Using Social Networking to Support University Teaching and Learning

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Outline

- Introduction of social networking environment and its characteristics
- An application of an Elgg-based social networking environment at faculty of education, University of Hong Kong
- Strength and limitation
- Ongoing and future work
Web 2.0 and social networking

**Web 2.0 applications**: a group of innovative applications emerging on the Internet, demonstrating some of all of a set of Web 2.0 ideas. Some of these ideas include:

- Read and write web
- Internet-mediated social networking
- Rich user experience
- Harness the power of the crowd

(https://www.elac.edu/faculty/titlev/web20.htm)
Social networking environment and its characteristics

- Social networking environment is an online space often supports:
  - Content creation and publishing
    *Blog, Wiki, Podcast…*
  - Collaborative information discovery and sharing
    *Social bookmarking, Social tagging…*
  - Social relationship establishment and management
    *Community space, friend list…*
  - Information and content aggregation
    *RSS feed, aggregator…*
Applications of a social networking environment at faculty of education, University of Hong Kong

MITE 6323

Interactive representation of information

and knowledge

January 2007 to May 2007

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Introduction of ELGG

Elgg is an open and flexible social networking platform.

Elgg is customizable and provides a group of plug-in features, such as blog, bookmarks, RSS, file repository, wiki, and other social networking tools.

Elgg has been used to power formal or informal learning in various institutions, such as Harvard University, University of Hong Kong, University of Brighton, and University of Leeds.
Implementation of an Elgg-based social networking environment
The course aims to engage students to develop knowledge and skills for representing educational data, information and knowledge in interactive and visual ways with a variety of technology tools (e.g., Microsoft PowerPoint and Adobe Flash).

Instructor maintained a blog as a central place for students to obtain the course-related materials, additional resources, announcements, and task descriptions; invited students to provide comments; give feedbacks on student individual blogs.
Assessment tasks

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Assessment component 1: students needed to regularly develop and update a personal digital portfolio that demonstrate reflective changes in thinking, progression in knowledge and skills, present ideas, digital resources collected on internet, and show completed featured digital artifacts.

Assessment component 2: students needed to form partnership with another member of the class to design and develop one interactive visual representation for internet-based implementation.
A screen capture of the platform as seen by a student

1. A blog entry displaying a completed task

2. Comments from peers

3. A navigation column containing:
   - A brief introduction of space owner
   - Links to the pages aggregating the updated information in the system
   - Quick links to other features
   - Google search
   - Friend list: links to friends’ spaces

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In order to explore in what ways social networking software supports students’ engagement in learning, data was collected through following methods:

- The on-line activities were observed (e.g., interactions, commenting, reflections) and artifacts that they posted were examined (blog posts, files, completed tasks, bookmarks).
- A number of students were interviewed in relation to ways they used the system to support their engagement in learning.
- At the end of the course, students completed a questionnaire to evaluate the usefulness of different web 2.0 tools of the platform and report how these tools impacted on their learning.
Findings (1)

Online activities contributing to students’ meaning making from interaction with course content and others:

- Blogging and reflecting
- Commenting on work of others and responding to comments
- Receiving comments from the facilitator and from other students
- Reviewing posts and resources of others
- Reviewing comments others received
- Tagging content, describing content, searching by tags
- Bookmarking relevant web sites
Online activities contributing to students’ social interactions with others:

- Responding to posts and comments
- Sharing resource
- Creating community space and working on collaborative tasks
- Selecting friends and friends of a friend
Findings (3)

Online activities contributing to positive feelings and enjoyment of using the social networking environment:

- Blogging and responding emotionally
- Taking responsibility of own learning
Strength of Elgg as learning environment

Strength

✦ It may serve as a medium of knowledge construction
✦ It enables students to take greater control of own learning process and choose tools which best suit their needs
✦ Students have the ownerships of the environment and the active stakeholder who takes responsibility of learning
✦ It may promote social presence and feeling of intimacy in virtual space
✦ It can facilitate communication, collaboration and sharing among students and teachers

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Limitation of Elgg as learning environment

Limitation

- Extra effort is needed to track and resolve bugs.
- Functionality of student administration is weak
- Facilitating learning in a distributed online environment may require additional effort.
- Teachers may need to help students get familiar with how these new technologies can be applied for learning
Ongoing and future work

A broadening undergraduate course

*New literacies for the 21st century*
THANKS!