both groups are forced to visit a large number of resources (blogs, wikis, etc.) that contain all needed information and at the same time cross students data. For this, it is the perfect medium, for teaching / learning environment, which push these blogs to be widely used in education, and because of the multiplicity of subjects, teachers and students who live together in one or several schools [4].

The social networking phenomenon is growing, especially in recent years, in parallel with the development of services and tools called Web 2.0. What sets this system mainly from its predecessor, Web 1.0, is a communicative paradigm shift, where the user of the network goes from being a consumer of content to participate in building and developing them. For these reasons, in our case for students in education systems, we see that the use of social networks for the development of our proposal is fundamental, and presents a very promising solution for the future pillars of the system to learn the meaning and importance of their vote, how it affects in the system development, and finally students will learn the way they can make use of it.

2.2 Previous Works

Looking for Leaders [2] is a tool for participation, awareness and leadership within the educational systems of secondary education. The users of the platform can

perform organizational activities, create and participate in the educational community events. It is based on the performance of social networks, adding a number of extra features to support active participation by students in their educational system. It has been taken into account that users of this platform are minors, and therefore decided that in principle it is an independent platform (per school) for the better management and control of the school. One of the main functions of the tool is to enhance participation in the daily activities that take place in school. For instance: reading workshops, sports clubs and so on. This is the platform that was improved during the work and research that is being shown in the paper.

The field study of [5] reflects the big use of the new technologies and social networks by high school students, this cheer up us to follow our social networks research at high schools. In this research work, says that 88% of the high school students use the Tuenti social network [6]. Also, it highlights a set of advantages for their application in teaching, where the field study focus on Tuenti and Facebook social networks. First, it presents the results obtained through an anonymous questionnaire given at three centers of the community Castilla-La Mancha, Spain (two secondary and one primary education centers). Next, it discusses the main findings of this field study conducted during the last two academic years and applied over 425 students (381 secondary education and 64 of primary one).

3 A Survey: Looking for Weaknesses

This section shows the features of “Looking for leaders” and the survey that was done to the students. The most significant result of performing this survey, was that, students felt they are important, and a real part of the system, as they can complain and propose changes.

3.1 Looking for Leaders Features

The features (before the improvement) related to leadership are as follows:

- Leadership by accumulation. Each student may delegate his or her vote to peers either because they have similar ideas, or because the student likes their way of leading, to be the class representative. Students who delegated their vote shall not vote until they revoke the delegation. For example, if a student is a voting delegate of three other students, his or her vote will count as four.
- Representatives of the group. All groups will include the following figures: the group representative/s and the rest of students. A manager coordinates and represents the group actions, can be a student or, in some occasions, several students from the group.
- Voting proposals. Everyone can open a voting form. If the proposal goes beyond 10% participation in its first four days, since its creation it will remain active, otherwise it will be closed.

- Academic timeline. Students can view their actions with respect to the system as a timeline. Viewing the activities in which they participated or the ones that were successful and the ones that were not.
- Proposals of change regarding system aspects. Made by the students themselves, each center may set a percentage of votes for a proposal that the school management may take into account. One possibility would be to evaluate the proposals, which reach more than 50% of votes.

Once the main features about leadership are presented the survey complete its meaning.

3.2 The Survey Description

The survey that was done had two parts. The first part was an anonymous questionnaire composed of ten questions that was filled by eighty-two students. Additionally to this, to obtain complete information of the survey, we made some face-to-face interviews with seven students. The anonymous questionnaire, performed by students, was done to look for the platform weaknesses, and to know its acceptance level. The most interesting results of it are:

- To the question: Would you add more features to the system? The 90.2% answered yes.
- Do you agree with the leadership's features of the system?
 - The 30% answered yes,
 - While the 33% answered no, and
 - The rest answered don't know / don't answer (N/A).

The seven students who participated in the face-to-face interviews were picked by random. We couldn't interview the eighty-two who participated in filling the questionnaire because of the lack of time. Each interview was performed between ten and fifteen minutes, there weren't a script of questions so dependent. We let the students to speak freely about the platform, some interesting commentaries were:

- María said: "I am tired of how the society behaves; the acknowledgements are always for the same little group".
- Elena said: "I get tired of using the system when I realized that no one was interacting with me".
- Luis said: "Many social networks, many passwords sometimes this is messy".

In this paper are reflected just the negative commentaries that needed our attention. There were positive commentaries as well but the focus of the research, here, is to look for the negative points of the system.

3.3 Survey Consequences

After the surveys, it was clear that "Looking for Leaders" platform was in need to new functionalities, to correct what its weaknesses (like what "María" said), thus, this

platform is not just for leaders, it is developed to serve the whole educative community. There were many questions, but the main one was: How we can make everyone feel the leadership means? Its answer is: by “Being Example”.

4 Being Example

The process to improve Looking for Leaders, and the main changes done to it, are discussed in this section. The first step after the surveys, was proposing a vote on the website of the system, where every user could vote Agree or not agree. Why to propose a vote? One of the goals of this platform is to get the involvement of the students, so to follow the spirit of the platform the decision of change was given to the students. The results are shown at Fig. 1.

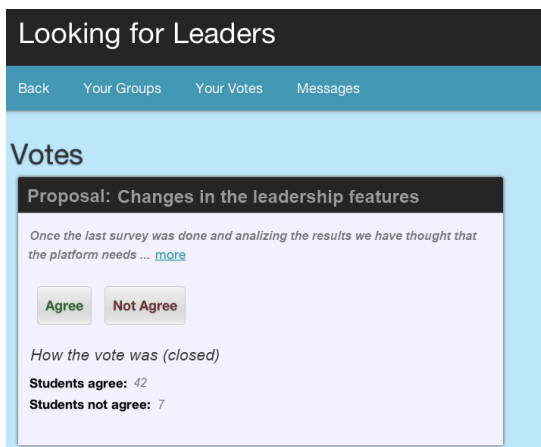


Fig. 1. The first step after the surveys, proposing a vote on the website of the system, where every user could vote Agree or not agree

So after the vote, and taking into account the results, the next step was to define the change to improve “Looking for Leaders”, and this definition is as follows:

“Being Example” goal is to promote the possibility of young students of being a good example for their peers. Our own experience in educations, ensure us that it happens continuously in our centers, but they aren’t rewarded. It happened with bad examples as well ones. But in our case, we are not sociologists, so it is not our responsibility to judge if the examples are good or bad. Our aim, with this platform, is just to enhance the participation in the platform, and make more visible to the educative community the good examples that surround them. So, *how to get this visibility?*, Simple, by adding new features to the online community.

Once “Being Example” has been described in a short way, in the next sub-section the new needed features are discussed.

4.1 “Being Example” New Features

The new features were added, and developed over the platform “Looking for Leaders” [2], by re-using as the same code and maintaining all its functionalities. Table 1 shows the main features added to the system. Which all its users can use: admins, students and teachers.

Table 1. It shows the main features added to the Being Example” system, and which all its users can use them

Main Features Available		
<i>Features</i>	<i>Admin.</i>	<i>Users</i>
New proposal	Yes	Yes
Voting a proposal	Yes	Yes ^a
Accept a new proposal	Yes	No
Check the results of a proposal	Yes	Yes
Close a vote	Yes	No
Check the accepted proposal list	Yes	Yes
Check rewarded proposals	Yes	Yes
Select a proposal as the month or week winner	No ^b	No

a. Users cannot vote in a proposal if they are sanctioned.

b. The system is the responsible of selecting the winners.

The “Being Example” feature is presented, in the platform, with the functionality “New proposal”: where registered users could add a new “Being Example” proposal. This proposal has to be accepted, first, by the system administrator “Accept a new proposal” feature. Once the proposal is accepted the rest of users can vote it, the default time for voting is one week. After this week the vote is closed automatically (there is another possibility, closing a vote by the administrator before it completes a week, for facing problems). After this process, a list with the most voted proposals are prized in a weekly and monthly way (a diploma).

4.2 Changes in the System

In Fig. 2 there are an example of “Being Example” proposal. A new button was added to the main menu of the website interface, named “Examples”. The vote respect to a “Being Example” proposal is the same that we had before for the vote in the prototype of [2].

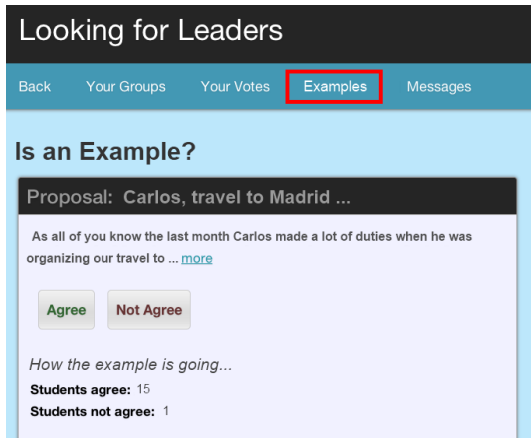


Fig. 2. An example of “Being Example” proposal, a new button was added to the main menu of the website interface, named “Examples”

Once the user accessed to the Examples section, he has different subsections:

- Closed Proposals: Represents the proposals situation once they were ended.
- Active Proposals: This subsection contains the proposals whose process of vote is still active.
- Rewarded Proposals: Once the vote of a proposal is closed and the week or the month ends, the proposal with more votes goes to this subsection, and a diploma is given to the person who proposed it.
- Adding new proposal: Where users can add new being example proposals.
- Proposal review: Only the administrators (teachers usually) of the system could access to this subsection.

The general aspect of the platform architecture remains equal. The Database has been changed as well to work with the data of the new features. The server schema (Fig. 3) suffers minor changes in the “Proposal” part where a new type was added: “Being Example” proposal.

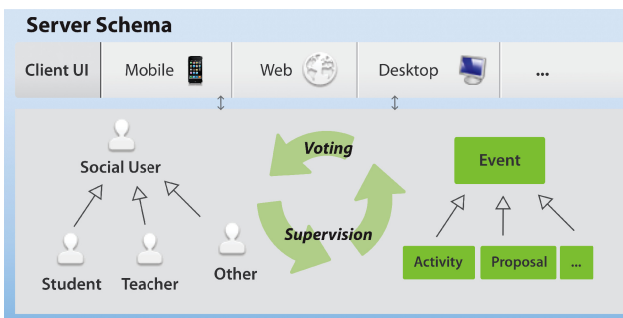


Fig. 3. The server schema changes, where a new type was added: “Being Example” proposal”

Some of the aspects of the system remain equal, in order to keep the platform functionality properly, like the recommended rules for the system. There are three possible sanctions, by the team of teachers responsible of the students who make use of the platform in an inappropriate manner:

- When a student loses the representative position, he or she shall not be able to re-present his/her candidacy in the system for a certain period of time.
- Temporary voting ban. The student shall not be able to participate in any of the voting proposals. Advisable to take this measure with students who are using their vote unethically.
- Observer. In this case, the student adopts the observer role, and he shall not use any of the system features. This would be the most restrictive measure.

5 Conclusions

After improving Looking for Leaders we can observe that its deployment in the educational environment, where the prototype was being used, was successful. Even the students with commentaries on the website showed their happiness about being part of the process of the improvement of their own educative system. Now the platform allows more kinds of leadership, trying to make students feel important inside their environment.

The problem that “Luis” highlights during his interview: “Many social networks, many passwords sometimes this is messy” is being researched long time ago, like for example the work done in [7] with opened 2.0. But the reality is that each company wants to impose its user id. As a future work, we are already studding the way to implement the option of login by using user id of the biggest web companies (as Facebook, Google...).

The results and its application in secondary schools, shows that this platform is a very interesting tool to analyze data, from passive participation (early voting only), and active participation, of students in the secondary school, to assess the level of leaders, the level of discontent and a number of indicators. In futures research this data analysis will be shown. The points of leadership were future work in [2], but because of the obtained results of the survey, we decided to improve the system by adding other type of features, the ones presented in this paper.

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