Practice From Implementing Web 2.0 Tools in Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each new technology, tool, or resource that is introduced in higher education practice with the promise of enhancing the students' learning experience and/or increasing their academic performance is subjected to meticulous scrutiny. In the early days of Web 2.0's implementation in the context of higher education, many educators expressed their concerns and were reluctant to embrace it. As it slowly proved its pedagogical value and an increasingly higher number of teachers began to incorporate it in their teaching practice and courses, the body of evidence speaking to its advantages increased and offered other educators the confidence and proof they required to do the same. This chapter examines Web 2.0 in the context of higher education by debating both its benefits and shortcomings and presenting cases of actual implementation. The cases in question pertain to the use of YouTube, Wikis, and Twitter as valuable resources in the development of different types of skills and to support the acquisition of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0 represents one of the main social and technological trends in education (Miranda et al., 2013). Despite accusations of containing many pedagogical frailties, Web 2.0 continues to be considered by many as a valuable teaching/learning resource, leaving the education sector to face the difficult balance between innovation and the integrity of curricula. Web 2.0, is now at the centre of this conundrum. Posing the challenge of being a potential distraction and of promoting amateurism, Web 2.0 represents, nonetheless, the opportunity to enhance students' engagement with content and to increase interaction and collaboration that transposes the walls of auditoriums and the limits of online classrooms' systems. With the minimum requirement of internet access, Web 2.0 holds the potential of extending this cooperation and interaction to other institutions and students in any part of the world. Applying Web 2.0 technologies to education is not exclusively restricted to the employment of new technology. In fact, the most important change it introduces is not technology-related. The real revolution of this alliance concerns a shift in the way learning is perceived and approached. Web 2.0 endows the internet with fluidity and a continuous knowledge exchange. People started dynamically initiating and having dialogues that go beyond the use of words or text, they now have the ability to communicate with video, images and audio (Bennett et al., 2012).

While the weighing of all pros and cons is central, it appears that this discussion is becoming obsolete. The 2009 edition of Gartner Hype Cycle (MacManus, 2009) placed Web 2.0 in the slope of enlightenment, meaning that it was earning recognition and it was less of a hype. Web 2.0's implementation in higher education followed that same evolution and because of that, now enthusiasm alone will not suffice. It becomes imperative to support the theoretical foundations of the deployment of Web 2.0 in higher education with real cases where educators have actually proven their effective application. Firstly, this chapter provides a synopsis of the benefits and challenges that Web 2.0 present as didactic instruments and it then places its emphasis on practical applications. In order to illustrate the deployment of Web 2.0, the cases used in this chapter aim to build upon much needed jurisprudence in the field. They aim to demonstrate real experiments with Web 2.0 in higher education, to provide formal evidence of implementation, to consolidate and substantiate the period of initial enthusiasm, and to make a contribution towards the improvement of the existing panoply of guidelines and best practices. This chapter is an extended version of the work presented in Isaias et al., (2014).

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