Introduction

The book you hold in your hands was instigated by a need to better understand the changing world around us. The incredible communications revolution that has been triggered by Web 2.0 tools, pre-eminently the presence of social media, reaches into each corner of our existence. Since education is a staple to our reality as social, skilled, and communicative beings, it is impossible that social networking tools and the design of instruction do not meet at some point or other, and this book explores that moment of meeting.

There is an enormous amount of talk worldwide about innovation in teaching and learning. We need to understand that innovation often means a huge departure from rote teaching methodologies, even though we are often convinced that these tried and tested methodologies “work.”

Of course, innovation should never be change for its own sake. That tends to follow the hit and miss model that does a lot more harm than good. Innovation, when scientifically researched and applied, looks at motivation and the affective domain underlying the way to cognitive acquisition. Innovation can, and should, look at what tools are offered by society itself and not resist them. Resistance is unfortunately often the stance taken by those in formal schooling who fear change and the deviation from a course that might have worked well in its time but only because its clients’ mindscape fit the design. Once that mindscape has changed and there is no longer the perfect fit of past practice, then the design too must change to accommodate. Resistance might easily mean failure to educate, with its far-reaching ramifications for society.

However, this book does not propose apocalyptic scenarios – rather, it is a very positive book. Yes, it provides an understanding of what problems there might be when trying to apply what is essentially a “social” network to something it was not originally intended for, but it looks mostly at application by not forcing a square peg into a round hole but finding fits and exploring results that are in the main extremely encouraging. This is a book about innovation that taps into the everyday life of our young people and draws from them what can help them learn more, better, and through channels that are a lot more enjoyable than some of the ones in normal use.

I sincerely hope that the fifty authors of this collection of extremely interesting experiments with the use of social media in educational practice provide a useful handbook for your own use of this widespread phenomenon that has transformed social communication. The authors here come from thirteen countries, so you will also catch a glimpse of the impacts that different cultures and approaches to teaching have on this experimental usage.
Given the importance of the topic, I was not surprised that there was a great interest in submitting for the book when the call for chapters first went out, with many proposals received. The process of selection and amendment used was the same as that for peer-reviewed academic journals. That is, two-way, and sometimes three-way, blind peer evaluation. This was a way of ascertaining that the contents of this book have a sound, scientific validity.

I sincerely feel that this book is a useful addition to educational scientific research and to ideas on teaching in practice in an area that has become an extremely important part of our everyday life. I hope you find it helpful in your own teaching and research, and that it helps bring about even more innovation in our schools and colleges. Let us all admit that there is never enough of that.

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