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Nancy Roberts

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Digital Education: Opportunities for Social Collaboration

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Part I – Theoretical Perspectives

Chapter 2 “Modified, Multiplied, and (Re-)mixed: Social Media and Digital Literacies,” by M. Pegrum, makes the case that digital literacy needs to be taught—that this school generation does not automatically have it just because they are young. All aspects of social networking must be studied, used, talked about in class under a teacher’s guidance; however, remix of web information is definitely more of a youth activity. The old phrase, “you can’t believe everything that’s in print”, is even more true for the web. Web networking is critical for a teacher’s success or responsible for a teacher’s failure, especially as many governments work to eliminate communication on the web because of their fear of the results. This chapter is an excellent review of digital literacy, what it means, and what it is going to mean.

Chapter 3, Research on Web 2.0 Digital Technologies in Education,” by C. Chaka, looks at six Web 2.0 technologies and their use in higher education, mostly foreign universities, as a series of case studies. The author concludes that more integration of these technologies is needed now to really understand their usefulness.

“The Role of Adult Educators in the Age of Social Media,” by R. Kop and P. Bouchard, Chapter 4, says that adult learners, using Web 2.0, will have much more control over their learning. The authors point to the same problem for adult learners using the web as for younger students: knowledge validity and valuing short communications. Universities are the slowest to make use of Web 2.0 learning except MIT and the British Open University. In Web 2.0 culture, deep, meaningful conversations are gone. The university is a by-gone institution unless it changes to have relevance to the way things are learned using Web 2.0. We really do not know yet what excellent on-line education looks like.

Chapter 5, “Educational Networking in the Digital Age,” states that professors and researchers have networked for centuries, but Web 2.0 changes how it is done. Research finds that disciplines act online similarly to how they had acted off-line, thus far. As the web is used more, disciplines will inevitably cooperate more than has been possible pre-web. The web has freed academics from previous rules and procedures—both of their universities and their disciplines. An academic digital identity will become more critical to an academic career. Using the web for research networking is still very new and will keep expanding.

Chapter 6, “Integrating Digital Technologies in Education: A Model for Negotiating Change and Resistance to Change,” by T. Berger and M. Thomas, questions whether the learning culture is changing because of Web 2.0 even though most people are still lurkers and

traditional educational boundaries are disappearing. One of the changes talked about sounds very much like Lesley's MAP culture, which gives learners much more control over what they learn and how they represent their learning. The Chapter presents a model to aid in the "implementation of a new learning culture." (p. 116)

Part II —Applying Digital Education

The first chapter in Part II, "Virtual Learning Environments: Personalizing Learning or Managing Learners?" by P. Banyard, J. Underwood, L. Kerlin, and J. Stiller, reviews the progress of virtual learning environments in British schools to eliminate persistent achievement gaps by personalizing learning. Virtual learning environments are described as having many pros and cons. The pros are for managing student information and the cons for teaching. The British still have a national curriculum and national standardized tests.

"Teaching Spanish in Second Life," by D. Gonzales, C. Palomeque, and P. Sweeney, Chapter 8, reports on a case study using a multiuser virtual environment, Second Life, to teach Spanish to tourists from around the world. An action research study, the multiuser virtual environment, Second Life, proved the most difficult for the students and faculty who became quite frustrated by Second Life. In spite of this, the students rated the course very high, thought it was fun and learned Spanish.

Chapter 9, reporting on a project by EDC (Educational Development Center), now a global company that originated in Newton, MA and for whom many Lesley people worked over the years, is, "'The Wisdom of Practice': Web 2.0 as a Cognitive and Community-Building Tool in Indonesia," by M. Burns and P. Bodragini. The project was a course for Indonesian technology trainers on Web 2.0 who were charged with helping the country to update its elementary teachers. The chapter details how many different Web 2.0 tools were used to train local coaches who then worked with teachers to develop online curriculum. EDC found the Web 2.0 tools retained students because they could be much more in communication with each other and the instructors. The dropout rate went way down. The Web 2.0 tools broke through Asian formal style of communication and encouraged different kinds of communication—smaller, more intimate and private.

Chapter 10, "Teaching Research Methods with Social Media," by K. Burns, describes two studies that explore ways to integrate digital social media into a research methods class to collect data, share research, and monitor online conversations. All studies referenced suggest students learn more using technology, but the older "immigrant" generation, those born before the web, sometimes had a bit of trouble using technology for teaching. The chapter reports the impact of using social media tools in courses in a management program. The students all recommended the professor use social media again because they felt more actively involved in the course. This course was in contrast to a traditional research methods class.

Chapter 11, “Deconstructing Formal and Informal Learning Spaces with Social Networking Sites,” by J. Daley is based on the assumption that this “net generation” is more creative than the non-net people and therefore more economically powerful. Social network creativity should be cultivated in more areas of formal education despite the fact it is viewed to be not safe or measurable. This is especially true in the teaching of writing. A social networking profile page is much more powerful than a personal essay. It can constantly change as the person’s identity is being created. Since students probably will not want a faculty member invading their personal space, the author suggests developing a different space for this assignment where students can develop a social networking profile. Supporting student creativity is the most important thing schools need to do in the Web 2.0 age, therefore Web 2.0 must be integrated into education.

“Digital Education: Beyond the ‘Wow’ Factor” by S. Bax, is the final chapter of the book. It discusses the process of normalization of technology: early users and others seeing the value and use as a normal part of education so it actually affects student learning. Not all students are equally expert at Web 2.0 and therefore still need a more knowledgeable adult, such as a teacher, involved. The chapter ends with a discussion of Web 3, or the intelligent web that can link many entries on one topic together like crowd sourcing. However, the author warns that many people’s opinions are not necessarily smarter than a few! Teachers need to challenge and facilitate student ideas. The author cautions that teachers must always remember what makes education different from entertainment.

This is a very eye-opening book on issues about which every educator should be thinking and making decisions. The authors make an excellent case that the web must be used in all subjects and at all education levels naturally to keep learning relevant to today and the future.