Chapter XXVIII

Web 2.0 and CMS for Second Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The process of technological inclusion begins with an analysis of the features and functions of the specific tool in consideration. Pedagogy should then be evaluated and evolved in the light of possibilities inherent in the new technology. The process is essential because tools are not neutral entities, and they must be integrated in a thoughtful manner consistent with “best practice” standards. This chapter contains an examination of E-Folio, a Web 2.0 application, and a case study focusing on the process of technological inclusion to determine how to promote portfolio creation in the acquisition of second language writing.

INTRODUCTION

Several features separate Web 2.0 from the previous generation of web-based applications and programs. Most noticeable is the emphasis on concepts such as participant-generated production, open-source systems that encourage instructor interaction at the site administrator or developer level (or at least, contact with these involved parties), increased communication and collaboration, and online identity formation (Green, 2004; Lecourt, 2001).

The ubiquitous nature of courseware inclusion in educational environments raises many questions about the tools and interaction with existing pedagogical models (Synder, 2001). A central component of ensuring proper tool selection and effective use is the process of inclusion, involving the evaluation and adaptation of pedagogy. This is essential to make sure pedagogical decisions are being made by the instructor, and will ultimately benefit the students in the desired way (VanDerKlink & Jochems, 2005). This process is so important because these tools aren’t neutral entities. Intrinsic to each CMS (Courseware Man-
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Web 2.0 and CMS for Second Language Learning are assumptions about teaching and learning. Yet, since they became commercially available in 1997 (Ullman & Rabinowitz, 2004) CMS have been developed and introduced into academia, a venue traditionally slow to change, and embedded into existing curricula at a rapid rate, despite the lack of proven pedagogical models. As Ullman and Rabinowitz (2004, p. 1) indicate:

Given the increased adoption of the CMS as an instructional tool, it’s important to address how instructors are to make use of this technology. A review of extant literature shows that many articles have been written comparing the functionality of different systems ... how to incorporate this functionality into an existing course, however, rarely has been addressed.

Very often these are tools that are derived from models outside of academia and for all their much-vaunted possibilities have the potential to disrupt existing curricula and established pedagogical models. Tool inclusion is a process that is best viewed over time, and should be approached with the ideas of longevity and course evaluation uppermost in the developer’s mind. When faced with the task of teaching advanced writing instruction in a Japanese university the first year was spent considering aspects of pedagogy and technological integration while preparing to incorporate an online component in my course. My intention is to promote portfolio writing to supplement classroom instruction through guided personal reflection and increased communication between peers and teacher to student (Bridwell, Nancarrow & Ross, 1984). To accomplish these aims the Web 2.0 courseware tool E-folio will be integrated for second language learning through English writing instruction. E-folio makes use of electronic portfolio systems, based on the performance support model adapted from the business world.

E-folio is an example of a Web 2.0 technology because of its teacher-centered design, which encourages teachers to engage with the components of the tool in terms of features and appearance. It is also a prime example of Web 2.0 technology because, while the instructor creates assignments and conversation topics, and sets the parameters for community, scope, and scale, the site is ultimately populated through participant-generated production and content.

WEB 2.0 COURSEWARE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The question these tools and their ubiquitous presence raises is: do Web 2.0 CMS offer the opportunity to radically alter existing pedagogies, or do they afford the chance to make what instructors already do easier? This distinction, in practice, ultimately lies in the method and manner of technological inclusion. A carefully integrated CMS application can help make what instructors already do easier, and offer the chance to expand pedagogy in new and exciting ways that will promote the development of skills necessary for life-long learning, by giving students the tools to process the wealth of information they will uncover on a daily basis.

First, a properly integrated CMS can support the already existing pedagogy of the instructor by helping in a basic way with time consuming administrative details. Secondly, after this process has been initiated, instructors who desire will have the chance to evaluate pedagogical goals in light of new and potential opportunities that exist intrinsic to the capabilities of the CMS. Thirdly, the process of inclusion itself can be the catalyst for the course’s evolution to accomplish tasks that support independent learning outside the classroom. In addition, an archive of the semester is created for further review, analysis, and research. Integration is a difficult task as very often there is little time during the academic year for instructors...
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