Towards eLearning 2.0 University

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Towards eLearning 2.0 University (Guest Editorial)

Adriana J. Berlanga[a*], Francisco García Peñalvo[b] and Peter B. Sloep[a]

[a]Centre for Learning Sciences and Technologies (CELSTEC), Open University of The Netherlands; [b]Computer Science Department, University of Salamanca, Spain

*Corresponding author. Email: adriana.berlanga@ou.nl

Introduction

This special issue is dedicated to the question of how universities should integrate Web 2.0 technologies and tools into educational and institutional practices. This question is driven by the assumption that eLearning 2.0, as this integration is called, will foster the idea of placing the learner in the centre of a more social, personal and flexible learning process. This requires not only a technological shift but also, and more importantly, a conceptual change in which all stakeholders conceive learning as a social activity, which occurs in interaction with others. Before introducing more in depth the contributions of this special issue, it is worth to point out the most relevant insights on this topic.

Importantly, rather than as a technological, instructional design, or institutional challenge, the inclusion of Web 2.0 tools into university practice is perceived as a challenge for learners. They need to shift away from traditional learning strategies and individual and passive approaches towards working collaboratively in social, situated contexts (Karasavvidis, Lim et al.). Students actually are not familiar with the activities required to sustain authentic collaboration (Huang & Nakazawa). Support should be provided to develop their competences on this respect.

It is also relevant to explore the potential of Web 2.0 tools for developing higher order skills, such as reflection on action, and critical thinking. These tools do have the potential to foster these skills (Wopereis et al., Mendenhall & Johnson). To make the most of them, nevertheless, learners require support on how to use these tools for meaningful reflection

(Wopereis et al.). At the same time, tutors and instructional designers should bear in mind that the quality of the instruction will improve if Web 2.0 tools are incorporated in the learning process, as is evidenced by grounded instructional design theories and models (Mendenhall & Johnson).

eLearning 2.0 also means a shift from the traditional university model of providing education, towards a more flexible and open learning approach. Personal Learning Environments give learners control of their learning process by providing a single access point to services, tools, people and resources. Learner control in these environments implies that learners will increasingly take responsibility over crucial instructional functions. It is evident that universities can play an important role in developing students' competences to control their learning projects and environments (Väljataga & Laanpere). It is also evident that universities should not be excluded from Personal Learning Environment approaches, quite the opposite, they can greatly benefit from Web 2.0 tools and services (Casquero et al.).

Contributions

In the opening article of this special issue, **Lim, So and Tan** argue that technological, social and epistemological dimensions should be considered to exploit the opportunities that Web 2.0 approaches offer. After having observed that students show little depth-collaboration while having been asked to work in wiki, the authors conclude that changes on the socio-techno-spatial relations and learning practices are needed.

Likewise, while exploring the barriers to a successful implementation of wikis, **Karasavvidis** concludes that current learning practices are incompatible with wiki requirements and, therefore, that students should be introduced to new learning practices, and have support on procedural and epistemological issues.

Huang and Nakazawa present an exploratory study that aimed to investigate how students interact using wikis as a learning tool. Their study included the activities students participate

in, how students perceived the level of interaction with peers and tutors, and if there was a difference between peer-to-peer and student-to-tutor interactions. Their findings suggest that interaction among peers is higher than interaction between students and tutors. They also show that students need support to sustain wiki activities such as writing, reviewing, revising, as they are not accustomed to the dynamic collaborations that are so specific to wikis.

Wopereis, Sloep and Poortman present a study of the use of weblogs as a means to promote students teacher's reflective practice. They conclude that weblogs are suitable for structured reflective writing and feedback. In their study they also found students learning practices at odds with Web 2.0 approaches. Students' reflections were superficial, the average number of feedback was not as high as expected, and large discussions were scarce. Students like ample comments on their postings but, paradoxically, they were of the opinion that weblog access should be limited to members of their student group.

Mendenhall and Johnson propose a combination of Web 2.0 tools and grounded instructional design theories and models. The authors explore the use of a Web 2.0 tool, HyLighter, which employs a social annotation instructional strategy. They report three different studies, which combined instructional activities using HyLighter for peer-critique, and critical analysis, comprehension and metacognition. Their findings include student perceptions on the benefits, weaknesses, and usability of the HyLighter tool. It turns out that on average, students exhibited slightly better cognitive skills after exposure to the learning method. Moreover, students showed more critical thinking skills than comprehension skills, but they did not show change in metacognition.

Väljataga and Laanpere present a theoretical framework for Personal Learning Environments, which integrates instructional functions of learner control. They explain their understanding of the learner control over instructional functions in relation to instructional design and Personal Learning Environments. Authors exemplify the applicability of their

theoretical framework in an intervention implemented in an eLearning course. They notice that, apparently, students find it difficult to create learning contracts and to choose tools and services for their learning environment. Nonetheless, students appreciated the increased learner control and the use of technology for managing learning.

Casquero, Portillo, Ovelar, Benito and Romo propose an approach that combines personal and institutional spheres to support eLearning 2.0 within a higher education institution. They propose an architecture, based on widgets, which allows one to merge Web 2.0 tools, services, personal social networks, and institutional content management systems in what they call (institutionally) Personal Learning Environment. Their PLE approach puts learners in control of their learning evidences by integrating existing Web 2.0 repositories in the routine of content generation; this also means including the social networks that learners maintain within and outside the institution. These authors present a prototype that has been developed as a proof of concept, and report its technical specifications.

Slavi Stoyanov   Open University of The Netherlands, The Netherlands
Steven Verjans   Open University of The Netherlands, The Netherlands
Riina Vuorikari   European Schoolnet, Belgium
Scott Wilson   University of Bolton, UK
Iwan Wopereis   Open University of The Netherlands, The Netherlands

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