

Chapter 7

Social Exclusion or Inclusion: The Implications of Social and Participatory Media on Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the implications of the changing digital landscape for education and in particular the implications for learners, teachers, and institutions. It begins by providing an overview of these new technologies and their associated characteristics. It then provides some examples of the ways in which these technologies are harnessed to foster different pedagogical approaches. It is evident that these technologies have immense potential to support more innovative approaches to learning, enabling more personalised and learner-centred approaches. However, there are also a number of downsides to using these technologies. The chapter outlines these and suggests that a new digital divide is being created between those who are able to be part of this new participatory culture and those who are excluded. It argues that we need to change the ways in which we design, support, and assess learning. It provides three case studies that attempt to do this: (1) the creation and use of Open Educational Resources and associated practices; (2) Cloudworks, a social networking site for sharing and discussing learning and teaching ideas; and (3) a new learning design methodology which aims to help guide practitioners in creating learning interventions that make effective use of new technologies.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last five years we have seen the emergence of a range of new social and participatory media. These include blogs, wikis, social networks like Facebook, microblogging sites such as Twitter, and media sharing repositories such as Flickr and YouTube. Many of these tools are free, and clearly they offer new and exciting ways to support learning, and to enable learners and teachers to communicate and share. In parallel we have seen the emergence of the Open Source (Iiyoshi and Kumar, 2008) and the Open Educational Resource (OER) movements (Aitkins, Seely Brown, & Hammond, 2007) and there are now many high-quality digital resource repositories in a range of languages. Coupled to this there has been a growth in user-generated content, enabling more learner-centred pedagogies. This chapter will focus on the implications of this changing digital landscape for education and in particular the implications for learners, teachers and institutions. It will begin by providing an overview of these new technologies and their associated characteristics. It will then provide some examples of the ways in which these technologies are being harnessed to foster different pedagogical approaches. It is evident that these technologies have immense potential to support more innovative approaches to learning, enabling more personalised and learner-centred approaches. However, there are also a number of downsides to using these technologies. The chapter will outline these and suggest that a new digital divide is being created, between those who are able to be part of this new participatory culture and those who are excluded. It will argue that we need to change the ways in which we design, support and assess learning, to take better account of the affordances (Gibson, 1979) of these new technologies. It will provide three case studies that are attempting to do this: (1) the creation and use of Open Educational Resources and associated practices; (2) Cloudworks, a social networking site

for sharing and discussing learning and teaching ideas; and (3) a new learning design methodology which aims to help guide practitioners in creating learning interventions that make effective use of new technologies.

SOCIAL AND PARTICIPATORY MEDIA

The range of social and participatory media now available is truly daunting. Conole and Alevizou (2010) categorised these into ten types of tools: media sharing, media manipulation, chat, online games and virtual worlds, social networking, blogs, social bookmarks, recommender systems, wikis and syndication/RSS feeds. Reviewing the ways in which they are being used, a number of common characteristics emerge: (1) They enable new forms of interaction and communication; (2) many provide functionality to enable users to peer critique each others' content or dialogue; (3) there are now a range of tools that enable users to collectively aggregate resources; (4) there are many tools to enable user-generated content, that can be shared with others in a variety of ways; (5) they are participatory, enabling users to produce and share their own content and interact with others; (6) they are open and exploratory, users can undertake inquiry-based queries getting access to rich resources and often near instant feedback from the social collective; (7) there is an evident networked effect, possible through the connection of millions worldwide sharing, discussing, aggregating and co-constructing knowledge. Within this context we are seeing a number of trends:

- A shift from the web as a content repository and information mechanism to a web that enables more social mediation and user generation of content.
- New practices of sharing (see, as an example, Flickr for images, YouTube for

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