The explosion of the Web in the mid-nineteen nineties promised a revolution in all human activities. In a talk on the use of the Web in education that I gave at that time, I said, “The challenge is to develop effective ways of teaching with the new medium, not to transfer ineffective methods from the old medium.”

Like all revolutions, the initial radical fervour was succeeded by a far more conservative regime. The products of that first revolution are with us today; companies, charities, governments, and so forth are all now very adept at pushing information at us via the Web. Likewise within schools and colleges, the first generation of learning management systems still predominate, being used by institutions to push corporate information and tutors to push knowledge at the students. An example of how the ineffective methods from the old medium have found expression in the new.

From the start of the Web revolution, there were places where the visitors were encouraged to talk back to the Webmasters and, even rarer, places where they were encouraged to talk to each other. These capabilities found a more mature application in social networking environments such as blogs, wikis, facebooks, folksonomies, twitters, and online virtual environments.

These so-called Web 2 capabilities provide environments where a second revolution in social and educational practice can take place. But ineffective methods from the old medium can still be transferred into it; one example being a number of colleges who have bought islands in second life, only to construct replicas of their physical campus upon it. Their replicas are complete with lecture halls where the student avatars are expected to assemble in ranks to be lectured at by the avatar of the tutor.

The chapters in this book are at the leading edge of attempts to develop more effective use of Web 2 capabilities in education. What is implicit in all the studies, and explicit in some, is that education is an interactive social process. Knowledge and meaning are actively acquired by engagement and communication within a community of learners. This has always been the case, despite the perception of many that knowledge flows into empty heads as the professor pronounces from the stage. Web 2 capacities augment the channels through which social communication can occur.

But communication, even in the new media, has within itself the possibility of miscommunication. For example, the 21st century student who apologised for not replying to an e-mail by explaining to their not-very-old tutor that they ‘only use e-mail to talk to old people!’; communicating with his peers solely by facebook. The YouTube video ‘A Vision of Students Today’ illustrates the ways in which contemporary students network and communicate, in a format and medium which is alien to many tutors.
It is said that a young person who is not radical has no heart, but an old person who is not conservative has no wisdom. Working in internet time, it will not be long in real time before the revolutionary heart of these studies becomes the accepted pedagogic wisdom of our age.

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