Peer Learning by Means of Interactive Social Media as a Tool for Sustainable Teaching and Learning

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1. Introduction: the social role of social (digital) media

It is now unanimously acknowledged that Web.2.0 has now a fundamental role in learning and in professional development and social networking play a consistent role in this process.

Literature consistently proves how social media can effectively support peer learning and social inclusion processes in general, also supporting community phenomena like collective symbolic self-realization processes [2] and community re-creation in diasporas [3].

Good use of ICT can go some way towards resolving the problems of social and digital exclusion with specified groups of individuals. By using an ICT solution to develop innovative pedagogies to improve transversal competencies through formal and informal learning, issues concerning employability, lifelong learning, social and economic mobility can be specifically addressed. Online learning is mainly self-directed and therefore positive outcomes arise from personal involvement and certain variable that shape up involvement must be taken into account like purpose and participation for instance.

Several are the aspects of Web.2.0 that could be examined within a pedagogic perspective. For instance, researches prove that online communities can be successful for engaging back to learn disaffected youth since "a strong sense of community not only increases persistence of students in online programs, but also enhances information flow, learning support, group commitment, collaboration, and learning satisfaction" [4]. Through the concept of online communities, ICT has the potential to serve as a gateway to social inclusion.

However, computer and internet access of marginalized people are limited raising the need to develop alternative methods to approach them through ICT. In this respect several projects, like for instance the Comein project [5] have approached ICT learning through the use of mobile networks and telephones that are most commonly used by marginalized youth, as the main infrastructure for social inclusion. Using innovative real at time integrated communication video solutions, this project developed a networked media platform giving rise to mobile online communities, delivering interactive media content specifically aimed at marginalized youth.

As far as formal education (e.g. school education) is concerned, Web 2.0 tools appear to have given rise to the concept of "flipped classroom", a new, IT–based training practice that is apparently proving to be effectively advantageous, at least in certain social and learning contexts [6].

2. Sustainability in Learning

What is sustainability in learning and, moreover, how can it be defined? There are not definitions of sustainability in learning in the literature, although some sustainability issues have been faced that relate to e-learning. However, the issue of sustainability in learning and teaching seems to begin to be tackled. We want to mention two stakeholders/programmes on this issue:

1. The Macquary University in Australia has set up a "Sustainability in Learning and Teaching Grant Scheme" which will look to fund projects which:
- Develop and support sustainability skills in teaching and learning
- Identify, foster and evaluate sustainability focused learning outcomes and/or graduate capabilities
- Support sustainability focused research-enhanced learning and teaching
- Promote environmental or social sustainability" [7].

2. "Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future" is a UNESCO programme for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It provides professional development for student teachers, teachers, curriculum developers, education policy makers, and authors of educational materials. The modules are divided into 4 themes. No. 4 "teaching and learning strategies" focusses on experimental learning, storytelling, enquiry learning, learning outside the classroom and community problem solving [8].

As mentioned before, here we are tackling Web 2.0-based community reporting practices from the point of view of sustainability, where we consider sustainability in training and learning within a multiplicity of dimensions: **economical, ecological, social and didactical aspects**.

3. Sustainable learning in the ISABEL-project

In the ISABEL-project the economical dimension relates to the use of cheap equipment, free access to equipment for participants by using/renting equipment of the adult education providers, free access to software, use of free of charge music and free access to user generated content of other community reporters worldwide.

The ecological dimension is concerned with the use of energy and other resources. Partners are aware that the equipment (computers, flip cams, microphones) should be certified e.g. by Blue Angel, (see http://www.blauer-engel.de/en/index.php) and servers should be low carbon. Usually educational events are not CO2-neutral. Lots of participants travel to join a training of an adult education provider. In ISABEL the trainers are joining an already existing community and work with the community in their hometowns/origin places.

The social dimension is related to the fact that social media entail facilitation of communication and interaction of communities, which is described in lots of literature, yet [1],[2],[3]

Last but not least concerning the didactical dimension: The ISABEL-trainings use an informal empowerment approach fostering self-esteem in participants and supporting pleasant learning situations by use of easy to handle equipment. At the level of didactics, sustainability means "autonomous learning", where the latter not only is defined as the capacity of working on one's own and constructing own knowledge but promoted and acquired as a "habit of mind" [10]. Our approach follows the above mentioned UNESCO programme [8]:

- "Experiential learning engages participants in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making in contexts that are personally relevant to them. They are reporting on and for their own communities. This approach to learning also involves making opportunities for debriefing and consolidation of ideas and skills through feedback, reflection, and the application of the ideas and skills to new situations."
- ISABEL is transferring an approach from Peoples Voice Media / UK to other European countries. PVM works with communities, organizations and public bodies to use social media as a tool for greater voice and engagement. "Everybody has a voice and everybody has something to say" is the basic idea and storytelling by means of Interactive Social Media is the approach. "Storytelling is currently experiencing a considerable revival of interest. This has led many educators to think about ways in which storytelling can be used to explore important shared themes and visions." [9] ISABEL is a project being part of this movement.
- "Enquiry learning is a learner-centred approach that emphasis higher order thinking skills. It may take several forms, including analysis, problem solving, discovery and creative activities, both in the classroom and the community. Most importantly, in enquiry learning participants are responsible for processing the data they are working with in order to reach their own conclusions." [8] In ISABEL this process is conducted by media: Preparing questions for data collection in interviews (audio-and video documentaries), data analysis as a basic step for editing the material, finding solutions for technical challenges etc. All these steps are supported by a set of ethical guidelines and the development of an identity as "community reporter", responsible for the communication within the own community, evidence-based reporting and/or a comprehensive (news) coverage for a wider audience.
- "Community Problem Solving provides participants with an opportunity to practice the skills that are needed to participate in finding solutions to the local issues that concern them." [8] In ISABEL we support a peer approach for fostering local communities. Cooperation and skills bartering between participants are intended and supported in our trainings. Because communities of place or interest usually have problems, this is inherent. Our experience is: Web 2.0-based community reporting practices not only support the problem solving processes effectively but also in a very pleasant and sustainable way.

The structure of Isabel's training and learning pathways are described in detail on the project website http://www.isabelproject.eu

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