About ePortfolios, ICT fluency and the Web2.0 New Deal

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Abstract: The Internet is now part of our everyday lives. It used to be a useful gadget some time ago, but its now a critical – when not essential – element of our daily activities. But to help of our societies become true information societies, we need more: a deeper understanding of the new dimensions that the Net can bring to us if we agree to contribute to it, a more appropriate usage of on-line resources and a wider adoption of the web2.0 way of life to reduce the digital divide.

Keywords: electronic portfolio, ICT literacy, ICT fluency, eCulture, new paradigms, key skills, basic ICT competences, digital divide

Matter

Our societies are currently in the throes of a shift from an industrial paradigm in which individuals were perceived as "information consumers" to a paradigm in which individuals are becoming "information producers". Within the context of this study, we are referring in particular to the following facts:

– individuals are no longer only "navigating" the web as they would walk in a library or a shop, but also actively projecting themselves into the web space, contributing and exchanging content, ideas, collaborating with one another;
– education, learning and training are transitioning to accommodate and encourage self-regulated, self-directed learning and reflective practices that encompass formal, non-formal and informal learning;
– a lot of self-publishing tools are available to Internet users, but there is no general rule nor manual that explains the relations and differences between tools, especially "what kind of information may users put into these tools?" and "which tone fits each tool" (or the contrary).

These are concrete changes and questions that match the new reality of lifelong learning and competence-based approaches. Within this context, social networking
processes are taking a fundamental role, but as the Gutenberg press needed mass education to transform a technological shift into a social progress, we now need mass IT literacy to make Web 2.0 not only profit to the happy few. New medias facilitate cooperation and mutual inspiration within communities of practice, thus empowering individuals by the emergence of collective intelligence in all topics. These emerging processes of identity building affect both the public type of ePortfolios relating to digital identity and the private aspect of ePortfolios akin to personal learning environments (PLE).

When considering the adoption of web2.0 platforms and collaborative tools, one should beforehand find answers to the following questions:

- Who I am.
- What is the information I agree to share with my readers.
- Where I do draw the limits between public and private sides of my life.
- How do I manage my multiple centers of interest and define how I can show a generic (or "core") profile with specific elements for each of my communities of practices.
- What is the right tool to publish each type of information (everyday life/thoughts, long term vision and perspectives, past activities and achievements, ideas conversations, current involvements)
- What is my life today, what are my goals in life.
- How I am going to talk with my future readers.

A report on ePortfolio and digital Identity [1] deepens this process and exposes the necessity for bloggers, social network systems (SNS) users and more generally "web2.0" adopters to integrate both collaboration skills and tools, and introspective processes.

It's somehow a Taoist approach, with Yin and Yang, opposites making a whole. This necessary harmony between introspective workflow and community linking for a global digital fluency development can also be considered as a basic original practice. In fact, who designed the first ePortfolios presenting themselves to all web users as a prerequisite to better cooperate? Who where the first to develop the culture of writing articles about how to get in touch with them, about their life etc...? The godfathers and visionaries of the Internet. Some of the first ePortfolios (previously called home pages) are those from:

- Tim Berners-Lee [2]
- Vinton Cerf [3]

To prepare learners to this participative era, where discussion replaces one-way communications, education systems also need to adapt -at the same time- their own organizations and their contents. In-class courses must become more hybrid curricula where students can partly themselves organize their schedules, making face-to-face time more profitable and dedicated to either knowing people better
before future on-line collaboration, or speaking about subtle subjects that are difficult to catch on-line.

But to allow actors (teachers and learners) to mainly interact on-line, asynchronously and appropriately, one must take care of giving them the core competencies whose lack would transform this experience into a nightmare (cyberbullying, identity theft, spam, e-mail overload, inappropriate exposure of personal data, copyright violation...). A lot of efforts have been made for "digital literacy" but the next step is now "digital fluency". Teaching practical computer manipulation is far insufficient, since appropriate electronic behaviors are a socio-technical(5) subject: mixing social interactions and IT usage. The majority of current syllabuses stick to (sometimes advanced) technical matters and have difficulties to introduce social interactions, except some minimal considerations. It may be explained by the fact that computer-related subjects have been considered private hunting by computer sciences departments...

To help learners mature their relationship to digital media, the priority should be to produce a joint effort between education systems for:

– defining a common syllabus of core "digital fluency" competences, not seen as IT-related but as transversal subjects;
– training teachers of all subjects to these emerging recognized competences so that they don't produce disincentive behaviors;
– introducing these behaviors and technologies in all courses so that everybody enter the information age and don't maintain the digital divide.

Educating the masses to ICT fluency is a big challenge of the beginning of this millennium, but it's also an exceptional opportunity for citizenship. Even if its multiple dangers may tend to refrain the use of all on-line social networks, one should prefer to educate to good usage instead of focusing on threats. In this process, the ePortfolio is an extraordinary tool that comes with a process that will provide learners a lifelong companion, that will follow their evolution, difficulties and successes. Introducing ICT fluency in the basic curriculum as a basic skill is a major factor for the equality of chances of our societies.

References


What Richard Stallman's auto-responder replies when he's not currently available:

[This message was generated by an automated system.]
I am not on vacation, but I am at the end of a long time delay. I am located somewhere on Earth, but as far as responding to email is concerned, I appear to be well outside the solar system.
After your message arrives at gnu.org, I will collect it in my next batch of incoming mail, some time within the following 24 hours. I will spend much of the following day reading that batch of mail and will come across your message at some point. If I can write a response for it immediately, the response will go out in the next outgoing batch—typically around 24 hours after I collected your message, but occasionally sooner or later than that. As a result, you should expect a minimum delay of between 24 and 48 hours in seeing any response to your mail to me.

If you are having a conversation with me, please keep in mind that each message you receive from me is probably a response to the mail you sent 24 to 48 hours earlier, and any subsequent mail you sent has not yet been seen by me.

If you are in a hurry to speak with me, try sending mail to <rms-...@gnu.org> saying what you would like to talk with me about, and giving your telephone number. Another option to reach me urgently is to call the Free Software Foundation office at 617-542-5942 and ask them to contact me on your behalf. If you aren't in an immediate hurry, there is no need to contact rms-...@gnu.org or the Free Software Foundation office. I will get back to you as soon as I possibly can.

If you do not wish to receive this message ever again, please send a message to rms-...@gnu.org with the subject "OFF". Otherwise, you might receive a reply like this one up to once a month.