



Tecnologias da Informação em Educação

Punking up Education! New perspectives for teaching and learning

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Abstract

Technology is changing the way we see education. Concepts like informal learning are arising at the same pace as tools like youtube, facebook and twitter enter our homes. Learners are receiving new sources of information from different places and disseminating them using several tools and channels. Teachers cannot close their classroom environment without understanding what is outside. And outside there is a huge amount of opportunities to foster teaching and learning quality. In this paper we will address new ways of envisaging education as Edupunk and elearning 2.0, and will confront these new attitudes analysing their advantages and disadvantages.

Keywords: Edupunk, elearning 2.0

Resumo

A tecnologia moderna encontra-se a alterar o modo como encaramos a educação. Conceitos como o de aprendizagem informal aparecem ao mesmo ritmo que ferramentas como o youtube, facebook e twitter entram nas nossas casas. Os alunos recebem novas fontes de informação de diferentes proveniências e disseminam-as utilizando várias ferramentas e canais. Os professores não podem fechar o seu ambiente de sala de aula sem compreenderem o que se passa lá fora. E lá fora há um enorme quantidade de oportunidades de promover ensino e aprendizagem de qualidade. Neste artigo abordaremos novos modos de encarar a educação, tais com o Edupunk e o elearning 2.0, e confrontaremos estas novas atitudes analisando as suas vantagens e desvantagens.

Palavras-chave: Edupunk, elearning 2.0



Résumé

La technologie moderne est en train d'introduire des changements remarquables dans les conceptions courantes sur l'éducation. Les nouveaux outils informatiques – youtube, facebook, twitter –, largement diffusés et utilisés, ont fait augmenter très rapidement la place qui revient à l'éducation informelle. Les enseignants ne peuvent pas continuer à ignorer ce monde d'apprentissage. A l'inverse, il faut qu'ils en fassent usage eux aussi pour assurer un meilleur enseignement/apprentissage. Le but de cet article est de faire une analyse, aussi profonde que possible, du recours à de nouveaux concepts en éducation, tels que Edupunk ou eLearning 2.0.

Mots-clés: Edupunk, elearning 2.0

Introduction

Technology is changing daily and with it Education. The last decade gave us mobile phones, laptops, social media and access to online applications where and when we want. Learners now have the opportunity of getting and producing information in an individual, attractive and dynamic way, without constraints of any kind. It is easy to create and generate information and it is easy to upload it online; it is easy to have an opinion and broadcast it worldwide. New trends, such as Web 2.0 and social software, are giving everyone the power to be someone. Kress & Pachler (2007) stated that we are experiencing a transition from a stable world of knowledge produced by authors to a world where knowledge is unstable and produced by the individual. As far as education is concerned, Web 2.0 is giving learners new opportunities, allowing them to form learning networks and communities and "jump" outside classroom walls, into the virtual world. While networks have rapidly changed many aspects of society, as well as what people think and how they live in community, changes in teaching and learning have been minimal (Siemens, 2008). Attwell (2008) argues that education should embrace technology, enabling learning and knowledge for all, otherwise technology and the Internet will minimize education with potentially disastrous results. In this paper we will focus our attention on new approaches to teaching and learning using Web 2.0 tools and address new trends that evolve from this new concept, mainly the Do-it-Yourself and Edupunk attitudes.



Fear 2.0 versus Web 2.0

In Higher Education (HE) there have been recent discussions about the potential of Web 2.0 in education, the shift we are experiencing towards a new teaching paradigm and the individualisation of learning experiences. Many authors (Attwell, 2008; Siemens, 2008; Casanova, Holmes & Huet, 2009) are convinced that Web 2.0 will completely change the traditional dimensions of education, giving it more adapted and personal learning environments that will support more individualised teaching strategies. However, there have been some concerns about the use of these tools instead of the institutionalized ones, like Blackboard and other conventional Learning Management Systems (LMS), where educators can centralise their teaching or the information they produce and control it in an easier fashion.

Some academics and educators are experiencing 'Fear 2.0'. They cannot adapt to a world where learners are more capable and willing to adapt to technologies and more accurate in the demand and search for information, using Web 2.0 based applications to do so. Most of this fear is motivated by inadaptation (Attwell, 2008) and lack of confidence in the confrontation of new and challenging changes. However, important issues like institutionalised policies and demands can also justify this. In some cases the commitment of institutions in the use of LMS like BlackBoard, Moodle or Sakai, gives some academics and educators excuses for not engaging in the changes we are experiencing. On the other hand there are also academics and educators that are embracing this new trend, experiencing and testing new solutions and approaches in teaching and learning environments. This new attitude is being defined by several authors as the 'Do It Yourself (DIY)' attitude (Attwell, 2008b; Groom, 2008).

Embracing students' knowledge about social software

It is important to respond to the generation gap that we are facing and give students the opportunity to produce information and the task of participating in the production of knowledge. Theories like Constructivism, Communal Constructivism



(Holmes, Tangney, FitzGibbon, Savage, & Mehan, 2001) and Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) point towards a learning process which:

“students not only construct their own knowledge (constructivism) as a result of interacting with their environment (social constructivism), but are also actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge for their learning community” (Holmes, Tangney, Fitzgibbon, Savage, & Mehan, 2001, p.1).

To overcome the generation gap it seems inadequate to force students to work with the more convenient and institutional oriented platforms. We are not suggesting that educators limit students' hunger for information and knowledge – it is important to see students as part of the process of building knowledge and embrace this as a community (Holmes *et al*, 2001). Educators should take advantage of students' habits when relating with social networks (as Facebook, Twitter and Hi5) and collaborative applications (as Wikis and Concept Mapping tools) in order to design innovative teaching strategies and therefore create new learning experiences, adapting them to specific class contexts and situations.

One example of these teaching strategies is given by the University of British Columbia in the course *Murder, Madness, and Mayhem: Latin American Literature in Translation*, offered by Jon Murray, where students are invited to make essays about articles on Latin American literature and publish them on Wikipedia. The assessment is made using peer evaluation and a Wikipedia panel of experts (WikiProject Featured articles/FA-Team). Using this methodology, students are assessed by external experts and not just by the sole teacher's personal judgement or criteria (Murray, 2008). The main goal is to achieve the classification of 'feature article', the top classification for an article on Wikipedia (Murray, 2008). If students achieve a feature article classification they are ascribed an A+ grade.

Other examples are being promoted in the Multimedia in Education PhD programme offered by the University of Aveiro since 2008 (Aresta, Moreira & Pedro, 2009; Lucas & Moreira, 2009). Students enrolled in this programme are motivated to use Web 2.0 tools for promoting and enhancing learning environments and to experiment, with



their own students, new and attractive ways to promote learning (the majority of the students enrolled in this PhD programme are secondary education teachers). This means that students develop several learning materials using different tools and can, afterwards, use them in their teaching contexts.

The use of wikis, social bookmarking, blogs, virtual reality, social platforms, micro blogging and social media and their integration into learning environments is known to “foster and promote the development of learning communities or learning networks, in which learning can happen unexpectedly as a result of the connections and interactions of their members” (Lucas & Moreira, 2009, p.26). At the same time, because content is available to everyone, students can obtain different kinds of feedback on their essays besides the feedback given from their own teachers.

The Edupunk movement

This new teaching attitude, more centred on students' abilities and on the process of building learning communities within the classroom, is also being adopted by Educational Technologists like Jim Groom (2008) or Stephen Downes (2008). These authors label this new attitude as Edupunk. The person responsible for this new and strange denomination is Jim Groom, an Instructional Technology Specialist and Adjunct Professor at the University of Mary Washington in the state of Virginia in United States. Groom (2008) criticises the use of Blackboard and the institutional constraints posed by this tool, and suggests a new way of teaching that is more focused on the people, as he stated in his blog:

“I don't believe in technology, I believe in people. And that's why I don't think our struggle is over the future of technology, it is over the struggle for the future of our culture that is assailed from all corners by the vultures of capital. Corporations are selling us back our ideas, innovations, and visions for an exorbitant price. I want them all back, and I want them now! Enter stage left: EDUPUNK!” (Groom, 2008, p.2).

In this theory, the same author defends that educators should look at platforms like Blackboard as closed and inadequate e-learning tools and defends different



teaching and learning approaches based on theories closer to *Do It Yourself*. Edupunk is an educational approach that combines a creative drive with a maverick attitude where the educator or possibly the student designs tools that are better adapted to teaching and learning (Rowell, 2008). According to Rowell, if an educator uses blogs, makes wikis, or builds mash-ups for his classes, it is possible that he is an Edupunk.

Downes (2008) refers to Edupunk theory as a student-centered, resourceful, teacher community, rather than a corporate-sourced community. This researcher also says that this movement is a reaction against the commercialisation of learning and education and that it can give the idea that people can do the same things with open source tools rather than using expensive and corporative tools in a simpler and more personalised way. Downes (2008) perceives three facets to Edupunk: (i) the reaction against the commercialisation of learning – in particular onerous copyright; (ii) the promotion of the do-it-yourself aspect of educational technology; and (iii) the idea that people can do the same things that corporate systems do with simple tools and simple methods. For Groom (2008) it is the idea of a community and its culture that makes technology “meaningful and relevant”.

Both these authors promote this new concept using their blogs to spread the word. Downes (2008) explains how Edupunk has caught on, and spread very fast through the blogosphere. Both authors share the opinion of Caulfield (2008) when he says that Learning 2.0 is very important but cannot be associated to a product or a feature. Web 2.0 reflects a different way of approaching the WWW, where products are only one of the results (Caulfield, 2008). Atwell (2008b) adds to this idea, stating that educators often feel tempted to scrap together some issues here and there in order to fulfil students' needs. Gualtieri (2008) points out that Edupunk can also be a good solution when there is a low budget and the teacher needs different kinds of educational tools.

However, several authors also criticise this new attitude, even those who embrace Web 2.0 trends. Connell (2008), for instance, says there are several flaws in the system and that only a collective action can overcome this. For this author, Edupunk does



not seem capable of looking after the balance between the individualistic and the organised, or the balance between the power of the crowd and the personal knowledge environment. Clark's (2008) opinion is even more radical: he states in his blog that the Edupunk movement is "merely a bit of a rant by old teachers who are fed up with the job of having to use Blackboard, and want a little bit of excitement in their lives" (Clark, 2008, p. 2).

The Edupunk discussion is growing on the Internet. It began with Groom's post "the glass bee" in his blog "Bavatuessdays" in May 2008 and spread to several other blogs and discussion forums. Curiously, in a much radicalised discussion, one of the most adequate thoughts is put forth by Weller (2008) when he says that while Google Corporation has their own "Google Time", a period during the daily work when employees can experiment new tools and opportunities, universities and educators would gain with some Edupunk time that would represent a period of time given to academics to experiment with new teaching and learning strategies. Weller (2008) suggested "10% Edupunk time for all" (p.1).

Is Edupunk compatible with Collaborative Networked Learning?

One of our major concerns about Edupunk is the apparent lack of compatibility between Edupunk and Collaborative Learning. Can a trend that individualises teaching and creates a barrier between academics within each classroom be confused with a term (Web 2.0) that promotes collaboration and social education environments? Edupunk is not confined to the use of Web 2.0 applications; it is much more than that. It is individualising teaching and closing the classroom doors so that nobody can enter, experimenting, with students, the most suitable ways of teaching and learning. Of course it uses Web 2.0 technologies; of course it uses a student-centred approach – but what about sharing these experiences? It is important to keep these experiments open to community knowledge. Dron & Anderson (2007) say that networks allow us to "identify and to contribute with the people we might want to know, the subjects that fit together, the 'buzz' that is current in a subject area" (Dron & Anderson, 2007: 2463). In a community, it is possible to exchange knowledge, share experiences and find solutions. In teaching and learning it is



crucial to participate in this kind of community and discuss with peers in order to make a given strategy or a given tool even better. The objective is not to 'pop the Edupunk attitude' but to give it a more social look.

From another perspective, it is also important to discuss pedagogical issues related to teaching and learning strategies and it seems this issue is not well defined by Edupunk advocates. Thus, while the creativity of the strategies that are being used is important, this does not mean that pedagogical issues should be neglected.

Another concern we have is recognition. Edupunk is individualising the ways of teaching but also the ways students are being evaluated. In Europe, and because of the Bologna guidelines, we are experiencing standardisation in terms of the design of learning outcomes, assessment and recognition. We are taking big steps in achieving a more coherent European Higher Education Area and making course structures and the European Credit Transfer System more and more comparable.

Groom (2008) offered a name for an educational approach that embraces ICT and online communities that also fosters the involvement of students in their own education (Rowell, 2008). Assuming that learning is a highly social process Edupunk can be seen as a sign to wake-up educators and to help them develop new didactic approaches improving the future of teaching and learning, as referred by Ebner (2008).

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