

Chapter 20

Mode Neutral: The Pedagogy that Bridges Web 2.0 and e-Learning 2.0

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ABSTRACT

The excitement of Web 2.0 and E-learning 2.0 is upon us. As the use of social networking sites and other Web 2.0 tools continue to increase, pedagogues are considering their place within education. Some passionately share their research findings or experiments of blogging, wikiing, podcasting and other tools, to empower a new wave in learning and teaching. The authors feel part of this new culture and have undertaken their own research with seventy health care students, harnessing collective intelligence to scaffold their learning in anaesthesia. In this chapter, the authors too share our excitement about the 2.0 era with some notes of caution. From an educational perspective, they believe there is a void between Web 2.0 and E-learning 2.0 - in the shape of pedagogy. What academics have traditionally delivered in a classroom setting has been framed around a sound set of principles – the pedagogy. As for e-learning, many of us have adopted classroom pedagogies within the ever-evolving online world and have noted their incompatibilities. Nevertheless, the common aim of using technology in education is intended to support the learner in their studies. Integrating any (new or old) technologies into education requires a pedagogy that is effective in information exchange, yet flexible enough to respond to the various demands placed upon learning and teaching by both the learner, and the technology. This chapter details the authors' evidence-based pedagogical model – Mode Neutral – showing how contemporary education can promote the use of Web 2.0 tools to harness collective intelligence. They will outline our case study of using (arguably) a Web 1.0 technology, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as the single learning space, with Web 2.0 tools integrated to encourage collaborative learning.

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INTRODUCTION

For many of us, there is little doubt that contemporary education has evolved over the last decade or so. Those changes have been brought about due to two reasons: the global investment into technologies that make up our digital society, and pedagogues using technology to enrich the learning experience. As technology continues to surpass itself, a plethora of Internet offsprings become available such as Moodle (Managed Learning Environment), Facebook® and MySpace® (Social Networking tools). To appreciate the ‘value-added’ of using technology in future education, it is worth considering how it became part of the pedagogues’ toolkit. One could argue the starting point of the digital revolution happened when the Internet became commercially available in the early 1990’s. Others might argue the digital revolution is a by-product of the 2nd phase of the Web, a time where *anybody* can publish material online. What is more difficult to establish is the early adoption of technology within education.

The term ‘technology in education’ is a subjective term based on how the teacher views technology within their learning and teaching principles. One pedagogue might see the use of a 35mm slide projector as ‘technology in education’ as opposed to another who might embrace Second Life® to host educational sessions in a 3D gaming world.

Moreover, the latest Web 2.0 tools can offer further enhancement of the learners’ experience when deployed within sound learning and teaching principles. To achieve this we should be compliant with their purpose and form before considering their application to the learning experience. That is, do we really understand what they are, how to use them, and the benefits they bring to education? Furthermore, we should consider the nature of the learners, alongside the purpose and the form of technological implementation.

The driving forces behind our work stems from emerging issues within Higher Education, and as such has been three-fold:

- ‘Top down’ pressures to recruit more students from different areas, are greater than ever before, as competition for student numbers continues to increase.
- ‘Bottom up’ forces have considered the student and their experiences of education, with a clear aim to increase flexibility, and develop ownership through personalised learning. We share the opinions of Landsberger (2004, p8), who reminds us that we must acknowledge the individuality of learners, and tailor learning activities to their personal needs.
- External pressures from employers who expect their staff to possess critical skills to allow them to critically reflect in order to make decisions and work effectively. This is opposed to traditional ‘rote learning’ whereby graduates may be able to recite a textbook of definitions, however incapable of responding to the needs and challenges they face within day-to-day activities. In other words, employers want graduates who are knowledge able, rather than knowledgeable.

With this in mind, our work accentuates learners’ social participation in constructing knowledge and understanding, and has led to the development of a new pedagogy – ‘Mode Neutral’ – that responds to the driving forces mentioned (above), and applicable for learning either in traditional or online formats.

This chapter will:

1. Raise issues surrounding the terminology used in contemporary education.
2. Emphasise the role of technology in harnessing collective intelligence.

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