Chapter 16
E-Learning 2.0:
A Case Study Exploring the Integration of Social Media into Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study involving the design, development, and teaching of two online courses based on e-learning 2.0 concepts and use of social web tools and technologies. Guided by the connectivism theory of learning, the courses were designed to integrate e-learning through social media. Blogs, podcasts, social networking, social bookmarking, and Wikis were utilized as fundamental course components. Participants included students in two graduate-level online courses in instructional technology. Details of the design and construction of each course are examined, as well as impacts on students' learning experiences. Students' perceptions of social media as a tool to facilitate classroom community are discussed, as well as their feelings of connectedness and learning, and their opinions regarding teacher-student and student-student classroom interactions. Results show that students' experiences were very positive and that an e-learning 2.0 approach in online courses can enhance learner-to-instructor and learner-to-learner interaction, and increase students' perception of classroom community.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advancements, particularly in regards to the internet content, functionality, and accessibility, have tremendously impacted all levels in the education industry, especially higher education. The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has enhanced distance learning, blended learning, and e-learning by altering the focus and methods of learning and teaching. Web 2.0 tools and services such as blogs, podcasts, wikis, social networks, and social bookmarking have shaped the Web into an application platform that is user-friendly, rich, and interactive. Additionally, the development of the Social Web (Web

2.0) has expanded the internet into a place where users can find connections, build communities, create ideas, exchange thoughts, and develop new knowledge.

Since the strengths of Web 2.0 technologies lie in building networks and sharing knowledge (Yaoyuneyong, Thornton, & Lieu, 2013; Yuen, Yaoyuneyong, & Yuen, 2011), educators have utilized these assets to facilitate a transformation of learning; students are empowered to take responsibility and control of their learning, construct their own knowledge, and gain self-confidence (Alexander, 2006; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Furthermore, the ubiquity of social media has increased the sense of membership in a learning community among distance learning and e-learning students by providing them with informal learning networks and virtual peer support (Martindale & Dowdy, 2010).

However, to ensure successful outcomes in a given learning environment, more is required than simply utilizing new technologies and adopting social media applications. Integrating technology into education is not an easy task (Granger, Morbey, Lotherington, Owston, & Wideman, 2002). Beyond the teacher's familiarity and comfort with the technologies to be adapted, and with methods of technology integration, to successfully add technologies into an educational settings requires:

1. A framework of teaching and learning theories and pedagogical practices (Granger *et al.,* 2002),
2. A thoughtful plan of curricular requirements, and
3. An understanding of students' various needs (Rahimi, van den Berg, & Veen, 2014).

To illustrate these concepts in practice, this paper presents a case study involving the design, development, and teaching of two online courses. The courses were framed by an e-learning 2.0 perspective in order to integrate e-learning through social media, guided by the connectivism theory of learning. Details of the design and construction of each course are examined, as well as impacts on students' learning experiences. Students' perceptions of social media as a tool to facilitate classroom community are discussed, as well as their feelings of connectedness and learning, and their opinions regarding teacher-student and student-student classroom interactions.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

The Social Web and E-Learning 2.0

According to Sangrà, Vlachopoulos, and Cabrera's (2012) study, definitions of e-learning can be categorized into four groups:

1. Educational-paradigm-oriented,
2. Technology-driven,
3. Delivery-system-oriented, and
4. Communication-oriented.

E-learning can be considered the next step in the development of distance learning, a field which has consistently taken advantage of emergent tools and technologies to re-structure education (Sangrà

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