

## Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter looks at how Web 2.0 tools enhance the learning experiences for distance education students by increasing participation, community building, and a sense of presence. It is understood that Web 2.0 tools encompass tools that emphasize socialization, communication, and collaboration. The author believes that Web 2.0 tools like blogs, wikis, podcasts, social bookmarking tools, and media sharing applications will overcome inherent downfalls of distance education. The author cites several issues in distance education from the student's perspective. These problems are (1) a balance between cost and motivators, (2) feedback and availability of teacher, (3) access to support, (4) feelings of isolation, (5) lack of experience with distance education, and (6) lack of technical training. Again, it is the belief that Web 2.0 tools can mitigate these problems. It is believed that Web 2.0 tools offer richer connections and participation in global communities, an overall enhancement to the distance learning system.

One opportunity that Web 2.0 tools offer is a design of relevant and authentic experiences and learning spaces. Through an authentic learning framework students are making decisions about why and how as they investigate a problem. It has become more of a self-directed and self-regulated learning experience. Web 2.0 tools allow for significant and real-world context with meaningful collaboration. Many learners in the distance education environment have significant professional experiences thus bringing with them a treasure trove of prior knowledge and resources. Sharing these experiences through Web 2.0 tools like photos, media, and bookmarks authentic discussions and communication is created. Many Web 2.0 tools like Flickr, YouTube, and Diigo ignite authentic and relevant communication.

Web 2.0 tools offer support for social feedback, support for conversational interaction, and support for social networks and relationships between people. Although the author does cite some professionals who feel that technology is "incapable of providing customized feedback needed by learners". One aspect that supports social feedback is the design of adventure learning, which enables different levels of collaboration and interaction between learners, educators, and even content. Web 2.0 tools like blogs and wikis can be essential elements of the social presence. These tools create an open environment to share ideas and support sharing and supporting of ideas. Vygotsky believes that people learn by participating in social situations. Shifting conversations to be student centered rather than teacher centered also creates a support for conversational interaction. Posting discussions with open-ended, thought provoking questions inspires an atmosphere for students to feel safe to generate their own questions. Participation in social networks fosters sharing and communication of ideas in which members are genuinely connected and invested in the participation and connection to others in the community. Through Web 2.0 tools the feelings of individual isolation and lack of support are broken down and sharing and communication are enhanced and encouraged.

There were several examples of how educators are using Web 2.0 tools to transform the learning process in distance education. Students participating in a distance course for German and Spanish language used voice recorders and mini-camcorders to record interviews with native speakers in the language they are studying. They also created audio-visual tours to share on the Internet. The instructor provided the equipment and sample topics for the students to create their own authentic tasks for their peers. Another example is students in a philosophy class use a wiki to post summary reports that the rest of the class edits. They also peer review each other's papers and then each author makes revisions based on the feedback they get from their peers.

In summary, there can be a variety of downfalls to distance education that can be overcome through the incorporation of Web 2.0 tools. Students who participate in online and distance education don't need to experience social isolation. Distance education can promote community building and global connections through the incorporation of Web 2.0 tools. Students who participate in distance education with social interaction as the foremost feature accompanied with authentic context and resources will have an enhanced learning experience that empowers the learner.

#### **References:**

Veletsianos, G. (2010). *Emerging Technologies in Distance Education* (61- 87). Edmonton, AB: AU Press, Athabasca University.

**Submitted by Kelly Boushell  
October 13, 2011**