

Chapter 10

E–Citizenship Skills Online: A Case Study of Faculty Use of Web 2.0 Tools to Increase Active Participation and Learning

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ABSTRACT

With Web 2.0 technologies becoming increasingly integrated into all facets of higher education and society, it is vital to use the digital communicative tools and digital media so that students develop appropriate digital literacy and human-computer interaction (HCI) skills to enable them to become participatory citizens in our future society. In this case study, Web 2.0 tools and scenarios for learning are used in learning tasks to connect learners, share ideas, communicate, and co-create content within a university learning environment. The context for the study is social informatics – a composite class comprising 25-30 postgraduate and 3rd year undergraduate students within the Faculty of Information Sciences and Engineering. The study of social informatics examines the impact of technology upon social processes and learning. In order for students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, they engaged in range of tasks that enabled them to engage in collaborative dialogue and knowledge creation. In this case study, a Moodle mashup (the integration of information from different sources into one Website) is used to amalgamate information from the class and external sources such as blogs, wikis, and Twitter. The integration of HCI and Web 2.0 technologies into the learning process is examined, highlighting how social media tools can improve student engagement, collaboration, and digital literacy and e-citizenship skills.

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INTRODUCTION

The rising popularity of social media tools (for example Weblogs, wikis, Twitter) is the result of the qualities that characterise Web 2.0 software. Such digital tools are easy-to-operate, user-generated, personalisable and allow for content creation and modification. In addition, they can be ‘meeting places’ for socialisation, sharing and collaboration. It does not come as a surprise then that using Web 2.0 tools to facilitate the learning process is encouraged in the educational literature (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008). In this networked age, the transmissive model of teaching is being replaced with constructivist, blended eLearning approaches, while the need to make the curriculum more relevant and engaging is imperative (Tapscott, 2009). A number of researchers refer to the changing landscape as ‘pedagogy 2.0’ and ‘learning 2.0’ (McLoughlin & Lee, 2009; Downes, 2006) and signal greater use of the affordances of social media to enable connectivity, communication, participation, and the development of dynamic communities of learning.

For many years, mechanical factory models of teaching and learning have been at war with participatory and interactive education. Currently, the affordances of Web 2.0 – sharing, collaboration, customization, personalisation have given rise to a number of alternative paradigms of learning e.g. personal learning environments (Atwell, 2007) and heutagogy, both of which are focused on development of self-regulatory skills among students (Conole & Oliver, 2007). In many fields, “the life of knowledge is now measured in months and years” (Siemens, 2005, para. 2). Thus, pedagogical methods used for years and considered instructionally sound have been brought into question and are becoming outdated as students adapt their learning to the networked world. Although more formal forms of instruction eLearning will persist, it is becoming increasingly important to integrate informal teaching strategies and blended learning approaches. The

recent emergence of pedagogies that are based on self-determination and networked learning such as heutagogy (Phelps, Hase, & Ellis, 2005) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) help us understand learning as making connections with ideas, facts, people and global communities.

Goals of Education in the Networked World

For decades, the chief aim of education has been the development of democratically oriented global citizens. Today’s learners need to be equipped with skills to survive in future digital participatory global world (Council of Europe, 2010; Dewey, 1938).

Desirable features of a democratically oriented citizen are:

- Knows how to interact with others and share views;
- Has the capacity to develop lifelong learning skills and attitudes;
- Is open to new ideas and alternative perspectives;
- Listens to others and is able to incorporate their views within their own understandings;
- Wants to share knowledge; and
- Does not strive to control others.

To prepare students as global citizens, it is essential for teachers to adopt learning designs that foster inquiry, meta-learning and learning-to-learn skills. Use of information and communications technologies is also essential in supporting networked, dialogic learning, and the addition of, emerging digital tools (Twitter, blogs, wikis, Flickr) also enable rapid communication, collaboration and engagement with government, commerce and society (Richards 2010). Social identity processes and the means, by which people formulate their outlook and relationship with the world, have changed. The skills and disposi-

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