Learning 2.0: Discover the power of online social tools and networking services

Steve Wheeler
Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth, UK

Abstract: This workshop will explore the emerging social tools and services commonly referred to as ‘Web 2.0’. Increasingly, emerging tools and applications on the Web are being used in authentic teaching and learning contexts. Teachers need to know the benefits and limitations of these tools and how they can best be deployed to enhance the learning experiences of their students. By the end of the workshop participants will be able to set up their own virtual learning environment using existing free tools and hosted services on the Internet, and will be equipped to evaluate the effectiveness of these tools and services for teaching and learning. In the workshop we will explore e-learning using some specific emerging open architecture (Web 2.0) tools and hosted services, including:

- Wikis (e.g. Wetpaint)
- Blogs (e.g. Blogger)
- photo-sharing (e.g. Flickr)
- micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter)
- RSS feeds (e.g. Feedburner)
- Aggregators (e.g. Twemes)

The workshop leader will demonstrate a number of useful teaching and learning applications, providing participants with opportunities to develop their own skills in creating content using the tools. Wikis can be used to promote better group communication, focused discussion on specific course content and a fertile environment for collaborative writing and teamwork. Blogs can be used to encourage students to reflect more deeply on their studies and support writing for authentic audiences. Photo-sharing sites like Flickr can provide creative outlets for students, and offer useful discussion environments and social networking opportunities. Micro-blogs such as Twitter encourage students to be concise in their thinking and articulation of ideas. RSS feeds enable e-mail alerts to be sent to subscribers when the content of a website or blog is updated. Finally, aggregators are designed to bring together disparate resources and artifacts through tagging so they become easier to find, manage and use.

In the workshop delegates will also explore a number of Web 2.0 associated concepts including the social web; the architecture of participation; the wisdom of
crowds; folksonomies; social tagging and ‘friending’ (a social network term) and discover how these powerful tools and methods can be used to enhance and extend learning opportunities for students, whatever the subject or level, in schools, colleges and universities.

The workshop will be fully interactive, encouraging delegates to participate in discussions, question and answers, and academic games and quizzes throughout.