

Chapter 13

The Transfer Value of Successful Learning Practices Using Web 2.0

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ABSTRACT

Listening to students' voices might result in the design of more effective learning practices, assuming that learning and teaching can be attuned more adequately in those practices. Therefore, research was carried out to investigate the characteristics of successful innovative learning practices using Web 2.0 technologies to establish to what extent they might serve as a model for learning practices in more or less similar contexts. Five learning practices were investigated through a range of processes including document analysis and by interviewing students. Additionally, a cross case analysis was carried out to track down success factors of teaching and learning with Web 2.0 technologies, and to find out to what extent these practices are contextual. The analysis showed the importance of co-production and co-creation in learning practices supported by the use of Web 2.0 technologies, and the crucial role of students' motivation and teacher's willingness to experiment with new learning practices.

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INTRODUCTION

In the academic year 2008-2009 research was undertaken in Australia and the Netherlands into the experiences, expectations and ideas of students and young, novice teachers regarding the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in learning processes: referred to as “Students’ Voices” research¹. Building on the results of this research and the insights gained from it, a second round of “Students’ Voices” research was started in January 2010, in the Netherlands and Australia, but also in other interested countries. All “Students’ Voices” research is based on the assumption that it is important to listen to the learner when designing learning practices, as this increases the chance that the learning processes are perceived as meaningful (Bottema, Fransen, Swager, Van Goozen, & Wijngaards, 2010).

It is becoming increasingly clear that listening to the experiences and ideas of students provides insights into the ways learning practices can best be designed, and the ways learning processes can best be supported with the use of ICT. The input of young people provides valuable insights that may lead to improvements in education. A greater involvement of the learner in the design of learning practices strengthens the students’ motivation, and results in the learner feeling co-responsible for the learning processes (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Spires, Lee, & Turner, 2008). Their involvement can be described as a form of co-ownership, and this ownership can be enhanced by the strategic use of ICT (Sandford, 2006; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994; Shaffer, 2006). With the arrival of Web 2.0 technologies, users become producers as well as consumers, and this is increasing with the technologies’ broadening influence and input (Downes, 2006; Fuchs, 2009; Siemens & Tittenberger, 2009). So, the use of Web 2.0 technologies in particular offers possibilities for offering learners an important role in determining both content and direction in their own learning.

But the use of Web 2.0 by itself does not guarantee that learners become co-owners of their learning processes. Other factors and circumstances in a given learning context also play a part in this. It is, therefore, important to investigate the success factors in innovative learning practices with shared ownership and shared direction using Web 2.0 technologies. As such, the study reported in this chapter set out to discover to what extent these success factors are context specific, or whether it would be possible to develop similar learning practices in more or less similar learning contexts. The focus was on identifying innovative learning practices with Web 2.0 technologies in education, where the decision-making in the learning was shared between students and the educational institute, regarding learning content and/or direction of the learning processes. The goal of the study was to draw on the views of students to describe a number of inspiring examples of innovative learning practices, in order to determine by means of a cross case analysis, what factors contribute to the success of these learning practices, and what is the transfer value of those factors. In doing this research, it was important to determine in what sense there was co-ownership in a learning practice, how co-ownership was achieved, and to what extent the successes were context specific or transferrable to other learning contexts.

The central question of this study was formulated as follows:

What are the characteristics of successful learning practices using Web 2.0 technologies that allow them to serve as models for redesigning similar learning practices in more or less similar contexts?

From descriptions of successful practices by students, it was proposed that more insights should arise into which characteristics of a given learning practice contributes to its success. It was determined that such a description would involve aspects as characteristics of the contexts, content of the learning practice, pedagogical strategy, choices

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