Cultivating the Web 2.0 jungle

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Abstract

The quality of a learning process is not something that is delivered to a learner by an online provider but rather constitutes a process of co-production between the learner and the learning-environment. Embedding the technologies into the fabric of an institution enables sustainable advances in educational practice for the benefit of our learners. To some extent Web 2.0 tools are available to cater to the needs of diverse population of students. As discussed in the paper by Dron and Bhattacharya use of these tools give rise to number of other issues and problems. This paper considers ways of overcoming some of these problems, partly through reflective processes for teacher and learner, partly through approaches to capturing higher level design goals and partly through technological fixes.

1. Introduction

In this paper we have provided examples and cases demonstrating the creative use of the restricted LMSs in association with other available tools. We are concerned about the wilderness of the Web 2.0 tools and tried to provide some techniques and strategies to cultivate the wilderness, of the personal learning environment (PLE). Studying the tensions among different components and understanding how to resolve them allows researchers to develop new forms of practice in collaboration with their subjects (students) and can be the driving force behind innovation [1].

2. Staying in the walled garden

The first task for the teacher will be to get out of his/her comfort zone without completely depending on the developer or technical staff. Teachers need to be the designer of the learning environment. They need to explore the tools available in and outside of the LMSs and use them creatively to suit their purposes. It is possible to integrate other available technologies outside of the LMS with the LMS environment to complement, for example, using concept mapping tools (Inspiration, Mind Manager, Smartdraw, etc) to organise thoughts after a brainstorming session using the whiteboard in LMS.

3. Integrating the PLE with the LMS

Although creating personal learning environment using web 2.0 tools by integrating a number of technologies could provide more flexibility to both teachers and learner this may lead to new problems. One possible solution could be to use web 2.0 tools by integrating them with LMS where it is possible, for example to receive RSS alerts via the LMS for any update in the PLE. The integrated approach will accommodate both digital learners as well as not so digital learners.

4. Lightening the darkness of PLE

Solution to technical problems: We can expect that all of us will have broadband connection at home within next couple of year’s time as we have telephones now. Until the systems are open and integratable we will have to keep copying and pasting and change format from one platform to another. We may even recommend the lowest common denominators, although this is not as useful for encouraging diversity.

Compatible cultures: We need to create learning environments which incorporate diverse needs of students. Students as customers should be paid maximum attention to sustain the existence of the educational organizations. As structure influences behaviour, therefore, we need to consider students needs, values, etc. in developing any learning environment. [2] as well as sustaining dialogue whenever possible.

Overcoming technophobia: It is important to provide support and help with hands-on opportunities. Establish a buddy system where more technically knowledgeable students and teachers could help less technically expert ones. The buddy system has been used successfully at Massey University. Other strategies involve introducing different technologies slowly where and when required. Asking not so technically confident students to communicate with the
teacher in private helps to deal with fears of exposing limited skills.

**Ways of monitoring:** Teachers were traditionally not used to monitoring their students outside the physical classrooms. With the implementation of LMS we started to monitor our students’ progress more closely. It has become unavoidable to monitor students’ online presence to ensure authentication of the work done during the course. This could be done through the process of self evaluation, peer review and developing learning electronic portfolios by the students. This gives an opportunity to the students to be responsible for their own learning, improves quality of work and also establishes a relationship of trust among students and teachers.

**Keeping in control:** We have too many choices to make us visible on the web and interact with people in many ways. Some cease to exist over time, some could prove to be harmful at times. Therefore it is vital that we should carefully decide the content what we want to make accessible and by whom. Electronic portfolios allowing different views and allowing creators to choose the audience is an appropriate solution to the issue. Also, reflections on the process and copying and pasting from different e-tools can make the process more manageable, as can the use of integrating technologies such as RSS.

**Capturing the process:** Until we get lifelong PLE we have to invent from whatever we have. It is possible for students to create individual and collaborative activity-reflection e-portfolios using already available open source tools where the students can document the process. We have found using a double loop method of reflection [3] that students’ motivation to progress in later life depends a lot on what they have done during their formal education. If the process is captured somehow and students have access to it after when they leave the institution then they can build upon it and find future directions.

**Assessment for learning:** Assessment should be integrated within the process of learning. With the information overload we can find enormous amount of information on any topic and it is not possible to cover all in a semester or two. Therefore, it is necessary to design assessment tasks which will allow students to work cooperatively, collectively, collaboratively and support each other through peer review and feedback called distributed cognition [4]. Students achieve the learning outcomes in a distributed environment which enriches the quality of learning outcomes as well as improves the quality of interactions.

**Relationship of trust:** In addition to the course work students and teachers need to know more about each other. This could be done by developing personal web sites or get introduced to each other in some other ways, such as profiles in social networking systems or e-portfolios. Providing emotional support and establishing rapport with the students are far more important than any technological support.

### 5. Conclusion

With the rapid changes in the technologies and the knowledge domain it is almost inevitable that we will need to change the goals and approaches to learning and teaching as we progress through courses in order to improve quality gauging student’s progress, interests, direction, etc. The teacher plays a very different role in the jungle of Web2.0, a co-constructive knowledge rather than a guide on the side.

To be successful, it is essential to engage in a continuing process of discussion, in which all learn from each other. The teacher is not so much a designer of the environment but a fellow navigator, whose knowledge and experience of the process and potential problems may help to solve dilemmas and reduce the struggles of learners. At the same time, the learners may guide the teachers through the new technologies and emerging knowledge that they co-discover.

### 6. References


