

Chapter 4.1

Social Networking, Adult Learning Success and Moodle

Margaret Martinez
The Training Place, Inc., USA

Sheila Jagannathan
World Bank Institute in Washington DC, USA

ABSTRACT

We know that technology is rapidly changing the world and it is hard to keep up. Social networking is the latest online trend we need to learn about. This chapter will consider the enormous changes that impact learners of all ages and offer some insights and resources for those professionals who want to provide more than just another lonely online learning experience. Social networking activities—including sites, blogs, chats, forums and wikis - are emerging to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among adult online learners. The loneliness of the Web 1.0 is passé and the read-only, passive mode of adult learning is fading away. The term Web 2.0 has been used to describe all the new applications useful for a new collaborative or social approach to sharing and repurposing Web content to learn. Just as communities were important in prehistoric times, today online communities are an inherent and critical part of the Web learning experience.

Implicit in most Web 2.0+ applications are social activities which help users network, share, create content, seek or research information, or contribute and interact with others. Youthful online learners are a driving force in this new social change, a change that adults can learn from and embrace. Our young Web users find technology is second nature and are unconsciously changing the paradigm of online learning as they communicate and socialize in a variety of new ways on the Web. Many adults are already following this trend. However, these ways of learning can only become mainstream only when many more adults who are responsible for adult learners learn to use the host of networking tools available. Moodle is an example of a popular open source application used successfully by many around the world. Understanding how to support collaborative online learning activities successfully can offer a huge leap towards greater online learning confidence, contribution and achievement. More is yet to come to change the paradigm of online learning and social networking in the future.

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SOCIAL NETWORKING, ADULT LEARNING SUCCESS AND MOODLE

Social networking is not really a new trend. The idea of learning through communication and collaboration is an old one. From the very beginning, humans have always gathered in groups to learn, communicate and socialize in communities with common goals, needs and interests. It is no surprise then that we humans, as the technology evolves, are similarly developing the Web with the same driving, evolutionary forces. Today, this process is enhanced by new online learning technologies supporting what is the next step in the evolution of the Web, commonly known as Web 2.0 or higher. The previous Web 1.0 phase, which was about finding and reading information, has passed—we have evolved. Users everywhere who have Web access are now collaborating passionately on a variety of social networking sites. Web 2.0 users are searching, creating and interacting with others with common interests to fulfill intrinsic needs to self-improve, learn new information and collaborate with others who are enjoying common likes and experiences. An important difference is that today's collaborative, online activities encourage others to engage and participate actively, continually and happily in the creation and use of new knowledge, artifacts and performance. This trend is in contrast to passive acceptance of what others know and pass on without collaboration or retention.

WHAT HAPPENING ON THE WEB? SOCIAL NETWORKING, SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB 2.0+

There is a huge curiosity about the social networking phenomena. This is a groundswell of using technology to revolutionize learning and communication, especially among young people. More and more users really want to know how all this stuff works, who's doing it and how. Adults are

equally becoming more enticed by the new opportunities to collaborate and be part of groups with common goals and interests. Social networking activities—including sites, blogs, chats, forums and wikis - are emerging to support online collaboration and sharing between users/learners more than ever before. Children are eagerly leading the way for adults in this latest fascinating and evolutionary technology trend. The loneliness of the Web 1.0 is over. Web 2.0 is about using new applications offering a social approach to work in collaboration to generate, share and reuse content. These new kinds of social activities and networks spark passions and help users find information, interact, self-improve and contribute. A description appears in the Wikipedia. Retrieved July 15, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0.

Social networking activities can offer many advantages towards greater more successful online learning. Educators need to understand the opportunities supported by the new Web 2.0 tools and resources, which help harness the power to interact, create and contribute. Social networking websites are used by millions of people to connect with others with common, passionate interests and goals.

Researchers are also curious about social networking. It comes as no surprise that social networking offers other various benefits or influences. For examples, researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University at California, San Diego found that positive social networking relationships can make us happier. Such moods (e.g., happiness) can spread among those connected socially. "Everyday interactions we have with other people are definitely contagious, in terms of happiness," says Nicholas Christakis, a professor at Harvard Medical School and an author of the study (2008). Retrieved July 15, 2009, from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97831171> and <http://christakis.med.harvard.edu/>

In North America, young adults are especially fascinated with collaborative sites, such as MyS-

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