Chapter IX
Web 2.0 Collaborative Learning Tool Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Social web asynchronous communication environments provide the space for content creation, idea sharing and knowledge construction within a participatory and collaborative framework that encourages online community establishment and evolution. However, community development is a long-term process and necessitates the adoption of appropriate theoretical principles to support a developmental scheme ensuring the community’s exploratory, knowledge-based and reflexively expanding character. This chapter discusses and analyses the techniques and tools used in an online course aiming to enable Greek teachers develop their pedagogical and digital skills in order to keep update, form new relationships and grow professionally. To this end, e-course design was based on formal learning principles underlying the virtual classroom activities during which a collaborative culture was built. Also, the course structure involved informal learning principles, which were integrated into social web activities
implemented on weblog and wiki artefacts created and used by participants as individual and collaborative learning tools. Through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the study it became evident that weblogs and wikis contributed to the growth and evolution of Greek educational networked communities and that a new online identity emerged.

INTRODUCTION

The term Web 2.0 has generated debate and actually the need for its very existence has been questioned by representatives in the fields of computer science and sociology and by non-experts as well. Nevertheless, the appeal of Web 2.0 technologies and applications worldwide is an undeniable fact. Indeed, relevant entries in search engines come with lists of millions of: weblogs; an increasing number of targeted wikispaces; awards for user-friendly, knowledge-based environments; diverse content finding its way to the e-audience through different types of media; networked communities of users sharing common interests, knowledge and experiences.

Web 2.0 is a signpost indicating a new state of mind of using information as in Web 1.0 but this development is not confined to a change in terminology. It has affected the way we connect to other people; the way we interact, we acquire information; the way we think and the way we learn. At the end of the day, it seems that the essence of the challenge lies in the principles underlying the educational change that follow the World Wide Web impact. Apparently, the Web 2.0 effect has a multidisciplinary nature, as the exploitation of second generation WWW services challenges existing theories and methods applied in pedagogy-related domains, such as human-computer interaction and knowledge management. Yet, as Baudrilliard (2002) puts it,

we are obliged to change, but changing is something other than becoming. They are different things. We are in a “changing” time, where it is the moral law of all individuals, but changing is not becoming. Baudrilliard, 2002 (online interview)

Attempting to interpret Baudrilliard’s words in educational terms, we should admit that in order to avoid the reproduction of traditional frameworks in the field, and thus fail to ‘become’, we need to reconsider the parameters upon which online education is structured. These relate to the qualities that Web 2.0 technologies bring forward and involve: knowledge distribution, networking/interconnectedness and ability for information access, collaboration, content creation, reshaping and redistribution.

Through the lines of this chapter we aim to present the rationale and implementation of the ‘Project Method’ online course aiming to encourage active learning and participation, reflective thinking and collaboration within the framework of the online learning community of Greek teachers that was developed during the course. At the other end of the continuum, values and attitudes incarnate through actions and symbolic representations mediated by different types of artefact acting as media for meaning construction and communication. Therefore, to achieve our overall pedagogical goals, we included a variety of synchronous and asynchronous tools in the curriculum; however, for the purposes of this chapter the focus will be cast upon the use of Web 2.0 environments, namely weblogs and wikis, and their dual role in the online learning process, as products and as media.
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