

Chapter 1.12

“You Can Lead the Horse to Water, but ... ”: Aligning Learning and Teaching in a Web 2.0 Context and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the potential benefits of incorporating Web 2.0 technologies in a contemporary higher education context, and identifies possible ways of doing this, as well as expected challenges. It uses the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), primarily a distance education provider, as the context for many of its case study examples. In particular, it addresses the important role of the allowances of particular learning management systems (LMSs) in pedagogical applications of Web 2.0 technologies. Overall, this chapter argues that the goals and ideals of Web 2.0/Pedagogy 2.0 can be achieved, or at least stimulated, within an institutional LMS environment, as long as the LMS environment is in alignment with such goals and ideals. It uses the implementation of Moodle at USQ as a case study to reinforce this argument and explore which factors potentially influence a shift in thinking about learning and teaching in a Web 2.0 context.

INTRODUCTION

Collectively, Web 2.0 technologies constitute a major conceptual shift in the way the Web is used. Two central concepts within this shift are collective intelligence and user participation, as

these have seriously blurred the boundaries between knowledge management and dissemination. From a learning and teaching perspective, Web 2.0 technologies offer a variety of opportunities in terms of what such technologies *could* be used for, and in many cases already *are*, by a new generation of students entering universities. The

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challenge from a higher education perspective is to align what students are already doing with technologies with how they are being taught, without blurring the boundaries between “private” and “educational” spaces to the point where students become disengaged. How students already use Web 2.0 technologies and social software tools, particularly with regards to social networking and user participation, are to an important extent driven by the affordances of the technologies themselves. However, such affordances do not necessarily predict the type of teaching practices that could be adopted by universities to exploit their potential. Aligning learning and teaching in ways that suit a Web 2.0 context implies a major shift in thinking about knowledge creation and dissemination, and thus about pedagogy. It requires a conceptual shift from thinking about the Web as a method of communication, to thinking about it as a method of education, and thus of knowledge creation and dissemination. Almost a decade ago, Dreyfus (2001) pointed out that much of the transformation driven by the Internet in general constitutes a transformation in the “*method of communication*” (p. 30, emphasis added). This in turn led him to question, “What proposed *method of education* generates all this excitement?” (p. 30, emphasis added). Although Web 2.0 technologies have largely developed after Dreyfus posed this question, it is still an urgent question in the current context, and one that directly relates to the types of learning environments we use in contemporary university contexts. While many current learning management systems (LMSs) could be seen as largely text-based (Wuensch, Shahnaz, Ozan, Kishore, & Tabrizi, 2008), and too inflexible to allow for Pedagogy 2.0 (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008; see also Chapter 3 in this book), more recently, LMSs have been developed that are potentially far better equipped to address changing learning needs in a Web 2.0 context. This ability has been further enhanced by the extended functionality that some LMSs provide to extend their core

environments with additional, and in some cases, third-party, applications.

Moodle is an example of an LMS that appears to be well suited to address learning and teaching needs in a Web 2.0 context, and affords the potential to think about the Web as a method of education, as it is essentially based on an open source philosophy of co-construction of knowledge. However, feedback to date suggests that many university teachers merely use it as a traditional method of communication, or as a way to disseminate existing content. In this chapter, it is argued that the goals and ideals of Web 2.0/ Pedagogy 2.0 can be achieved, or at least stimulated, within an institutional LMS environment, as long as the LMS environment is in alignment with similar goals and ideals. However, this requires universities to resist the temptation to rigidly close the “wall around the garden,” which is a long-established practice to control and manage all aspects of the student experience, and is difficult to change. This chapter uses the implementation of Moodle at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) as a case study to reinforce this argument and explore which factors potentially influence a shift in thinking about learning and teaching in a Web 2.0 context. The chapter addresses issues of institutional change, and asks, “What would encourage institutions of higher education to adopt Web 2.0 tools and pedagogies?”—or, in other words, “What would make the horse drink?”

WEB 2.0, GENERATION V, AND E-LEARNING

Collectively, Web 2.0 technologies constitute a major shift in the way the Web is used (Boyd, 2008). More importantly, from an educational perspective, Web 2.0 technologies offer major opportunities for the way in which they *could* be used. This is not to say that the technology necessarily drives these changes in a technologically determinist sense, but rather that educators could

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