Chapter 1.13

Dispatches from the Graduate Classroom:
Bringing Theory and Practice to E–Learning

F.R. "Fritz" Nordengren
Des Moines University, USA

Ann M. York
Des Moines University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter is a practical overview of both the theoretical, evidence-based research in pedagogy and the anecdotal, experience-based practices of faculty who work daily in online and blended learning communities. This approach combines best practices with theoretical aspects of delivering and facilitating education with diverse adult learners. Issues and trends in E-learning are presented with specific examples for implementation and suggestions for future research. Using an evidence-based approach, the authors will explore and summarize recent research with a concurrent analysis of the anecdotal popular literature. The authors explore the concept of information literacy and other skills necessary to succeed in the Web 2.0 world. Their discussion takes us away from the traditional "sage on stage" versus "guide on side" dichotomy towards both a new understanding of Web 2.0's role in education as well as a preface to what may become Web 3.0 and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is intended to lay a foundation for E-learning and Web 2.0 for readers from a wide range of experiences. It will provide both a theoretical overview of evidence-based research in pedagogy, and experience-based practices of faculty who work in online and blended learning communities. It is important to blend both theory and practice to fully appreciate the power, influence, and potential of Web 2.0. Experienced educators may gain a fresh appreciation of how familiar theories may apply in an E-learning environment. New educators may gain insight and ideas on how to implement E-learning in an effective way.

Whether experienced or novice, one thing is certain: we are all pioneers in on the digital path of E-learning. As pioneers on this trail, we are beginning to leave a traditional classroom setting where lectures dominate, and move toward an educational environment where technology-enhanced instruction is becoming the norm. In this new environment, learning may take place completely online in a synchronous or asynchronous format. Or, it may take place in a combination of face-to-face and

online learning, commonly known as blended learning. Even in courses where lecture is still the primary mode of delivery, technology is playing an increasing prominent role. When faced with the broad landscape of E-learning technology, many educators may feel unprepared, and perhaps even a bit lost.

The term "pioneer" often conjures up images of American pioneers pushing across the Great Plains to reach the promise of a new life in the West. Like them, today's E-learning pioneers are balancing the known with the unknown; balancing the tried and proven with the tried but not yet proven. And, like a pioneer exploring new territory, today's E-learning pioneers are seeking landmarks or milestones by which to gauge progress. In this chapter, there are several landmarks to guide the way:

• Landmark One: How Does Educational Theory Apply to E-learning?
• Landmark Two: Technology: Web 2.0 and Beyond?
• Landmark Three: Practical Implementation: Issues, Controversies, Strategies and Tactics

While these landmarks cover a lot of territory, here is a caveat: there is simply no way to capture the full panaoramic view. In fact, at the current rate of change, by the time this book is published, new tools will have emerged and early adopters may be charting Web 3.0. Educators will constantly need to be adding new landmarks and charting experiences as discoveries are made.

To assist in navigation, for the purpose of this chapter, the phrase E-learning means education delivered entirely online. The phrase blended learning means online tools mixed with classroom or other face-to-face learning experiences. Web 2.0 refers to the increased online collaboration and interaction made possible by tools such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites. With this in mind, the chapter objectives are to:

1. Understand key theoretical concepts for blended and E-learning applied to adult learners.
2. Analyze current research and anecdotal evidence on blended and E-learning strategies.
3. Evaluate and create best practices in blended and E-learning using Web 2.0 tools.

The focus of this chapter is on higher education, although much of the material also applies to K-12. The emphasis is on adult learners as they are increasingly turning to online education for earning degrees, updating knowledge, and the sheer pleasure of life-long learning. This population of adult learners is highly diverse, spanning not only generations, but continents and cultures. This diversity brings tremendous richness to the learning experience, and significant challenges to the educator. Combine this student diversity with new models of delivery, the ever-increasing choices of technology, expectations for 24/7 access, and the pressure to demonstrate learning outcomes, and the result is a changing landscape that can easily overwhelm educators and administrators. While it is daunting to keep up with the pace of change, immobility is not an option. To help clear the path forward, this chapter is designed to stimulate careful reflection of not only the "how" but the "why" of using Web 2.0 tools. Ultimately, the goal is to facilitate bringing Web 2.0 to Learning 2.0 and beyond.

BACKGROUND

Landmark One: How Does Educational Theory Apply to E-learning?

Analyzing Web 2.0 tools within a theoretical context can assist educators to understand the efficacy of their use and to guide future research. Many of these Web 2.0 digital tools can be viewed as a

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