Chapter 3.20
Assessing Weblogs as Education Portals

Ian Weber
Texas A&M University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key sectors that has benefited from the continuous developments and innovations in information and communication technology (ICT). Web-based facilities now provide a medium for learning and a vehicle for information dissemination and knowledge creation (Khine, 2003). Accordingly, developments in ICTs provide opportunities for educators to expand and refine frameworks for delivering courses in innovative and interactive ways that assist students achieve learning outcomes (Kamel & Wahba, 2003). However, the adoption of ICTs has also created tensions between traditional control and directiveness in teaching and student-centred learning, which relies on flexibility, connectivity, and interactivity of technology-rich environments.

This chapter examines the introduction of Web-based technologies within a media studies course. The objective was to establish a community of learning, which provides students with a portal or entranceway *into* a common work area and *out* to networks of media related organizations. So doing, a pilot study was conducted within the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University to blend *Weblog* facilities with a classroom setting to enhance students' interpersonal and content interaction, and build *citizenship* through participation and collaborative processes. Four key aims frame this study:

1. provide an accessible, interactive online environment in which students can participate with peers and engage with new media technologies within a learning community setting;
2. develop an instructional technology framework that enhances the learning experience and outcomes within online educative environments;
3. establish a *portal* or gateway for students to access media advocacy and special interest groups and enhance and diversify perspectives on global media; and

4. evaluate student-learning experiences facilitated through innovative online instructional technologies.

BACKGROUND

Early approaches to integrating ICTs into education environments emerged from conventional learning models, originating from the objectivist approach in which a reality exists and experts instruct individuals of that reality (Belanger & Slyke, 2000). However, such teacher-centric, information-based approaches failed to adequately prepare students to become independent learners. Responding to these limitations, educators embraced learner-centric approaches such as *constructivism*, which leant weight to the empowerment of individuals to take charge of their own learning environments. As Wilson (1996) suggests, the constructivist movement in instructional design emphasized the importance of providing meaningful, authentic activities that can help the learner to construct understandings and develop skills relevant to solving problems and not overloading them with too much information. Solis (1997) supports this position, suggesting that student-centred learning "… relies on groups of students being engaged in active exploration, construction, and learning through problem solving, rather than in passive consumption of textbook materials" (p. 393).

In spite of these favorable positions, Khine (2003) warns that creating such learning environments supported by ICTs can be intrinsically problematic. Accordingly, it is critically important that careful planning and design is employed at the early stages of instructional design to provide proper support and guidance, as well as rich resources and tools compatible to each context. When adequate consideration is given to new learning and teaching strategies that incorporate ICTs, real opportunities exist for educators to provide students with a dynamic

environment to learn, to think critically, and to undertake productive discussions with their peers in supportive, constructive environments. Given the potential of such technology-rich learning environments, educators have the opportunity to make student learning more interesting and enriching, preparing them for the demands of the future workplace. Accordingly, instructional designers must consider matching the strengths of new technology (flexibility, connectivity, and interactivity) with traditional forms of education (control and directiveness) to inspire, motivate, and excite students in ways that maximize the individual's learning potential.

Achieving these goals requires the development of individual competencies in *problem solving*, *participation*, and *collaboration*, and communities of learning (Kernery, 2000; Khine, 2003; Wilson & Lowry, 2000). *Problem solving* provides ways for students to engage with authentic episodes, providing opportunities for students and educators to examine events and reflect on solutions. One way of maximizing the benefits of problem solving is to support these through c*ollaborative processes*, which can be built around these "episodes" by focusing on the use of instructional methods to encourage students to work together as active participants on such tasks. Such efforts can be facilitated through structuring and organizing online interactions using computer-mediated communication, which provides the means to overcome limitations of time and place (Harasim, Calvert, & Groeneboer, 1997). Based on the principles of the transformative paradigm, multiple perspectives, and flexible methods, it is possible for students to adapt, to process and to filter content into their own logical frameworks, resulting in outcomes that may not be thoroughly predictable (Bento & Schuster, 2003). As Morrison and Guenther (2000) note, such collaborative environments provide a forum for students to discuss issues, engage in dialogue, and share results. However, Bento et al. (2003) also warn that one of the main challenges in Web-based education

8 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/assessing-weblogs-education-portals/22317

Related Content

Health Information Technology and Human Rights
Shane O'Hanlon (2013). *Human Rights and Information Communication Technologies: Trends and Consequences of Use (pp. 235-246).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/health-information-technology-human-rights/67757

Balancing Awareness and Interruption in Mobile Patrol using Context-Aware Notification
Jan Willem Streefkerk, D. Scott McCrickard, Myra P. van Esch-Bussemakersand Mark A. Neerincx (2012). *International Journal of Mobile Human Computer Interaction (pp. 1-27).*
www.irma-international.org/article/balancing-awareness-interruption-mobile-patrol/68845

Socioeconomic Reforms, Human Development, and the Millennium Development Goals with ICTs for Coordination
 (2013). *ICTs for Health, Education, and Socioeconomic Policies: Regional Cases (pp. 211-229).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/socioeconomic-reforms-human-development-millennium/74591

Chinese POS Disambiguation and Unknown Word Guessing with Lexicalized HMMs
Guohong Fuand Kang-Kwong Luke (2006). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 39-50).*
www.irma-international.org/article/chinese-pos-disambiguation-unknown-word/2877

Early Detection of Poor Academic Performers Using Machine Learning Predictive Modeling
Kaviyarasi Ramanathanand Balasubramanian Thangavel (2021). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development (pp. 56-69).*
www.irma-international.org/article/early-detection-of-poor-academic-performers-using-machine-learning-predictive-modeling/285444