Creative Networks of Practice Using Web 2.0 Tools

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the professional implications for teachers and managers in new and evolving forms of professional development using Web 2.0 tools in a European context. Research findings are presented from the “Creative Use of Media” learning event developed through a European eTwinning Learning Lab initiative in spring of 2009. The Creative use of the Media online learning event supported a series of initiatives celebrating the European Year of Creativity and Innovation and involved 135 participants from 27 countries. The key objective was to introduce a range of learning themes constructed around a phenomenon-based inquiry model, which supported interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative online learning methodologies to stimulate new teaching and learning rationales. Digital Web 2.0 technology was used as an independent creative medium and as a powerful facilitating tool to enhance and blend with the more traditional forms of visual, audiovisual and multimedia inquiry. In developing models encapsulating risk taking and experimentation this online learning project supported a general principle that future education models and professional development would be based on social learning and “customer-driven collaborative knowledge building” in relation to open source materials.

Keywords: Collaborative Knowledge Building, Creative Use of Media, Innovation, Phenomenon-Based Inquiry Model, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Web-based learning has made rapid advances over the last decade with the development of interactive communication tools permitting computer users to move from passive receivers and consumers of information to critical co-creators and producer-consumers (Toffler, 1970; Bruns, 2008; Baldwin, 2009). The use of Web 2.0 applications has enabled users to participate in a social communication networking revolution on a global scale. Mobile technologies are transforming professional competencies through the use of personalised virtual spaces and these are developing new pathways for screenbased experiential learning (Redecker et al., 2009; Pascu, 2008). Global educational policies reflect these changes, advocating the use of Virtual Learning Environments incorporating eportfolios, for students’ to access information, interact with others using (blogs, forums and wikis) and co-construct and publish within local, national and international communities.

Social computing and Web 2.0 applications are merging with pedagogical approaches
around both formal and informal educational contexts, however it remains important that the construction of technological solutions are based on pedagogical imperatives (models and concepts), rather than the reverse. New media courses incorporating elearning also require robust technological infrastructures, to enable fast networked internet access, to multimedia content streams. There is also a well-recognised need (and challenge) to modernise current curriculum content, due to these rapid technological advances. Reconceptualising curriculum models to include digital literacies will support employability and prosperity in the emerging national and global information economies (European Commission, 2006, 2007).

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND ONLINE LEARNING

Although Web 2.0 applications were not widely available in 1998, the theoretical concept and pedagogical models applied using ICT were learner oriented, focusing on collaborative and co-operative learning. Between 1998 and 2005 Jukka Orava coordinated the European Schoolnet’s Virtual School Art Department developing an extensive range of online projects in cross cultural contexts (Orava, 2006). During this time early theoretical concepts were built around experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Räsänen, 1997) and problem based learning, in a socio-constructivist knowledge paradigm.

A web-based online learning structure had also been developed in 1998 for the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH) as a learning model and concept for media education and web-based media related studies (1998-2007) for teacher training in art. These learning models and structures were further developed and implemented through international curriculum development partnerships between Schools’ of Art at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH), the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE) and the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, Brazil (Worrall, 2000; Davies, et al., 2003; Orava, 2006). In contrast to the popular models of online learning developed over the last ten years, that could be described as highly organized and reliant on the use of professional learning management systems, our models harnessed the web based sources and built upon specifically tailored structures using ordinary web pages (Orava, 2006). The use of web pages and standard code, (HTML, PHP and CGI-programming) kept the focus away from the learning management system, allowing users to concentrate fully on the learning process and develop online learning as a collaborative, holistic and integrated process resulting in collaborative knowledge creation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LEARNING LAB WORKSHOPS

In 2009 we were invited by Anne Gilleran, Pedagogical Manager, European Schoolnet to design and coordinate an online, eTwinning event for European teachers. It is worth noting that eTwinning is an online resource within the European Schoolnet, representing a hub for schools in Europe to exchange ideas and engage in online projects. We based the pedagogical concept for the eTwinning course, entitled the Creative use of Media on previously designed and trialed models of experimental workshops in Europe and Brazil, exploring the interface between Creative Arts practice across the curriculum and the use of ICT in an intercultural context (Orava, 2006).

The workshops were designed for European teachers to explore the creative and innovative use of Web 2.0 applications in teaching, learning and for professional development. The event encapsulated a model that encouraged the participants to critically experience and contextualise the potential for the use of social media within their own domain of skills’ development. The key components of the Creative use of Media learning event were:

1. A Pedagogical Model – The workshops were introduced through a flexible pedagogical model to scaffold the learning
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