

Chapter 14

Web 2.0: Privacy and Integrity in the Virtual Campus

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ABSTRACT

The use of Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom is becoming more widespread, as educators begin to recognise their use as effective learning and teaching tools. Web 2.0 facilitates new modes of social interaction that offer the potential to enrich university educational activities. New roles, structures and activities can be enabled, engendering new forms of creativity and increasing the availability of and extent of access to information. Yet in achieving this, such platforms shift the traditional boundaries between educators and their students, between personal and professional lives, raising issues of integrity and pedagogy in unexpected ways. This paper reflects on three personal narratives to examine some of these challenges; the authors conclude by highlighting concerns that universities need to address.

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in modes of social interaction facilitated by Web 2.0 technologies have the potential to shift the traditional boundaries between educators and their students. Social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Ning, Basecamp and blogs promise to enrich university

educational activities through their capability to support communication, groupwork, networking and project archiving. When combined with “traditional” tools such as Blackboard (or other course support platforms) and email, a complex “virtual campus” can be established that offers potential for different modes of social interaction between staff and students. New roles, structures and activities can thus be enabled, possibly reducing social

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distance over time and place, engendering new forms of creativity and increasing the availability of and extent of access to information.

While the use of the Web as an effective teaching and learning medium is a widely researched area, issues which have received less attention by researchers to date are the emerging concerns associated with classroom use of social media, for example the revealing of excessive personal information, the blurring of the boundaries between professional and personal lives, and the behaviours of teacher and learners in online environments. In this paper we examine some of these challenges in the context of our own recent experiences as tutors in higher education. We begin by examining the potential of new technology in education and critique the notion of the “digital native” student, before drawing upon our individual case studies to focus on what we consider these related developments really mean for the ways in which we interact with students and each other.

ICT AND EDUCATION

The Potential of Technology in Education

According to Brown and Adler (2008) a profound impact of the Internet is its ability to support and extend the various aspects of social learning. This means that understanding of content is influenced not just by *what* is learned, but also by *how* it is learned. Tools such as blogs, wikis, social networks, tagging systems, mashups, and content-sharing sites are examples of a new infrastructure that focuses on conversation, participation and action-based learning. Siemens and Tittenberger (2009) take this argument further by suggesting that Web 2.0 technologies could be instrumental in moving away from traditional hierarchical models of education that are structured around a defined body of knowledge and broadcast to learners in a controlled manner, and towards a

networked approach which is more adaptive to the needs of modern learners. Communication could be facilitated through the use of wikis, blogs, and global communities of expertise, while the relative value of diverse sources of information is assessed through social bookmarking tools such as Digg or Del.icio.us. In this environment, the role of the tutor changes or can even disappear altogether. Students are moved from a learning environment controlled by the tutor and the institution, to one where they direct their own learning according to personal interests, find their own information and create knowledge by engaging in relevant networks of expertise that could be physically located anywhere in the world.

From a tutor’s perspective, such a learning environment sounds ideal, but to what extent is this scenario actually played out in practice? Despite the undisputable potential of ICT in and for education, the links between pedagogy and technology, and indeed accompanying ethical issues remain unclear, especially in the light of societal, cultural and technological change McRobb, Jefferies, and Stahl (2007).

Is the “Digital Native” Student Really a Myth?

So far we have focused upon supply side issues of technology development, but does demand exist from students for this type of interaction? Are they really “digital natives” who are well ahead of the curve in their use of social technologies? Prensky (2001) noted the disruptive potential of emerging Internet technologies on student behaviour. He argued that this group of “digital natives” constituted the first generation of students to grow up with the Internet, having spent their entire lives exposed to computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams and mobile phones. More recent endorsements of this view are provided by Dede (2005) and the extensive research carried out with US teenagers by Tapscott (2008).

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