
BUZZWORDS IN THE CLASSROOM

MAKING SENSE OF THE DISCOURSE ABOUT WEB2.0 IN CLASSROOM2.0

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As a global society we have entered into what is referred to in everyday language as the *Information Age*, an all encompassing era where individuals have the ability to transfer information freely and have instant access to knowledge that would have been difficult or impossible to find previously. It is worth taking pause, for a moment, and considering what this meta-narrative really assumes. Determining just how and when information rose up into the contemporary picture is no easy task, nor is all of the so-called “global village” on equal or even coherent footing. There is considerable dispute over the unit of analysis in conceptualizing the information age in terms of power, be it embedded individuals or nations, information flows or forms of labor. The revolutionary point at which manual or industrial era labor ends and the knowledge economy begins might be held to be a “violent abstraction” as Daniel Bell (1979) put it, structuring the ways in which we see ourselves as engaged in political economies. The disappearance of the 3rd world of non-alignment (Schiller 1981) and appearance of a network society (Castells 1997) with new forms of power relationships present alternative models for humanity, but also possible variations on a theme of evolving capitalism. In talking about the state of the world identifying the social and historical discontinuities that signify dramatic or revolutionary change is often left as an unmentionable given, we simply state that technologies have driven us to do more and do it faster, or that the aspects of information as a commodity that can be produced make it unique (Porat 1976). Indeed the character of the rhetoric becomes reminiscent of the technological determinism of the post World War II industrial complex saga in US history, thought leaders like Nicholas Negroponte (1995) suggest that “the change from atoms to bits is irrevocable and unstoppable” in reference to turning everything in the physical world into information. This vision of information society has been an enduring

concept ever since the late 70's and yet continues to be reiterated over and over as a kind of unending revolution. First it was microchips (Large 1980), then it was personal computers (Negroponte 1995), then it was the internet (Warf and Grimes 1997), and now it's Web2.0.

The term 'Web2.0' was introduced at an O'Reilly conference in 2004, right around the time many of the web technologies we now associate with it began to emerge. The US economy, a major driver of the internet,¹ had recently suffered through a major setback with the bursting of the dot-com bubble and the business world was looking for something to name the tools and strategies of successful and surviving companies. Meanwhile the increases in physical access and social adoption of the internet began to press the need for a language set to capture the emerging social dimensions of production of information on the internet (Tancer 2007). The O'Reilly definition of Web2.0 was of course primarily business-oriented but this is an important aspect to understanding the evolution of the term. They first defined it as *"a set of economic, social and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet – a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects"* (Muser 2006), but over the years the phrase has come to describe a time period, a social movement, a technology and even used as an adjective (Zimmer 2008).

One of the stronger expressions of the recent edition of the information society revolution is the crisis in education brought about by *Digital Natives*. The first intentioned and famous use of the term occurred in a 2001 publication written by Marc Prensky, a consultant, writer and game designer who works with education and learning. He originally employed the term to refer to an entire generation of students who *"have changed radically"* and are *"no longer the people our education system was designed to teach"* as a result of their upbringing in a world wrapped up in information communication technologies (ICT's; information society) (Prensky 2001). He suggested that students today think and process information differently as compared to people of older generations. He went further to claim that the contrast was particularly evident when digital natives were compared to older adopters of technology, so-called "Digital Immigrants"

¹ I can't reference this properly because the document it's based on is an unreleased draft of Dan Schiller's that was only published in compressed form: Schiller, Dan. (2009). "Communications and the Crisis."

who would manifest their “accent” by showing a lack of awareness of insider meanings and practices.

The idea sparked a controversy and debate that continues today. Many critics have attacked Prensky’s notion, some evaluating the rather vague and difficult to measure binary definition, others citing participation (access and ability) gaps between potential digital natives, and still yet others implicating larger issues of the digital divide by raising questions of who precisely controls and uses technology. Bennet et al. (2008) systematically criticized Prensky’s idea of the digital native by reviewing some of the available literature and rendering it inconclusive. They contended that the media and academic obsession over a digital native generation is instead an example of a moral panic or fear amongst educators, parents, and others who lack understanding and fear the unknown.

Despite this, the concept has found a great deal of support and exploration. The recently published MacArthur Foundation series on digital media and learning focuses on many of the aspects of how the current generation of youth relates to and uses technology, in effect exploring the potential for digital natives. Popular YouTube videos like *A Vision of Students Today*² by Michael Wesch (2007) call into question mass production driven and empty-vessel learning oriented university systems full of disengaged youth. More directly, a recent book, *Born Digital* (2008), written by two professors of law, John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, investigates “Digital Natives” as a population instead of an entire generation. They add “Digital Settlers” to the mixture of terms and focus on a wide range of topics, including identity, safety, privacy, creativity, learning and more.

One of the most pressing concerns, however, is how schools, universities, libraries, and other institutions of knowledge should deal with this new population, or possible (eventual) generation. Because Web2.0 is often described in terms of user (everyday person) produced content it has also become closely associated with the concept of participatory culture: communities *“with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations and some type of informal mentorship whereby*

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>

what is known by the most experienced it passed along to novices" (Jenkins et al. 2006). Jenkins et al. go further to say *"participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement"* and posits that immersion in it can help to cultivate core cultural competencies and social skills needed for full involvement in the information society. In other words, participatory culture, the social dimension of web 2.0, is cast as the solution to the educational needs of our future.

This paper takes to task this vision, in part, by addressing one of the battle grounds of this debate, Classroom 2.0.³ By examining the discourse surrounding Web 2.0 and collaborative sharing and production technologies in this community of educators we can begin to interpret the social forces and effects at play.

INTRODUCING CLASSROOM 2.0

Classroom 2.0 is an online-based community of practice⁴ (Smith 2003, 2009) that brings together educators, school administrators, librarians and students who are interested in Web 2.0 and collaborative technologies. It is a social networking service⁵ (SNS) website and could be categorized as a virtual community, as most of its members never meet face-to-face. Classroom 2.0 (or, CR2 for short) is an instantiation of a Ning⁶ Social Network, a corporate conglomerate that hosts a wide range of networks ranging in size and nature, presumably with an interest in data collection and specialized marketing information as a profit-driving model.⁷

The site was created sometime in early 2007⁸ by Steve Hargadon,⁹ Elluminate's¹⁰ social learning consultant and prominent blogger, speaker and technology consult. It is supported by several

³ <http://www.classroom20.com>

⁴ Smith (2003,2007), in quoting Wenger (2007) explains, "Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour."

⁵ Defined in full by boyd and Ellison (2007), <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>

⁶ <http://www.ning.com/> has a relatively limited information on all of its networks, they can instead be found via custom Google search and a limited directory, <http://theningdirectory.ning.com/>.

⁷ They've raised a lot of money so far, and claim to be based on a similar business model to Google, but with pay services for their website also available, <http://www.crunchbase.com/company/ning>.

⁸ The earliest forum posting is from March 23, 2007.

⁹ Steve's blog can be found at <http://www.stevehargadon.com/>.

“hosts” who don’t seem to have any formal affiliation with the site but instead are power users who are also educational professionals, mostly teachers. These hosts post more material and respond to (and start) a large portion of the forum topics and help to welcome new members.

The site is structured around a limited profile system, each user has their own page that records their recent activity, group memberships, posted media and space for biographical information. The profile pages feel a little bit like MySpace in that users can customize them with their own graphics and have some limited control over layouts, but only within a set framework that results in pages that often appear boxy and simplistic. The site is largely driven by **communication tools**, like traditional discussion forums, chat (embedded in the bar at the bottom) and a collaborative blog,¹¹ but also has **areas for sharing media**, such as photos and videos, **spaces to present identity and membership**, like groups, and **connections to external events and resources**, like a wiki, events, workshops and online conference sessions.

At the time of writing Classroom 2.0’s total membership was just over 35,000 members, which is comparatively high for niche social networks and the largest education-related network to be found in all of the Ning collective. Highly popular media and topics like 50-Cent¹² and Twilight¹³ have managed to boast Ning memberships ranging in the hundreds of thousands but most, based on casual observation in searches, seem to be only a few thousand in size. Facebook, the colossal SNS often used as a point of reference has well over 350 million users¹⁴ (again, at time of writing) but its largest teacher and educator groups are only a couple of thousand. By contrast the US Census¹⁵ reports over 7.3 million people employed in education, training or libraries in the year 2000, which suggests that many people who would be interested in the topics of Classroom 2.0 are not active participants.

¹⁰ <http://www.illuminate.com/> is an e-learning classroom emulation solution.

¹¹ Any user on the site can put up posts here, and can set them to be seen by the entire community, just their friends (colleagues) or only themselves.

¹² <http://thisis50.ning.com/> rocks almost five hundred thousand members.

¹³ <http://www.thetwilightsaga.com/> has a mere near three hundred thousand members, and requires a sign-up for full access.

¹⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/press.php#/press/info.php?statistics>

¹⁵ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-25.pdf>

The website specifically forbids direct corporate advertisement and has specific guidelines for regulating involvement by persons representing commercial entities. Its funding base is unclear, though Ning likely waives their usage fees because they pull in so many customers.

STUDY DESIGN

As a researcher I came to this site somewhat incidentally. At some point or another a link to it had been passed my way from the SNS research communication circles and I had been getting emails about their web conference sessions for months. They usually sounded intriguing and I had always wished I had time to go investigate the site seriously. Unlike Facebook or email it wasn't part of my daily routine, and seemed like it would require considerably more effort. When offered a chance to do content analysis on a website for this class I leapt forward at the opportunity, perhaps a little too hastily. What didn't hit me until too far into the project was just how enormous and complicated the site and associated community is. Classroom2.0 came off as essentially another Facebook, only this time I didn't have years of daily participation and piles of literature behind me. I had learned from my previous studies that focusing on one element or angle of a community, interface or discourse was about the only way to effectively and deeply engage with material for scholarly production, but in the case of Classroom2.0 I simply wasn't familiar enough with the whole show: who these people are, the current state of education in the US and abroad, how the site is used and what it means, and more. As a result a substantial portion of my research time was spent simply exploring without adequate focus, sort of milling about a city abuzz with activity and filled with an endless number of shiny objects (research topics) and passionate people to talk to. To this effect much of my work was spent exploring loose odds and ends that won't be covered in this paper, but instead saved for the future. It is very much a work in progress, I've chosen a few themes and interesting conversations to illustrate findings and analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study began with a large and expansive set of research questions, something of an assemblage of the various dimensions a digital ethnography might take. Over time they were

reduced and refined in response to the story the data could tell. They in turn, led to one another.

Is Classroom2.0 an example of a web2.0 website? What makes it so?

Though this might seem like an obvious or simple question answering it became a key way of understanding the discourse surrounding the topic of Web2.0. The site's potential 2.0 classification could be evaluated from a perspective derived from external literature or from the definition and understanding presented formally on the site itself, its own description. This led to the next major question, which has at least two components:

How do people make sense of Web2.0 on Classroom2.0?

- ❖ How do functional aspects of the website influence what people think and say about web2.0?
- ❖ What are they saying about it? How is it presented in relation to social practice? What does user-contributed material suggest?

These two directions are related but different. One calls into question the structure regulating or altering discourse while the other gives agency to the views of individual participants as well as external voices. Paired together they foster a more comprehensive answer to the root question of socially produced meaning.

METHODS

My purposes in conducting this study in an ongoing fashion are three fold: personal, practical and intellectual. Obviously I'm interested in the topic of transformative education and hope to practically benefit as a teacher from my participation in the community. The analysis also presented an opportunity to refine and reflect on my own understandings of Web2.0 and further engage in the body of knowledge connected to it. The work here testifies to the social web in practice, as it is situated between the online and offline worlds in the context of education, a topic that will merit continued investigation in the future. It is my hope that this paper can be a building block in this process, even if only for my own progress.

My methodological approach has been predominantly inductive in nature. Despite coming in with some previously formed associations of Web2.0 I didn't know very much about how it would be related and understood specifically within the community. I decided to study the site as if I were a teacher new to online communities, starting with making general observations, following through the motions that introductory members might take, such as watching the welcome and how-to video, and ultimately diving into some sections of driving content: the forums, linked media and an attached conference session.

For the most part I did not interact much with other Classroom 2.0 users, but this was not out of some kind of non-interference principle. I was honestly too concerned with simply taking in a massive amount of information, I felt like starting to shape the discourse and presented material before I had a sufficient idea of what it is was unwise. I did make a post about a stop-motion learning series I had done in the past and fill out portions of my profile with pictures and biographic information. At no point did I really see myself as outside of Classroom 2.0, I fancy myself to be another full-fledged, if new, community member.

Most of my analysis was collected over intense observation periods, spanning several hours and spread out between only a few days in the semester. Since I was assessing mostly content that had been on the site for a great deal of time already this didn't seem to be a drawback. I may have missed an opportunity to track live-chat as it occurred between members on a daily basis, but I was already in over my head with too much data, this would have been too much. I never let the URL strictly bound my 'research site,' however. Since Classroom 2.0 serves as such a nexus of links and resources it only felt natural to follow hyperlinks to their respective blogs, videos and websites as well as download or view uploaded files. This falls in step with Christine Hine's (2009) recommendation that researchers construct their research site on the basis of what makes sense in terms of sampling and research questions. The discourse surrounding Web2.0 isn't artificially bound by the website's address, there's no reason I should be. I typically didn't go too many links out from the root site, though, as I had to realistically limit my trajectories of investigation for available time.

As I would watch, read or otherwise scrutinize an element of the site I would collect notes on it. This data was aggregated in a series of dynamic memos tied to information sources and organized loosely by recurrent ideas or themes. I structured a spreadsheet of forum posts and collected some basic information about each (number of replies, date, user-assigned categories) and later added codes to them and compressed them into summary expressions of what was going on throughout the site.

At this point it is too early for me to make much of an absolute statement towards the validity of my findings and analysis, only that what I present here is provision and emergent. The more time I spend on the site and more perspectives I consult like the better my outcomes will be, I hope to polish these with additional time, exposure and experience. In general I think it's worthwhile enough to leave myself and readers better off than they were before in terms of understanding discourse about Web2.0 in terms of its conceptualization in theory and practice.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

First, a look at what makes Classroom 2.0 an incarnation of Web 2.0.

CLASSROOM2.0 AS WEB2.0

Web2.0 represents structural changes in the way people travel, create, organize and otherwise interact with the internet. It is fundamentally driven by social forces like politics, economics, and various forms of culture.

As users are presented with websites and application interfaces that offer more interactivity, customizability and powerful functionality, and as pages are created dynamically on the fly for specific contextual needs the observable boundaries between websites, software and services blur considerably. Determining how to measure relationships between agents, objects and places in Web2.0 becomes potentially more difficult because of these intersections. It is in this sense that the term has become associated with shifts in the overall architecture of the internet (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008). It is not necessarily the ultimate convergence, however, as Matthew Allen (2008) argues, in stating *“Convergence is best thought of as a reorganisation of*

the economic structures and social practices for the provision and consumption of a broad range of communication and information services enabled by technological advances that lead to the digitisation of data, and its circulation at ever-increasing speeds over computer-based networks involving direct connections through telecommunications links. While these technologies provide the conditions for the possibility of convergence, they do not determine its particular forms because the technologies only come to be applied in ways that, in a predominantly free-market global economy, serve the needs of private corporations and their financial interests in the media and information industries.” A good example of this might be iTunes. The service was brought about by the qualities information takes on as a commodity and the failure of existent media distribution systems to anticipate the agency of the very individuals in which they had fostered such a vicious consumer desire. Napster exploded on to the scene in the late 90’s and was quickly shut down, only to be replaced by iTunes (Urs and Gasser 2008), an adaptation of old world economics (paying money for single defined units of goods and control of property) molded to the information economy. Though iTunes isn’t exactly an example of Web2.0 it represents the futility of Web2.0’s aspirations to be a revolution and ultimate convergence: those in power will always find ways to impose beneficial components of old power structures. This may not be an absolute certainty, open source projects have developed such an anti-corporate following that they will likely never yield, and internet piracy is still a pretty unstoppable force.

Web2.0 also involves the creation and adoption of new technologies. Beyond better browsers and increased availability of high-speed internet connected computers Web2.0 relies on technologies that allow participants to actively publish and subscribe to specialized information (content), often in a real-time fashion. Underlying technological components, like XML, RSS, Ajax and Flash then help to organize and present such information for users. It has been described as use of the internet as a platform for advanced computing tasks that might have once been fulfilled by specific software programs as well as social and business institutions (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008, Scholz 2008). People can design multimedia online in browsers, get a ‘school experience’ by joining educational communities or provide their own

news. They can do this largely on account of the network effects now in place: technology goods that increase in value as they increase in participation.

Classroom2.0 quite overtly identifies itself as a social network for people *“interested in Web2.0 and collaborative technologies and education.”*¹⁶ Interestingly enough, it does not immediately claim to be an exemplar of Web 2.0 itself, but instead demonstrates its identification indirectly through adoption of many popular collaborative digital content production/sharing tools and concepts that are consistently identified as Web2.0. The ‘about’ paragraph drops a link to the local wiki, which gives a definition of Web2.0, presumably the one the site authors would like users to adopt. This definition appears to be assembled from the thoughts of different thinkers in the Classroom2.0 community. A quick look at the history of the page suggests that it’s been modified about twenty times over the past few years, mostly in the form of revisions by guest users and Steve Hargadon that have been kept, but at least once by spam bots. The discussion surrounding the page is somewhat limited, with only a handful of posts that actually relate directly to issues of definition. Based on the amount of discussion relating to issues of definition of Web2.0 in the forums one would expect that this wiki would be more disputed or highly edited. It may be that most visitors to the site who have a say about the topic don’t bother to click on the link, and instead assume they know what it is.

The definition itself seems to don the universal attribution to the business world birth of the term, and dresses itself in the idea of a point of transition tied to economic revolution, casting Web1.0 as *“a reflection of our industrial culture: experts or businesses dispensing identical knowledge or products to mass students or consumers”* and Web2.0 by contrast a two-way medium where, *“almost anyone can become a publisher or ‘content producer’”* and that this is *“as much a part of our experience as finding or reading data.”*¹⁷ It also identifies Web2.0 as an online experience or lifestyle held by teens, and defensively warns off that it surely cannot be a passing fad because of its continued growth and popularity. The article states (about Web2.0) that *“the inherent ways in which these programs encourage collaboration and engagement*

¹⁶ Based on the introductory statement on the home page.

¹⁷ <http://web20ineducation.wikispaces.com/Intro>

resonate so highly with the pedagogical aspirations of teachers who are trying to meaningfully involve every student in something that is personally engaging for him or for her.” This actually doesn't say much about the definition of Web2.0 or associated tools here (suggesting that they are a framework to be filled out by users and their material and gives examples of them as blogs and wikis), other than the assumption that they encourage collaboration and engagement, but also draws out a critical pedagogical affiliation: a desire for personal engagement and meaning in learning.

Here in this definition we see Web2.0 referred to as a type of portable technological entities, a transition or movement, and a factor in lifestyle. It also makes some assumptions about control (if 1.0 was always and completely one-to-many, if 2.0 is really open to everyone's impacts) and that everyone has the proper motivation and social support to want to become a content producer. It makes the assertion that action and participation in web2.0 should be coupled to education.

If the social side of Web2.0 (non-architectural, non-technological) is epitomized by participatory culture Classroom 2.0 probably qualifies as Web2.0 on these grounds alone. According to Jenkins et al. (2006) it would need to include elements of affiliation (membership and community), expressions (production of new creative forms), collaborative problem-solving (teamwork, intentioned distributed knowledge), and circulations (shaping the flow of media). Classroom 2.0 is at its root an SNS and online community. Participants don't generally remix each other's media but do play with one another's ideas in creating lesson plans and shared resources. The site involves groups and a lot of crowd-sourcing to answer problems submitted by participants. And it enables users to push out into media flows via their blog or by partaking in (or even leading) online conference sessions.

The site title itself seems to evoke a certain way of making sense of the experience. By suggesting the website is a classroom, users are provided with a vision of a bounded physical space with given social expectations and norms. No clear-cut teachers or students are defined, however, and there is a likely assumption that most of the participants are educators or teachers of some kind themselves, which might be interpreted as to suggest that the space is a

place where everyone can learn from one another (this was later verified). The number on the end of the title implies, at least two notions. It implies there was a previous version of the classroom before this one (1.0, it is unclear if this would be on or offline) and this one is the newer (and potentially better, the vision of progressing software is evoked) edition. It also insinuates that this site is inexorably tied to Web2.0, the new vision of the internet by making use of the popular 'branding' effect achieved by adding the number. The meaning becomes dual purpose: the website itself is a technological classroom and new form of education, and also facilitates people who are interested in creating these.

ASPECTS OF INTERFACE

Below you can see a picture of the Classroom 2.0 website at the time of writing:



Clearly one of the most immediate aspects of the website interface is the prominent position (upper left, just beneath the banner) of the welcoming paragraph which includes a link to the

Web2.0 definition wiki just examined. Users are initially propositioned with this model and may not think to challenge it, especially if they're not yet familiar with the expectation that wikis need to be perpetually rewritten.

Users are encouraged to act on the website both explicitly with action-based text and pictures (the red banner at the top, giving visitors things to do) and implicitly by which information yielded overtly and how it is organized. Clearly Ning has an investment in gaining more customers, as its advertisement is permanently fixed in the right column. More subtly users are structured in the type of stuff they feel welcome to put online by the categories available for it: there's no section for lesson plans, for instance, so they have to be fit into forums or videos or blogs.

The center span of pictures shows a mosaic of members who have joined recently, which seems to carry the benefit of encouraging people to take notice of newbies, but also gives the impression that many people don't associate pictures with themselves (and therefore might be less engaged or more mysterious). In actuality almost all active users observed posted (presumably) real pictures of themselves. This positioning of pictures might bring a level of humanity to the website (importing physical bodies) and creates more possibility for assertion of identity, which may in turn foster connections between community members. In other words, it is comfortable to know something about who you're talking to, the more cues we have the more easily we can know which aspects of ourselves to present to achieve the outcomes we desire. There is also an implicit danger embedded in such presence of pictures: power relationships from the offline world get inadvertently (or perhaps purposefully) imported into the online community. People will know they're talking to women or men, people of an assumed race or ethnicity (they don't automatically self assert in tandem), users of a general age group or members who they find attractive or unattractive. The website's mechanism for keeping out spammers and other automated accounts was a little unique but very effective: each new member is required to fill out a section of their profile explaining why they're interested in the site. It gives the site creators a great set of data about people's investments and intentions, is hidden from the view of other users, and is a relatively tough

question to spoof because every answer should be unique. Each new member is reviewed by one of the hosts and then cleared for access. This strong commitment to keeping the site full of real people, and outlawing 'commercial use,' as indicated in the welcoming statements for the site, creates an atmosphere that feels less artificial, less virtual, even.

Visitors are implicitly compelled to take notice of the latest activity on the site, as it is placed in the main column in the center, which is filled with forum post selections, pictures, and links. Each item is time stamped and has a picture of the poster next to it, allowing us to situate the communication going on with a sense of who is saying what, to who, and when. A visitor map glowing in red bubbles rests in the right column just beneath the search boxes indicating that there are users on the site from all over the world—except non-costal Africa and Russia. The US and Europe are so covered in red you can't really even make out the shape of the continents. Users likely get the impression that they're part of a global community of educators and technology users, even though the metrics used to determine bubbles size and placement are not revealed.

Ultimately, if users come to Classroom 2.0 and come to understand it as representative of Web2.0 then they'll logically start to associate the aspects of the site interface with their view of it. This means the site will encourage them to see Web2.0 as bustling activity tied to real identities and set in a zone where people share ideas and media in a range of ways. It implies that active participation is good, both by giving many venues for it and by giving attention and status to users who are deeply and frequently involved.

Users are afforded limited control over the sharing of their profiles and actions. For instance they cannot hide portions or the entirety of their profile from certain users and any 'active' actions are recorded on a sort of newsfeed on their profile. Chat and reading of posts don't show up, but the posting of media or input into discussions does. Generally it's made obvious that what they do and say on Classroom2.0 will be public (people observe information about others quite forwardly), but it differs greatly from the wildly nuanced and emergent privacy social norms of other SNS like Facebook. One of the greatest challenges Facebook has faced with its near-ubiquitous adoption is that users have very distinct privacy needs and want to

control who has what information about them. CR2 has a lot of teachers who live in public roles and the site is based on a practice (education and technology) that doesn't usually involve a lot of unveiling of personal (private) information. It could have these sorts of problems in the future, however, teachers might share a photo of a class of students without permission from a parent quite easily. Overall, the analogy to the classroom holds – in general most people in a typical classroom can see what an instructor is doing and hear what they're saying. Users not only seem comfortable with these displays of action, but may even prefer it, you can track them following links across the site to some extent by noticing which profiles they leave messages on and which forum posts those people are connected to. Substantively we can see some major differences in use, too, as many users put up pictures of their kids, classrooms and homes on the site. This would suggest a certain expectation of the types of people using the site, and the sorts of behaviors they demonstrate and lifestyles they live as being ones that are socially accepted, if not outright supported.

Most production that takes place on the site comes in the form of textual presentation, there are no embedded tools for multimedia production, at least of the 249 application extensions I briefly paged through. This raises an interesting question – if this site is all about sharing user-generated content, but can only facilitate the construction of text and conversation, where does it all come from?

A FORAY INTO DISCOURSE

I started off by watching the one hour "Tour of Classroom 2.0 webcast video," which turned out to be a moderately informative and helpful introduction, even for someone who has a great deal of experience with SNS. The site creator and primary administrator, Steve Hargadon, spoke from an insider creator perspective, and gave a personalized introduction in the video. In general the site seems to pay a great deal of attention to welcoming and indoctrinating new users – asking them to not only learn about how to operate the various features of the site but introduce themselves and join conversations on education and collaborative technologies. A key definition is dropped in this introduction video: Hargadon believes virtual communities can be formed by the combination of individuals representing themselves (and their identities),

communicating, and sharing ideas embedded in various text and media. This seems straight forward enough, but when contrasted with other forms of community, such as those based around neighborhoods, shared heritage or ascribed social characteristics, seems to stand out. As outlined earlier, the website's interface has this value of community embedded in it. Hargadon casually goes through and introduces those who watch the video to the site's main tools for discussion, sharing, and connection, answering questions and pursuing side interests the whole way. He highlighted several nuances I may have never noticed without watching the video, like drop-down boxes for more forum topic sorting options and links at the bottom of items that allow you to follow them through email updates. After some fairly aimless exploration and discovery, I dove into the forums.

The forums make up the backbone of the website in terms of sheer content, with the total posts numbering at over 6000 when I checked into them. Over a quarter of these (1565) are introductions (makes sense, there are 20 times that many members), and the introductions forum also wins for the greatest number of replies, pulling in 3197 responsive postings. The posts with the most replies were as follows:

- 1) Let's share links to our blogs (435)
- 2) iPod Touch schoolwide implementation (336)
- 3) K-8 Computer Lab Teachers (217)
- 4) SmartBoard or Promethean (217)
- 5) Google Wave Invites (142)
- 6) Technology Approval Process – Hardware and Software (130)
- 7) Are interactive whiteboards necessary (123)
- 8) Quotes I like (110)
- 9) How are you using your classroom smartboard (110)
- 10) Are you using Twitter (105)
- 11) Effective ways to get teachers to use technology (100)
- 12) Where To, Classroom 2.0? (99)
- 13) iPod Touch in the Classroom (98)
- 14) The Google Wave Will Change Education Forever (88)
- 15) Wikispaces – So Far, So Good... So far (86)
- 16) Are they really digital natives (86)
- 17) Goal: Blogging for elementary students (86)
- 18) Teachers and everyday uses of technology (84)
- 19) Ning for students (80)

While this list was interesting, I noticed that none of the posts had anything to do explicitly with Web2.0 in their titles. The category with the most activity appeared to be “Help or Feedback Needed” (2342 posts), followed by “Introductions,” and “News or Noteworthy” (498 posts). This would suggest that one of the site’s major functions is to provide assistance and facilitate discussion, which would certainly shape the type of discourse about Web2.0.

I decided to limit the amount of material and paged up the search results for “Web2.0” and “Web 2.0” on the forums. In all, 2683 unique posts showed up, most of them having the identifier in the title or first couple of sentences. Many of these were short posts, announcing another website or asking a question about a topic that had already been more thoroughly addressed previously, in which case it would be redirected by a site facilitator. With a little query-string hacking I was able to sort the search returns by number of replies and look at the most-talked about items, which usually had around 40-70 replies.

PROVISIONAL THEMES

Since I could only review a subset of the massive amount of material on the site I can present a few of the consistent themes I started to stop in the hundred or so posts and replies I read. First, I should say that there was not a single post that had a reply that did not involve a link out to another website or uploaded file. Classroom 2.0 is fundamentally about centralizing and connecting links, its value rests on networking. Beyond this, other commonalities were found:

Definition

Many users inquired about the definition of Web2.0. This came sometimes in the form of an explicit interrogation of the concept, but more often in the shape of an evaluation of a given product or technology. One such reply:

“Are WebQuests Web1.0 or Web 2.0? This is my question... Any thoughts would be appreciated.”

Was very common, and pulled in a lot of interesting responses, like this one:

"I think it would depend upon how the WebQuest was put together. If, within the structure of the WebQuest, tools like bubbl.us or del.icio.us were utilized, then I could see an argument for web 2.0. However, most WebQuests I have seen seem to be web 1.0 to this point. This may be yet another area that will be revolutionized as a result of social networking. :)"

Notice how the definition of Web2.0 becomes about attaching an item to companies or technologies that are assumed to represent Web2.0? Social networking is something of a concept, but there is no explanation of the traits that would make such a site or resource Web2.0. Interestingly, another member blatantly attacked the question:

"It is probably a moot point since web 2.0 is not really a technology just a perception:

"Web 2.0" refers to a perceived second generation of web development and design, that facilitates communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web.

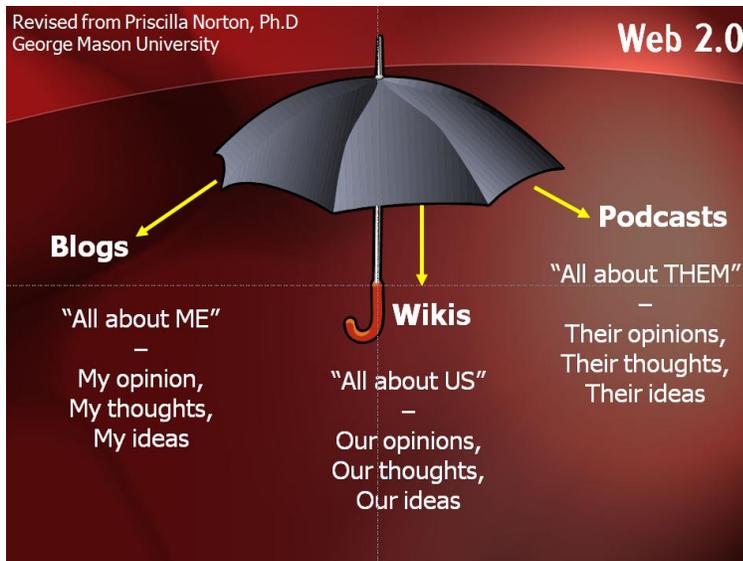
but, the rule of thumb is that if you are reading AND writing to the web then it is web 2.0 otherwise perceived as web 1.0 if you are not using a computer then I guess that is web 0.0.

Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, has questioned whether one can use the term in any meaningful way, since many of the technological components of Web 2.0 have existed since the early days of the Web.[5][6]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0"

This user rejected the assumptions made in the post, begrudgingly answered it anyway, and cited his source for explanation. Here we have another functional definition that came out quite commonly on the site: producing and consuming content. This falls in line with the social-organizational dimension of the conceptualizations introduced in the beginning of this section, but doesn't cover other aspects, like architecture.

Another user posted a Powerpoint file with an embedded explanation in response:



Referenced from another website/person the graphic conjures up a definition based on social perceptions and positionality: me, us, them. And then further down yet another user produced another unique view:

"web 2.0: In general Web 2.0 is composed of technologies that made web pages 'interactive' instead of static in nature. This could be ActiveX, Java Script, Java Modules, Flash (in its later forms) or ever the new Silverlight product from Microsoft. The key to Web 2.0 was not in the individual technologies but the combination of them in certain patterns to create a 'different' kind of site."

This person tells us that whatever Web2.0 is, it is made up of technologies that are interactive (the quotes imply some uncertainty over the definition of this term). Examples are given and it is suggested that they relate to one another in such a way that they create a different (yet again ill-defined) kind of site (or, likely, experience).

Looking for help with this one thing...

A huge number of posts asked users for help using a given technology tied to a company (social bookmarking with Delicious, for instance) or presented a problem (needed a tool to combine screen captures from many students) and asked for a technology tool solution. Many of these posts began by identifying the 'right' kind of tool they needed as one that was Web2.0.

Ideas for using something something in a lesson plan

Many of the posters were teachers looking for ideas on how to teach with or on Web2.0 in the classroom as well as school administrators who wished to teach their teachers “how to use it.” Not surprisingly the site became a stomping grounds for idea sharing and recollection of experiences in practice. Most of the time it took the form of the way a single or set of tools was applied in a classroom.

Other Topics

Some of the other themes that I would like to expound on more completely in the future included reference to kids getting around technology to use Web2.0, FERPA and privacy with use of Web2.0, digital literacy and the digital natives crisis, the concept of “upgrading” a site or school to Web2.0, and a whole lot of comparison and top-ten lists of technologies.

IN CONCLUSION

A lot was said in the ways people talked about Web2.0. Mostly apparent here is the operational definition of Web2.0 as embodied by corporate tools and websites that provide functions, usually ones that involve the two-way publishing and reception of content. This doesn't reveal a whole lot about the impacts on pedagogy, the role of power operating behind the limits and controls of production, of the lifestyle or social world that Web2.0 might represent. It remains to be seen how much of this can be found in the future.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Time constraints brought this project to a screeching (if artificial) halt, and there is a great deal more to do to really unpack what's going on in Classroom 2.0, related to Web2.0 and otherwise. Mostly this project helped me to realize that I'm less interested in studying the discourse happening in the site than its meaning to users and relation to practice. I found myself wanting to know if the people there thought it was useful, if they excitedly logged in

daily and how many lesson plans or teaching topics they gathered or contributed as a result of the site. I wanted to think about ways the site could be improved to help teachers or policy makers or students make better use of it, by doing a needs and asset assessment of its primary target population. I began to wonder how evaluation systems might be embedded into the information sharing happening on the website to ensure effective or meaningful use: the sorts of new organization or data structures (lesson plans, teacher reflections, tool guides, instructional videos, user-driven priority of materials) that could enable visitors to network the people power and data there. This is the kind of thing that I feel would make study like this more worthwhile.

I also had a battery of complex sociological questions that I couldn't address:

- Who are the people using the site? How do they see themselves, how do other see them? How does engagement differ by person?
- What can we learn about user identities in terms of active and passive use? How does this relate to meaning and value in the site?
- How do external affiliations and institutions alter the experience on the site? How does the community influence them in turn?
- What do people say they do/produce/present on the site? How does this compare to what they're actually doing? What does this say about what it means to them?
- How do users see Classroom2.0 relating to Web2.0? How do they see themselves in relation to Web2.0? How do they see other users relating to it? What does this show us about the discourse?

In the end, I'm really excited about the possibilities this work holds and to have had such a cool project to take on in my last semester of classes. I hope to come back to it in the not too distant future.

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