

Chapter 5.19

The Pedagogical Implications of Web 2.0

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 tools like blogs, Wikis, and podcasts are new to the vocabulary of language acquisition. Teachers and students who take full advantage of these emerging tools will participate in more dynamic, immediate, and communicative environments that provide opportunities for meaningful experiences through social constructivist learning. This chapter aims to bring perspectives rooted in educational theory to a domain too often dominated by the technological implications of its tools and argues that social constructivism is the pedagogical paradigm for learning and teaching facilitated by the next generation of Web technology. It reviews basic theoretical tenets and discusses their implications. Social constructivism lays the foundation for

learning environments that foster the participation of students and teachers in today's knowledge and information-based society to their full potential.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning in the 21st century has new tools at hand. Tools like blogs, wikis, and podcasts are new to the vocabulary of language acquisition. Language learning environments are evolving into more dynamic, immediate, and communicative environments. The traffic on second language Web sites like *BBC Learning English* demonstrates the growing popularity and reach of online language learning. Concurrent with the development of the Internet over the past 20 years, learning has become intertwined with learning online; more and more

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people are looking for flexibility and independence in their language learning experiences.

The emergence of new technologies has always been accompanied by promises of the transformation of learning and teaching. In *Teacher and Machines*, Cuban (1996, p. 3) states that “educators [have] searched for means of communicating knowledge in simple, inexpensive, and timely ways” while “making instruction both productive and enriching” (p. 3), all in the name of transforming education to serve more students more efficiently. Cuban continues to say that “because teachers believe that interpersonal relations are essential in student learning, the use of technologies that displace, interrupt, or minimize that relationship is viewed in a negative light” (1996, p. 61). Although Cuban has argued that technologies have been oversold, he also makes a case for computers being underused in modern education. Apart from the promise of “more efficient and productive” educational institutions, the “transformation of teaching and learning into an engaging and active process connected to real life,” and “the preparation of the current generation of young people for the future workplace” have been major goals of educational technology reform (Cuban, 2002, pp. 13-15).

The promise of Web 2.0 technologies is different. Their impact on the learning process and the practice of teaching is truly revolutionary in that it does not promise more efficiency but it extends the relations between teachers and students beyond the two-dimensional models of instruction to multi-dimensional networks that resemble the world we live in closer than ever before. However, the role of technology represents a site of struggle with effects on the quality of learning opportunities. As Warschauer (2006) argues, “Educational reformers suggest that the advent of new technologies will radically transform what people learn, how they learn, and where they learn, yet studies of diverse learners’ use of new media cast doubt on the speed and extent of change” (p. 1).

BACKGROUND

Many educators consider correspondence education the precursor of distance education. Correspondence education developed in the mid-19th century and this was the only way to reach students who were physically separated from their instructor. By the mid-20th century, education models had evolved to computer systems built to also increase the efficiency of instruction by delivering learning packages to a large number of students, for example via PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations) (Berners-Lee & Caillau, 2000, p. 85). In the late 1960s, a computer-assisted instructional system called TICCET (Time-shared, Interactive, Computer-Controlled Educational Television) was developed by combining computer with television technology to deliver large amounts of individually controlled instructional material to students. It was not until the 1980s that progress in the areas of speech recognition, machine-assisted translation, Artificial Intelligence and generally Natural Language Processing was made to a significant extent. While computers became more available to the average consumer and the World Wide Web was invented they didn’t enter the public sphere until the early 1990s. From this the first generation of the Web as an environment for learning emerged, giving teachers the tools to create and disseminate electronic and digitized learning materials in more efficient ways much like correspondence courses once did with print-based resources. The learning paradigm as such remained unchanged.

Many influences have had an impact on the world of learning and on shaping the online learning landscape of the second generation of the World Wide Web, the Web 2.0 era. Richardson’s (2006) book, *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms* has been recognized for the use of blogs in the classroom as a “trendsetter in education” by the *New York Times*. The underlying concepts of the use of Web tools in this book are spreading throughout the

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