

Chapter 4.1

A Case Study of Infusing Web 2.0 Tools for Blended Learning: Virtual Presentations as an Alternative Means of Assessment

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ABSTRACT

In the era of Web 2.0, students are not restricted to search and collect information from existing Internet resources. They are expected to be able to collaborate, create, and share new information on the Web through different tools. On the other hand, students of this era are also familiar with sharing multimedia contents on the Internet. We can also observe that presentations are not limited to face-to-face and university students should be able to present virtually using multimedia technology. It seems that Web 2.0 tools open another space for the assessment modes for teachers. This study aims to describe an innovative practice of having two groups of student teachers conducting a virtual presentation about their final assignments, which could either be videos or other digital formats. One group of students was final year undergraduate while another group consisted of post-graduate Diploma of Education student teachers. For the purpose of the study, the virtual presentation materials were uploaded to a learning management system (LMS) platform to enable the two different classes to comment each other's work within one week. Thereafter, the data collected from tracked statistics provided by the learning platform and students' reflections of this interclass activity were analyzed and compared with each other. It was found that most of the participants were positive about this new presentation approach and ready to accept it as a part of the assessment. However, the undergraduate students were more active in participating in virtual presentations of both classes. Furthermore, their attitudes were influenced by the tutors' participation. Thus, it is suggested that tutors involved in virtual presentations should play an active role and give encouragement to their students regularly.

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INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the Internet since mid 1990, Information Technology (IT) has presented a new arena for learning and teaching worldwide. In particular, Web 2.0 tools provide a huge, untapped resource for educators because of their potential to enhance learning in virtually any environment. They also offer a real opportunity to create a classroom without walls (Barlow, 2008). We expect that our students can be able to collaborate, create and share new information on the Web through various Web 2.0 tools such as social bookmarking systems, blogs, wikis, social networks, video sharing platforms, etc. Students can learn from blogs and wikis as well as from traditional textbooks and they prefer using their “clicker” to indicate understanding instead of raising their hands (Conrad, 2008).

Furthermore, students of this era are familiar with production of multimedia contents and have no difficulties to share them with others through various communication technologies. However, most existing learning and teaching resources are still confined to the traditional text format. Similarly, most learners are assessed in plain text formats, rather than multiple presentation formats, though Web 2.0 tools have opened another space for the assessment modes for teachers. “It is widely accepted that assessment must be designed to reflect course pedagogy, aims and objectives. Networked courses require the course designers to rethink the assessment strategy if it is to reflect the aims of the course and appropriately assess the skills developed during the course,” (Macdonald, Weller, & Mason, 2002, p. 9). In the study, the researchers attempted to make use of a Web 2.0 tool: a Learning Management System (LMS) platform to conduct virtual presentations. These presentations were considered as an alternative means of assessment. In addition, the virtual presentation component may be able to supplement face-to-face contact time and also very useful to enrich the online interaction.

The following section proceeds to describe the pertinent literature review to justify using IT as a tool and medium for peer assessment. The review will be followed by a discussion of the research methodology and findings. Finally, the conclusion of the research and future directions will be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional mode of learning requires rote learning facts and procedures and, thereafter, learners are assessed for their command over the content and the knowledge they have acquired. Vygotsky (1978) was amongst the pioneers who suggested a constructivist approach to learning which emphasized learning through social interaction, which included social relations and interactions with social artifacts such as linguistic symbols, to enable individuals to construct new knowledge from their experiences. Bruner (1986) believes that learning is an active social process in which learners construct new ideas of concepts based on current knowledge. Lave and Wenger (1991) regard both the physical as well as the social environment as being crucial to the learning process. Jonassen, Peck and Wilson (1999) argue that learning is more engaging and interesting when learners are stimulated by sounds and images. Furthermore, Jonassen, Howland, Moore and Marra (2003) suggest that technologies such as video, hypermedia and the Internet are excellent tools to learn with. Their emphasis is on problem solving and they address how the Internet can be used to foster community building. Oliver (2007) points out the needs to redesign technology integration course to leverage new Web 2.0 tools that have been created with web collaboration, sharing and/or new information creation in mind.

Assessment has a long history in both the Eastern and Western worlds and the role of assessment was mainly used for selection purposes in the past. Morris (1995) points out that assessment

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