

web 2.0 applications as alternative environments for informal learning: a critical review

paper for OECD-KERIS expert meeting - Session 6 - Alternative learning environments in practice: using ICT to
change impact and outcomes.

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key questions...

- what evidence is there for informal learning taking place within Web 2.0 applications, and if so, in what ways? Can Web 2.0 applications be designed to facilitate informal learning?
- what potential benefits and risks do Web 2.0 applications pose for formal learning in educational institutions such as schools? Does Web 2.0 herald the increased individualization and personalization of informal online learning at the expense of learning in more formal offline settings?

questioning the educational potential of web 2.0

i) social networking sites - the example of Facebook

The screenshot shows a Facebook profile for John Potter. The profile picture is a man with short dark hair wearing a green t-shirt. The bio includes: Networks: Institute of Education Staff; Sex: Male; Relationship Status: In a Relationship; Birthday: July 19; Hometown: London, England. The Mini-Feed shows several updates: John edited his profile music on October 6, joined a group on October 6, and became friends with Mark Holmes on October 6. On October 5, he became friends with Shakuntala Banaji. On September 28, he posted 'at home at work at home' and became friends with Gerald Sterling. On September 16, he added the 'Movies' application and was tagged in two photos by Pete Fraser. On September 11, there is another update. The friends list shows Mishel Isaacs, Harvey Mellar, Andrew Burn, and Fitri Mohamad. The left sidebar contains search, applications (Photos, Groups, Events, Marketplace), and a green cursor advertisement.

questioning the educational potential of web 2.0

ii) massively multiplayer online games - the example of Second-life



what is the educational importance of these Web 2.0 applications?

- a lack of rigorous and carefully conducted research
- informal learning does not map easily onto formal educational objectives
- the limited prevalence of these new forms of online activity in the everyday digital lives of learners.
 - the homogeneity of users
 - issues of 'e-safety'

what is the potential for “scaling up”?

- beware of simply ‘importing’ informal Web 2.0 applications into classrooms on the presumption of transforming formal education
 - learners do not necessarily expect or even want to use technology in educational settings in the same manner as they do at home
- many young people are rightly mindful of the risks, as well as the opportunities, involved in fully ‘opening-up’ ICT into classroom settings and often share adult concerns over issues such as e-safety and the variable quality of learning that informal ICT uses can engender

the need for learner voice and co-construction of new learning tools

'learner voice' questions to frame future debate and research in this area:

- to what extent do learners expect/desire to use 'informal' forms of ICT use in the formal educational settings such as the school?
- which ICTs do learners see as being most motivating, engaging and personalisable?
 - conversely, which ICTs do learners see as unsuitable for the classroom and why?
- what unintended consequences and/or risks do learners see as arising from importing 'new' informal modes of ICT use into the classroom setting?
- how can these issues (such as e-safety) be addressed without curtailing the informal learning potential of ICTs?

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