Chapter 2.2
Pedagogical Responses to Social Software in Universities

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ABSTRACT

Learning management systems (LMS's) that cater for geographically dispersed learners have been widely available for a number of years, but many higher education institutions are discovering that new models of teaching and learning are required to meet the needs of a generation of learners who seek greater autonomy, connectivity, and socio-experiential learning. The advent of Web 2.0, with its expanded potential for generativity and connectivity, propels pedagogical change and opens up the debate on how people conceptualize the dynamics of student learning. This chapter explores how such disruptive forces, fuelled by the affordances of social software tools, are challenging and redefining scholarship and pedagogy, and the accompanying need for learners to develop advanced digital literacy skills in preparation for work and life in the networked society. In response to these challenges, the authors propose a pedagogical framework, Pedagogy 2.0, which addresses the themes of participation in networked communities of learning, personalization of the learning experience, and learner productivity in the form of knowledge building and creativity.

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INTRODUCTION

In contrast to earlier e-learning efforts that simply replicated traditional models of learning and teaching in online environments, social software, together with other components of the Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) movement, offer rich opportunities to move away from the highly centralized industrial model of learning of the past decade, towards achieving individual empowerment of learners through designs that focus on collaborative, networked communi-

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cation and interaction (cf. Rogers, Liddle, Chan, Doxey, & Isom, 2007; Sims, 2006). Hilton (2006) discusses how a number of "disruptive forces" are shaping the future of higher education. These include: the unbundling of content; the shift from "provider push" to "demand pull;" the arrival of ubiquitous access to information and services; and the rise of the "pure property" view of ideas that is incongruent with the Web 2.0 philosophy and spirit of collaboration and sharing.

For the purposes of the current discussion, the focus is on social software that enables participation, collaboration, personalization, creativity, and generativity, as these are arguably the key elements of what it means to be educated in a networked age (Bryant, 2006). Social software tools are a defining characteristic of Web 2.0, and many are already being widely used to support learning. For example, one of the most basic social software tools, the Weblog (blog), has been a resounding success in many colleges and universities, used to facilitate reflective writing and the building of e-Portfolios (Ganley, 2004; Richardson, 2006a). With the rich and varied functionality of social computing in mind, together with its "always on" culture and participatory attributes, it is useful to consider the potential value adding of these new and emerging tools and technologies for millennial learners.

HOW SOCIAL SOFTWARE TOOLS IMPACT ON LEARNING AND WAYS OF KNOWING

The affordances of Web 2.0 are now making learner-centered education a reality, with collaborative writing tools (wikis, Google Docs & Spreadsheets), media sharing applications (Flickr, YouTube, TeacherTube), and social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, Ning) capable of supporting multiple communities of learning. These tools enable and encourage informal conversation, dialogue, collaborative content generation, and the sharing of information, giving learners access to a wide raft of ideas and representations of knowledge.

The attributes and affordances of the new software tools and services also make possible an expanded repertoire of online behavior, distributed collaboration, and social interaction. Mejias (2005, p. 1) observed that "… social software can positively impact pedagogy by inculcating a desire to reconnect to the world as whole, not just the social part that exists online," referring to the isolating and decontextualized experience of much text-based traditional education. Many social software applications straddle the virtual and real social worlds, as they entail both online and offline interactions and visual/verbal connectivity. These new affordances are being harnessed for knowledge sharing, development of ideas, and creative production, while allowing for personal sense making and reflection.

There are also associated changes in what and how people learn, and the ways in which they access information. Knowledge is no longer controlled and stable, but open to interpretation, modification, and re-creation by anyone, anywhere. The traditional macro-structures of the disciplines are being replaced by dynamic microstructures created by networked individuals working collaboratively. These communication networks are able to link people and summon the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki, 2004), so that the collective intelligence of groups can be harnessed to generate ideas that are fresher, richer, and more sophisticated than the contributions of individual users. Lindner (2006) quotes Parkin (2005), who observes: "it's not content or even context, but process that gets us going" (p. 31), indicating that participating, doing, and experiencing rather than knowing what or where, and creating knowledge rather than consuming it, is the new mindset and *modus operandi* of learners, online communities, and the knowledge economy at large. All in all, we have an environment in which digital technology and the flow of information are paramount,

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