

# Chapter 1

## Leading Pedagogical Change with Innovative Web Tools and Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

*Today, in a globalised, digital world, leadership challenges in the adoption and integration of emerging social software tools to support learning abound. Today's students, who have grown up in technology saturated environments, have never known a world without the internet, mobile phones, video on demand and personal computers. Leaders and educators must know their students, and cater for their diverse needs. Educational institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must learn how to adopt social software tools and apply sound pedagogical strategies to add value to existing practices and enhance the learning process. ICT supplements and enhances learning and student engagement through access to global learning communities and rich resources, requiring educators to be conversant with the technology, able to lead by example and capable of creating authentic contexts and environments for learning. Educators in today's media rich society must be ready to grapple with the significant pedagogic, cultural and social changes associated with technological innovation.*

### INTRODUCTION

The development and uptake of digital tools and social software is bringing about massive societal and economic change. Yet, technology's impact on education, teaching, and learning has been

rather limited. While expectations have run high about web-based instruction, personal computers, computer-based instruction, social media and the raft of "Web 2.0" tools, the impact on teaching and learning is not well documented. While there are cases of innovation and transformation of pedagogies, there remain many exemplars of outmoded, traditional curricula and didactic instruction that

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merely replicate face-to-face teaching rather than innovations that make best use of interactive tools and technologies (Schrum & Leven, 2009).

The paper will focus on leadership challenges that educators need to be fully aware of in the adoption of emerging social software tools, and the need for educators to embrace innovative pedagogies in order to capitalise on Web 2.0 applications to support teaching and assessment in meaningful and authentic ways. The adoption of social software tools need to be integrated into sound pedagogical strategies in order to add value to existing practices and to enhance the learning process. The article supports the notion that ICT supplements and enhances learning and student engagement through access to global learning communities and rich resources, thereby creating opportunities for dialogue with others, for broadening understanding and participation leading to improved social and learning outcomes. The realization of these benefits can only come through institutional leadership that is focused on adoption of appropriate pedagogies, learner centred curricula and the design of effective learning environments and learning activities.

## **CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: STUDENTS AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN TRANSITION**

Worldwide, higher education institutions today are confronted by considerable change driven by a myriad of external factors. The current learning landscape is characterized by constant connectivity, networked spaces, web-based tools and virtual learning environments. Mobile devices and social media abound, and the dramatic shift in learner characteristics and demands is evidenced by the emergence of “millennial students” who are digitally literate, always on, communicative, and experimental and community oriented (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). The terms “learner voice” and “learner experience” are central to today’s

technology supported learning environments, and a number of studies have emphasized how ICT tools can facilitate learner engagement and participation (Conole, 2008). Today’s students demand interactivity and thus there is a pressing need to meet their needs and to rethink approaches to teaching and learning in order to replace outmoded didactic pedagogies, which place emphasis on the delivery of content from a textbook or website rather than being learner-centric and to allowing for self-paced flexible learning. Clearly, many popular learning management systems (LMS’s) and virtual learning environments (VLE’s) used by educational institutions to support e-learning perceive the student as “information consumer” thereby reinforcing instructor and content-centered approaches to teaching, learning, and cognition. Many commonly used learning management systems simply feed information or content to students and do not include social engagement, peer learning or creative inquiry by students. In the Web 2.0 era, such approaches no longer meet student needs. Tim Berners-Lee (2000, p. 216), the inventor of the World Wide Web, foreshadowed a more open, social raft of tools that are not simply about learners downloading and consuming information when he stated, “I have always imagined the information space as something to which everyone has immediate and intuitive access, and not just to browse, but to create” (p. 169). These words foreshadowed the Web 2.0 era, with its raft of social tools (Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace) which allow users expanded capacities for creative, collaborative and communicative responses, often leading to idea generation and knowledge creation. The rise of learner generated content is captured by Wheeler, Yeoman and Wheeler (2008) who state “*The social network provides opportunities for the individual learner to create sound and viable knowledge syntheses from fractured and inchoate information*” (p. 989). For digital age learners, Web 2.0 tools are part of the learning landscape, and are therefore worthy of consideration by educators and instructional designers.

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