Chapter 6
The University in Transition:
Reconsidering Faculty Roles and Expertise in a Web 2.0 World

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ABSTRACT

Discussion of changing notions of faculty expertise and the role of technology within the educational enterprise is nothing new. However, the current demand for change in teaching and learning practices is particularly strong, in part due to the pressures arising from emerging technologies and the shifting nature of faculty expertise. Web 2.0 technologies enable social connectivity, academic interactivity, and content co-creation. Thus, they change the ways of interacting with information and can support collaborative and constructivist approaches in higher education. This both inspires and requires a corresponding expansion in faculty's role: from imparter of knowledge to orchestrator of learning experiences. Within the general metaphor of orchestration, other specific roles and functions will also be required; for example, scripting, translating, introducing, and co-exploring. As educators attempt to reimagine an educational paradigm in this context, the integration of new technologies must be grounded in how they can support educational experiences and outcomes that are focused on learning.

INTRODUCTION

The discussion of changing notions of faculty expertise and the role of technology within the educational enterprise is nothing new. While historically teaching was expected to be the imparting of knowledge from faculty to student, over the last 40 years this approach has been heavily critiqued as ineffective in preparing engaged citizens and skilled professionals, and thus not successful as a singular approach (Laurillard, 2002). Specifically, when the goals of learning involve higher-order thinking and preparation for transfer to future situations, interactive methods are generally considered more effective (Amundsen, Winer, &

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Gandell, 2004; Wise & O'Neill, 2009). Molenda (1997) has suggested that the sense of inadequacy around the imparting knowledge paradigm and the challenge for universities to push toward deeper understanding occurred in tandem with the rise of a more constructivist philosophy in education. Together, these changes have broadened the framing of the faculty role from that of an imparter of knowledge to a mediator of learning.

In this new role, the faculty member is often seen as a facilitator, whose expertise is valued not simply for the wealth of information at their disposal, but their ability to help students "acquire knowledge of someone else's way of experiencing the world" (Laurillard, 2002: 24). Of course, this conceptual change in thinking about learning does not always translate into changes in teaching actions and learning activities. It does, however, raise questions about current teaching practices and what new ones can be imagined. Web 2.0 technologies present an opportunity to support and extend the desire for change in higher education through the ways in which they make "constructivist, collaborative knowledge-making more natural" (Moore, 2007: 181). At the same time, the use of these technologies outside the classroom also puts pressure on the university as they change our relationship with information. Thus, Web 2.0 technologies both provide a call for, and can help enable, more collaborative and constructivist practices in teaching and learning in higher education.

This chapter begins by positioning the university as undergoing a transitional period that may be unprecedented in scope and impact (Amirault & Visser, 2009). The combination of emerging information and communication technologies that move beyond ubiquitous information access (Web 1.0) to enhance social connectivity, academic interactivity, and "sharing, creation, and participation" (Downes, 2006: 1) has been termed learning 2.0 or e-learning 2.0 (Downes, 2006; Ravenscroft, 2011). Web 2.0 technologies are at the center of a transitional pressure on universities that arises from the ways in which they change how we interact with information and thus the characterization and value of experts and expertise. Specifically, the emergence of these Internet-based technologies has made information—its dissemination and its creation—broadly available and no longer mainly the preserve of universities. This has required a corresponding shift for university faculty as they attempt to reconceptualize their role and expertise in the learning endeavor, and as they come to understand and exploit the learning potential of these digital technologies.

Another source of pressure arises from the current generation of students. Much has been written about the millennial generation and their presumed comfort with and preference for digital technologies (Prensky, 2001). This literature implies that for universities to survive, they need to move their technological profile to match the expectations of a "new" kind of student (Amirault & Visser, 2009). While there is little empirical evidence to support a homogeneous group of "digital natives" with well-defined characteristics (Bennet, Maton & Kervin, 2008), Web 2.0 technology does affect the amount and kind of information readily available to all students and thus, perhaps, their perceptions of the relevance of the teaching and learning processes in which they are expected to engage. The question to be asked, then, is not whether the current wave of Web 2.0 digital technologies must be integrated into higher education based on new students' demand for these technologies. Instead, we must look at how the affordances of this group of technologies is already affecting relationships in teaching, learning, information, and knowledge in the university and the ways in which they can increase the educational potential for learning within higher education. In other words, as educators we need to move beyond simplistic stereotypes of current students and focus on the more complex challenges of developing appropriate educational uses of these technologies (Bullen, Morgan, & Qayyum, 2011).