Chapter 2

Web 2.0 and Learning: A Closer Look at Transactional Control Model in E–Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores three facets of Web 2.0: the pedagogical use of social software in a Web 2.0 e-learning environment, social software, and social networking from the perspective of transactional control in fostering student learning, as proposed in the theoretical framework of Dron’s (2006) theory. It also examines the implications of Web 2.0 as it relates to learning and e-learning. Using Facebook as a case specific Web 2.0 platform, the researcher pursues understanding of learner control, as well as cultural interactions in Web 2.0 environments in the broader context of cultural implication for Web 2.0 as a learning platform in a global e-learning environment. Accordingly, the Facebook example helps to illustrate how instructors and students can effectively control their learning environment (or relinquish control of their learning environment) within an intracultural setting, in an attempt to create a meaningful learning experience as proposed by the transactional control model. In conclusion, the chapter offers recommendations for Web 2.0 e-learning technology applications in order to create effective and meaningful learning for students and instructors.

THE WEB 2.0

Web 2.0 is not a term that refers to any specific or new form of World Wide Web, or Internet 2.0; instead it refers to conglomerate of social software that uses the internet as a platform for which such devices can be connected (Kenney, 2007; O’Reilly, 2005). In essence, the social software enables an architecture platform that brings about the network effects where people are able to participate. Some specific examples of social software that enable Web 2.0 for collaboration includes blogs and its multimedia companion such as pods and videocasts (Cameron & Anderson, 2006; Kenney, 2007), wikis, distributed classification systems, and RSS feeds (Mejias, 2005). Dron (2007) however has a nar-
rower view of what counts as social software by limiting the technology platforms to Flickr, Ning, Collaborative filtering / Recommender systems, Shared tagging and Social navigation.

Despite views on the variations of what counts as social software, one idea that seems consistent and without debate is the fact that each of these tools fosters a self-emergent collaboration. In order words, social software in relation to Web 2.0 allows and provides ways for transitioning static websites into fully interlink and often interactive computing platforms where users can create, as well as use, contents from other participants. The primary driver of Web 2.0 is the recent development in people’s ability to create and publish content online, or in what has been termed as “read/write web” (Richardson, 2007). However, the social component of the Web 2.0 platforms should not be underestimated as users engage in high level of interactivity with the technologies and other users. More important to this discussion, however, is the role of Web 2.0 in educational pedagogy. Unlike distance education that focuses on independent study and student learning, Web 2.0 adds an additional dimension to learning in two ways. First, Web 2.0 helps fosters the idea and tool for e-learning; Second, Web 2.0 allows students to move away from tighter control of teacher or instructor organized activities and curriculum to a context, or platform, where varieties of loosely constructed learners are able to establish and control how they learn. In the words of Terry Anderson (2007), students have the freedom to create their own learning. As a result, this chapter will explore the implication of Web 2.0 as it relates to learning and e-learning. Specifically, the issue of learner control in Web 2.0 environments will be analyzed along with the cultural implication for Web 2.0 as learning platform in global e-learning environment. At the same time, this chapter will explore Facebook as a case specific Web 2.0 platform.

CONTROL IN WEB 2.0

First, however, is the issue of control. One of the general arguments in favor of incorporating newer communication technologies into education and learning curriculum is the fact that it enhances learners’ capacity to determine how they learn (Olaniran, Savage, & Sorenson, 1996). It is not surprising that a similar argument has been made for e-learning and in particular as one of the major reasons for using Web 2.0 in learning (Dron, 2006; 2007). Dron (2006) extended the concept of control to what he terms as Transactional Control – which he described as choices people make in learning environment regardless of whether the environment is offline or online. Dron (2007) argues that choices are made by both teachers and learners in e-learning environment; however, the degree to which a person dictates the choice determines the amount of transactional control in a given setting. Dron (2007) went on to categorize types of control on a continuum taking into consideration both structure – which is the control that a teacher has on the learning content and the students, and autonomy – that is the level of control the students has. Notwithstanding, the two levels of control are mediated or regulated by the dialogue, or negotiated control, which involves the negotiation between teachers and students regarding how much control one is willing to give up or allow the other to have.

TRANSACTIONAL CONTROL AND LEARNING

The idea of transactional control is useful when one subscribes to the transactional nature of communication, which argues that communicators influence one another and the notion of absolute power is perchance nonexistent in the sense that