

Chapter 12

Learning, Unlearning, and Relearning: Using Web 2.0 Technologies to Support the Development of Lifelong Learning Skills

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ABSTRACT

Given ever-changing societal and professional demands, lifelong learning is recognized as a critical educational goal. With postsecondary students' increased demand for online learning opportunities and programs, postsecondary educators face the challenge of preparing students to be lifelong contributing members of professional communities of practice online and at a distance. The emergence of powerful Web 2.0 technologies and tools have the potential to support educators' instructional goals and objectives associated with students' professional preparation and the development of lifelong learning skills and dispositions. In this chapter, the authors explain how postsecondary educators can use the Web 2.0 technologies associated with blogging, social networking, document co-creation, and resource sharing to create intrinsically motivating learning opportunities that have the potential to help students develop the skills and dispositions needed to be effective lifelong learners.

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INTRODUCTION

The world we live in is changing right before our eyes, as well-illustrated by Dr. Michael Wesch's thought-provoking YouTube video, "A Vision of Students Today" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>). One basic point made in this video is that information and communication technologies are drastically changing the world we live in, and institutions of higher education are now scrambling to attend to these changes. Specifically, universities are trying to adequately respond to a trifecta of emerging trends:

- Today's economy depends increasingly on employees who are quick and efficient lifelong learners (Hinrichs, 2004). Employers are now looking for employees who can think critically and solve a range of problems, move easily from one task to another, work efficiently and effectively in team situations, and constantly adjust and enhance their knowledge and skills to meet ever-changing needs (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Dunlap, 2005).
- Postsecondary education has been involved in a paradigm shift from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Boggs, 1999; Harden, 2000). This shift substitutes teacher-centered learning's goal of providing instruction through transfer of knowledge with student-centered learning's goal of producing learning through student discovery and construction of knowledge (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Universities have been encouraged to focus their strategies and resources on this paradigm shift in an effort to make learning more meaningful and lasting for students.
- The postsecondary audience is demanding more distance and online learning opportunities (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2004; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). This demand

is no longer based solely on geographic obstacles and schedule constraints; many students report a preference to the online learning format for a variety of reasons. For example, some students perceive on-campus course experiences as high-pressure, uncomfortable, and even exclusionary because of cultural differences, social class background, lack of facility with the English language, age, and so on (Burbules & Callister, 2000a). Additionally, because these students typically have full lives and busy schedules with which to contend, they want what they want, when they want it: (1) students expect their learning opportunities to be available immediately, and (2) students need learning experiences that are directly applicable to their needs and immediately transferable to their professional settings (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2004).

Reflecting and in response to these specific trends, lifelong learning is increasingly recognized as a critical educational goal. Lifelong learning is intentional learning that people engage in throughout their lives for personal and professional fulfillment to improve the quality of their lives (Dunlap & Grabinger, 2003). The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, and the participatory culture those technologies engender, has great potential to support lifelong learning endeavors, allowing for informal, just-in-time, day-to-day learning. Unfortunately, people are often ill-equipped to engage in lifelong learning (Dunlap, 2005), let alone take full advantage of the abundance of resources available at their fingertips via Web 2.0 technologies.

We believe that postsecondary educators preparing students for professions in this day and age are obligated to help students develop into competent lifelong learners. In this chapter, we will describe and present examples of how online technologies are making just-in-time, at-your-fingertips lifelong learning a possibility.

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