Web 2.0 in and out of the Language Classroom

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Abstract

This poster aims to provide the concept of Web 2.0 and its relevant tools in language teaching and learning. An online blog is served as an information kiosk and indicate possible instructional design and applications to language education. By experimenting with the Web 2.0 tool in a participatory community, we are hoping language teachers will learn about appropriate tools ready to be used and further think about the relationship of Web 2.0 and the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and 5 Cs (communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities) as well as the Wallace’s framework for assessing its effectiveness.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this poster is to investigate Web 2.0 and to understand users’ perspectives of its application in language teaching and learning. As discussed by O’Reilly (2005), an important principle of Web 2.0 is the web as a platform that facilitates the building of web-based communities and the contribution from collective intelligence. Web 2.0 has a multitude of good features (Amol Deshpande & Alejandro Jadad, 2006; O’Reilly, 2005; Skiba, 2006). It: 1) presages a freeing of data, 2) permits the building of virtual applications, 3) is participative, 4) has applications that work for the users, 5) has applications that are modular, 6) is about sharing, 7) is about community and facilitating community, 8) is about remixing, 9) is smart, 10) opens up the Long Tail.

Given the fact that Web 2.0 is such a new concept, many language teachers and learners may still not be aware of this revolutionary progress in designing language curriculum. By forming an online participatory community, we expect to examine three major questions proposed and six types of tools in language teaching and learning. (Blogs vs. Wikis, Myspace vs. Facebook, Podcasting vs. Vodcasting, Mindmeister vs. Mindomo, Mashups, and Second Life vs. Quest Atlantis). This online blog community (http://chungkaii.blogspot.com) is used as the information kiosk during the poster session.

2. Creation

This online exploratory blog is both text and audio based, so users can engage in the tasks with the aid of multimedia. In order to let participants familiarize themselves with the blog coordinator, the coordinator’s personal information (e.g., education, teaching experience, research interests) are posted so that a collaborative and trust relationship can be built and thus promote responsive feedback. The major topics discussed are as follows:

- Topic 1: Web 2.0, 4 Skills and 5 Cs
- Topic 2: Web 2.0 and Tools
- Topic 3: Web 2.0 and IT support
- Interview: ESL/CSL Language Teachers and Learners
- Topic 4: Blogs and Wikis
- Topic 5: MySpace and Facebook
- Topic 6: Podcasting and Vodcasting
- Topic 7: MindMeister, Mindomo, Freemind Share, Bubbl.us
- Topic 8: Mashups
- Topic 9: Second Life and Quest Atlantis

3. Marinate

This blog was conducted on a voluntary basis; participants are mainly student bloggers from the university settings. In order to make this blog easy to understand, instructions and themes were clearly stated to guide the first-time users to read the posted prompts in reverse chronological order. Concerning the sporadic participation at the beginning, the topics were also extended to incorporate Xuite, Web 1.0 vs. Web 2.0, YouTube, Slideshare, CMC vs. CBL and World Wide Web vs. Language Learning Center to elicit better responses. In addition, adding a Picasa photo album to the slideshow and a music box in support of a non-profit organization in Taiwan helped to...
build a strong connection with the bloggers as well. The
following session selectively summarizes the reflections
worthy of reporting based on the experience of
investigating Web 2.0.

4. Analysis

What assumptions about the nature of knowledge
and learning does this innovation make?

Before explaining the assumptions of Web 2.0,
the features of Web 1.0 should be examined.
According to MacManus and Porte (2005), Web 1.0
focuses more on the creation of the content of a site.
Web users obtain information by going directly to
the source such as BBC.com for news and
utexas.edu for the University of Texas at Austin.
However, with the evolution of the Web, Web 2.0
has provided a new set of tools to aggregate and
remix Web components in an innovative way. Web
2.0, as Cornor (2007) indicated, enables different
types of tools to create, aggregate and share
dynamic content in an emerging social environment.
Web 2.0 provides learning in a creative and
interactive way via online social interaction,
collaboration and collective intelligence.

The concept of Web 2.0 emphasizes the
characteristics of “Web as a platform” and users
subsequently can share knowledge and blend
information with new or unknown information. Web
2.0’s social dynamic consists of peer production of
content, asynchronous interaction, and a high level
of trust. Applying this to language teaching and
learning, we can foresee the potential of Web 2.0 in
creating a new era for language teachers and
learners (Anderson, 2007). The key markers that
distinguish between the industrial age and
information age in instructional design lie in the
customization, cooperative relationships, shared
decision-making, initiative, diversity, networking,
being process-oriented, and the idea of the customer
as a king (Reigeluth, 1999). Web 2.0 is
user-centered and geared towards learner-centered
teaching. These key markers provide insights into
the core ideas that guide the design of Web 2.0 in
the language classrooms.

What unique role does technology play in
facilitating learning?

Traditionally we converse with someone in
person or over a communication tool (e.g., phone,
computer) and process the information we receive
individually in our brains. Webs 2.0 clones and
elaborates on the conventional communication by
sharing our knowledge and understanding of a topic
with others and maximizes the benefits of this to
The compensate for the limitation of the human
brain. That said, Web 2.0 plays a
facilitative role in fostering language
teaching and learning. In terms of the four
skills, the direct relationship to Web 2.0
tools is observable. For example, Wiki, Google
docs, and MindMeister are helpful for writing;
YouTube, Podcasting and Vodcasting can be used
as supplementary input for listening; Skype and
MSN provide a medium for speaking, and Blogs,
Mashups, Slideshare, and Quest Atlantis may be
good for reading. The incorporation of Web 2.0
tools has great potential to enrich the language
learning classrooms.

Concerning the 5 Cs (communication, culture,
connections, comparisons, communities) proposed
by National Standards in Foreign Language
Education (1996), theoretically, Web 2.0 also
provides a niche in achieving each C. With the
increase in online interaction, creating online
communities that engage students in cross-culture
communication is no longer impossible. From
these communities the interpersonal connection
can be built and the evolved communication
patterns can be observed. In addition, Web 2.0 will
be able to offer tasks for students to practice the
different cognitive levels (knowledge,
comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis,
evaluation) on Bloom’s taxonomy (Lorin W.

Nonetheless, there is still little empirical research
about Web 2.0 and language teaching and learning,
so we do not plan to overstate Web 2.0 without
evidence.

The original purpose of this blog was to elicit
teachers’ perspectives of Web 2.0. However, the
teacher population seems to be too busy to join
this type of online discussion, and thereby not
many responses have been posted. Another
possible reason is that language teachers cannot
explicitly anticipate the benefits of Web 2.0 in
language, and that is why they are not as active as
expected. In the future we would like to explore
how to motivate teachers and provide incentive to
courage the participation. Some related research
questions could be 1) what kind of prominent
significant linguistic features does Web 2.0
promote?, 2) what opportunities does Web 2.0
give to learners to fully participate in the language
learning tasks?, 3) what modifications of
linguistic input does Web 2.0 provide?, 4) what
opportunities does Web 2.0 provide for both
written and spoken comprehensible output?, 5) what
opportunities does Web 2.0 offer for learners
to notice errors in their output?, 6) what
opportunities does Web 2.0 include to prepare learners to correct their linguistic output, 7) what interaction does Web 2.0 foster among learners and computers? These questions were inspired by the book, Education and Technology (Ann Kovalchick & Kara Dawson, 2004).

How is this innovation seen to fit with existing school curriculum?

The answer to this question will depend on the setting (primary/middle/high school or college) and level of language classes (basic, intermediate, or advanced) or college advanced level students in Asia or the US, Web 2.0 will be easier to implement when teachers have the freedom to integrate Web 2.0 tools into the main curriculum and when students have the computer literacy to utilize the tools to finish the assigned tasks, as well as when the schools have enough number of computers. For primary/middle/high schools in Taiwan, the curriculum is centralized and there is usually pressure from tests. Language teachers may feel hesitant to use Web 2.0 tools because it invisibly increases the burden on teaching and learning due to the time spent on understanding and implementing innovative technology tools. If students’ academic performances do not improve significantly, stakeholders (parents, school administrators) may feel worried about it and jump to the conclusion that the technology does not facilitate but hinder learning. The 9th grade World Geography Culture Exchange project at Anderson High School in Austin, TX (http://www.edb.utexas.edu/edc385g/fall2007/chuang/wgc/starter.html) can be a good example of Web 2.0. Students from the US and Taiwan are using blogs, wiki, vodcasting, and online platforms to exchange their ideas about a concept and compare the differences and similarities among each population group. Consequently students develop their cultural awareness and knowledge of World Geography. Without the application of Web 2.0 concepts and tools, this goal would never be achieved easily.

Furthermore, the issues of boundaries, limitations and user ages contribute to the interwoven pros and cons of using the Web 2.0 tools in teaching and learning. Wallace’s (2004) framework provides five major elements (authority, boundaries, pedagogical context, disciplinary context, stability) that teachers should take into consideration. Her article can be retrieved via the hyperlinked resource on the blog.

What demands does the innovation place on the knowledge of teachers or other “users”? What knowledge supports does the innovation provide?

How does the technology fit or interact with the social context of learning?

As mentioned above, Web 2.0 creates and provides social interaction for language teaching and learning. Teachers can incorporate Web 2.0 tools in different instructional settings such as instructional programs, tutorials, supplementary exercises, simulations and so forth. Students who are engaged in the Web 2.0 network not only react to the information presented by working with a mouse and keyboard but also take initiative control over their learning at their own pace while interacting with their peers on line. That said, the social context of learning is contextualized or situated and is constructed through the individual interaction in a situation.

5. Summary

This poster reflects on the potentiality of Web 2.0 tools and the difficulties as well as barriers of applying technologies into language classrooms. The complexity of foreign language teaching still requires teachers to further think of how Web 2.0 technologies can be utilized for their instructional design and mobilize their students’ learning in and out of the language classrooms.

References


