Chapter 5.25
Hypertinence, Serendipity or Elicitation of Passion for Knowledge?
Some Critical Elements of Online Learning by Using Web 2.0 Resources

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ABSTRACT

Learning processes depend on the socio-technical and regulatory contexts in which professional practices and daily usage take place. These processes develop out of and through various systems of activities, consisting of subjects, artefacts, rules, knowledge, and roles. What happens when the rules governing these systems, the roles, artefacts and knowledge change? For instance, what happens to learning processes when the settings in which practices take place are virtual, when they occur, say, in a blog, or in a community, or on a social networking platform? In this chapter the author intends to examine in detail the specific features of learning processes taking place in these new online environments.

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Tim O'Reilly published an article on the changes developing in the relationship between the web and its users. Essentially, O'Reilly stated that negotiation between the web and its users was heralding a new era for the Internet (known as Web 2.0), in which users are allowed to interact directly with the web to create user-generated content. This takes us beyond the one-way communication phase (from web to users) and gives users a role of direct involvement in communication. In a very short time, the phenomenon of Web 2.0 applications has exploded.

These applications have encouraged a large-scale shift from 'individual publishing' to 'personal managing', an activity that enables any user not just to create and share content or partly personalize interfaces, but also to design and

manage an interface completely or even develop one's own platform to manage a range of resources and/or interfaces. Without underestimating the playful aspect of the use of Web 2.0 resources, it is also worth focusing on the value of online practices from the viewpoint of individual and collective learning, with which the playful aspect is undoubtedly connected.

The rapid changes in recent years have led web users to activate and constantly reformulate their knowledge and practices in relation to a variety of contexts, objects and diverse actors - including in their on/off-line relationships - based on the possibility of generating and managing this 'relational content' in terms of personal/collective managing.

This content, in turn, may take the form of technologies or new media. Web 2.0 resources are technologies-in-practice (Orlikowski, 2000), which structure users' practices through their repeated use and the way they are operated. They are also technologies-in-technology, i.e. technologies-in-practice with a potentially large number of technological actants and hence the possibility of numerous levels of interaction - technological, semiotic, material and reflective - within the same context of practices. And these resources can also be practices-in-technology, i.e. the generation of new technological resources through the experience of their usage.

Some of the most important innovations include tagging, blogging and social networking, and it should be noted that folksonomies, as opposed to traditional taxonomies, have developed within these innovations for the management of information and knowledge. Bottom-up processes concerning the organization of knowledge, in reality, involve the opposition of top-down classification and indexation versus bottom-up methods of organizing and indexing knowledge.

But how to find our way around? The web environment is definitely a hyper environment (hyper as in hyperlink, but also in the sense of enormous, exaggerated). The volume of resources that can be found through the web and the number of possible actions are far beyond our capacity to use them. At the same time, however, the web can also be somewhat inaccurate, scattered, uncoordinated, and often not very pertinent. How can we conceive of learning processes that are visible, recognisable, and based on the use of Web 2.0 resources?

Information Technology (IT) systems, conceived with the aim of creating the conditions and processes to support the development, processing and sharing of information, have not always produced the hoped-for results. Some studies show that we can by no means take it as given that IT investment improves the processes of creating and exchanging knowledge within an organization (Bernard, 1996; Davenport & Prusak, 1998); others point out that people are often reluctant to use new technologies (Markus & Keil, 1994).

We do not believe that Web 2.0 resources alone, given their technological features, can overcome these barriers. However there are grounds to believe, as we shall see in this chapter, that a relationship exists between the socio-technical features of the use of a given technology and the degree to which subjects use, activate, participate in and share that technology. This relationship is spurious in that it is mediated by a number of motivational aspects. These aspects, however, are in turn connected to a series of other factors, including features specific to these same participation practices.

The concepts of Hypertinence (De Kerchkove, 1998), Serendipity (Merton, 1949; Merton & Barber 1958) and Passion (Barbalet, 1996; Solomon, 1993; Fabbri, 1998), as we shall see, help us to specify the forces underlying participation in communities, social networks, blogs, etc. These aspects are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they interact and enable us to understand the tensions within the processes whereby individuals or groups participate in online learning practices.

Therefore, in this chapter, we will regard Web 2.0 resources as a set of practices - discursive,

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