THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WHOLE GLOBE INTO AN ESL CLASSROOM WITH COLLABORATIVE WEB 2.0 TOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The internet applications first labeled by Tim O'Reilly in 2004 as Web 2.0 have offered numerous new opportunities for the English teachers. Blogging, wikis, podcasting, and social networking are a few examples of the so-called Web 2.0 technologies that language teachers are currently exploring. However, not only many ELT teachers currently working at the schools but also a good number of prospective English teachers' awareness of Web 2.0 tools in ELT is far from satisfactory (Usluel and Mazman, 2009). This paper aims to provide awareness for the educators for the potentials of Web 2.0 tools in language learning and teaching. A theoretical foundation for a technology enhanced pedagogy is outlined, one that places Web 2.0 within a social constructivist and connectivist context. Also the importance of Web 2.0 tools in providing comprehensible input to the language learner is emphasized. Finally, an overview of relevant technologies applicable to ELT is provided, along with successful classroom usage models and links to online resources.

ÖZET

İlk kez Tim O'Reilly tarafından Web 2.0 olarakadlandırılanetkileşimli internet uygulamalarıİngilizce öğretmenleri için yeni fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Buna rağmen Web2.0 uygulamaları ile ilgili farkındalık düzeyi gerek İngilizce öğretmenleri gerekse İngilizce öğretmenliği adayı öğrenciler arasında oldukça düşük düzeydedir (UsluelveMazman, 2009). Bu makalede Web 2.0 araçlarının İngilizce eğitiminde öğretmenlere sağlayabileceği fırsatların neler olabileceği konusu incelenmektedir. Sosyal yapılandırmacı ve bağlantıcı öğrenme bağlamı kapsamında Web 2.0 uygulamaları elealınmıştır. Ayrıca Web 2.0'ın anlaşılabilir girdi sağlamada önemi vurgulanmıştır. Son olarak, bu bağlamda başarılı sınıf uygulamalarının neler olabileceği konusu irdelenmiştir.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interactive internet applications which allow the user to perform a more active and participatory role on the net was first labeled by Tim O'Reilly in 2004 as Web 2.0. The traditional internet applications, which are known as Web 1.0, include only the presentation of the content to the user. The users are sole consumers. They have no chance to contribute or make any changes on the content of the web page they visit. In Web 2.0

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however, the sole consumer is replaced by a more contributing and participatory user. The user has an active role; he/she can control the content of the site. He/she is not only bound with whatever content he is presented. With the recent technological developments and a philosophical shift of knowledge, the internet has become more and more interactive today.

2. WHY SHOULD ENGLISH TEACHERS CONCERN ABOUT THE WEB 2.0?

The implementation of Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom does not immediately improve the teaching quality to an immense level. A teacher deciding to use a new technology in the classroom takes the challenge of increasing his burden of already existing practices and this requires extra time and effort. So, the fundamental questions that should be asked by a teacher deciding to apply a new technology must be these: Is this new technology worth allocating time and effort? Is it a must to implement Web 2.0 technologies to practice a good teaching? The answer is absolutely not.

So then, if the Web 2.0 technology is not something must for a good teaching practice, why should the teachers concern themselves about the issue? Good teaching practice requires a desire of making a difference in students' lives. Therefore, any effort and patience shown to achieve this goal and an inspiring character complementing all these are necessary components for an effective teaching practice.

As foreign language teachers, every new development in technology concerns us, because our subject matter is oral and written communication and this is what we call language, which covers every aspect of human life. Usually the human response to a new technological innovation comes out of a 3 stage cycle which is called "Hype Cycle". In the first phase the new technological innovation arouses a great excitement and unrealistic expectations. Then comes the next stage of disappointment in which people start to think that this new gadget is of no value at all. The real fruitful stage of new innovation is the last stage. In this phase, people learn

to evaluate the innovation with its strong and weak points and more realistic expectations are created.

Web 2.0 based internet applications were first met with great excitement and became a cover story for the Time magazine. In 2006, the Time columnist Lev Grossman wrote that the Web 2.0 applications on the net not only changed the world, but also opened a new way on how to change the world. Although, we cannot easily say how the world will be changed through Web 2.0, we can definitely assume that Web 2.0 will present new perspectivesin ELT classrooms.

3. WHICH LEARNING THEORY ACCOUNTS FOR WEB 2.0?

Computer assisted language learning dates back to the first wide use of PCs in 1980s. In this first phase, which is called Web 1.0, students were able to do some applications on the ready-made software they were presented. They were not allowed to make any changes or any contributions on the content of the program they were studying. The Web 2.0 applications on the other hand, present a more contributory learning media in accordance with the contemporary learning theory of connectivism (Siemens, 2004).

The behaviorist, cognitivist and constructivist learning theories used in the past to design learning programs do not suffice today. According to **behaviorist learning theory**, learning is so complex to be comprehended fully. The fundamental principles of behaviorism can be stated as follows:

1. We should focus on the observable behaviors of individuals rather than focusing our attention to the inner complex mechanisms in human mind which are far from any clear explanation.

2. The human behaviors should be examined as definable stimulus response phases.

3. Learning can only be explained by observing the changes in behaviors.

The cognitivist learning theory compares learning like a computer that processes data and explains the acquisition of new information and skills likewise. According to this model, individual first processes the information gathered from the environment in his short term memory. Then, the meaningful information within these newly received data is stored in long term memory as mental symbols. This recorded information is therefore learned.

The constructivist model, on the other hand, argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. Learning happens as a result of individual's endeavor of giving meaning to his/her experiences. The behaviorist and cognitivist models handle knowledge as a phenomenon that is outside of the individual. The constructivists, however, argue that individual is not an empty vessel filling himself/herself with output coming from outside. He/she rather actively selects, processes and constructs knowledge with meanings given to one's individual experiences.

Roughly speaking, behaviorist, cognitivist and constructivist learning models hold learning as a phenomenon happening within an individual's inner world generally. These three models view learning is an inner and individual activity. Learning takes place through stimulus-response connections created by observable factors (behaviorist view). Though these observable factors come from outside world, the learning in the end occurs within one's mind. Similarly, cognitivist learning theory and constructivist model view learning something occurs within the mind either as a process of information or attribution ofmeaning to life experiences. Even in social constructivism in which learning is claimed to occur as a result of social interaction, learning is something inner.

In modern world, due to the technological and social advances that reduce the half life of knowledge rapidly, the learning paradigms mentioned above cannot be sufficient. According to the American Statistical Association, the present knowledge we have in today's world has doubled in the past 10 years. In other words, what we know of today was unknown 10 years ago. However, at present the half life of knowledge is less than 2

years. The American Statistical Association data assumes that in the next 18 months what we know of today will double, which means a 100% increase in 1.5 years.

So what does this mean? This means that a society organization assuming individuals going to school for some period of time and then graduate and keep on their work will no longer work. Knowledge is so abundant and this vast amount increases so rapidly that lifelong learning is not a fantasy, but a must. Therefore, the fundamental skill that an individual in today's school must achieve is learning to learn. In a world in which knowledge is so widespread, to act by using the knowledge that is not stored in our mind is more important. Here is where the connectivist model accounts for.

The connectivist model sees continuous learning as a process of recognizing the relationships between disciplines, ideas and concepts and give decisions based on these relationships. Accordingly, the fundamental skill of an individual in connectivism is the ability of deciding on what to learn and what these newly learned information mean. A correct decision based on the present data might become a wrong one depending on the changing context. In short, the connectivist model sees learning no more as an inner and individual activity, but rather an impact of the social changes on individual.

In modern world, as knowledge flourishes every single day, the important thing is not to know how, but rather to know where. Informal learning today is as important as formal learning. Social sharing Web 2.0 addresses affect even format individuals in terms of lifelong learning, professional development, socialization, etc. Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theories must be realized this way in modern world.

The general learning models mentioned above are not enough to explain the language competence acquired by people. The acquisition of morpho-syntactic rules and lexical items are the main issues in language learning. Human beings do not learn or acquire their mother tongues through imitation or processing information only. There must be some

innate capacity that enables human beings to acquire the complex language systems. This inner mechanism is called "Language Acquisition Device" by Noam Chomsky. The **nativist** interpretation of language acquisitionis based on the assumption that all human languages evolve from a core set of abstract rules called Universal Grammar. The comprehensible input that triggers the innate Language Acquisition Device enables the children to decode the nature of his/her L1 and thus leads to successful production of it.

4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WEB 2.0 IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS?

According to a study conducted in the U.S., 90% of the 12-17 age group of youth use the internet almost every day (Greenhow & et al., 2009). In Turkey, the rates must be similar especially for the urban youth population. In another study, 55% of the youth on the net were found to be using social sharing Web 2.0 sites on a continual basis (Greenhow & et al., 2009). These findings reveal us that the English instructors have a potential to exploit this widely used medium to realize their course objectives.

In order to accomplish this, the English instructors themselves first get to know about Web 2.0 applications. The best source of help to achieve this goal would again be the internet itself. First of all, we could start the work by visiting the blog address *http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com/2007/01/learning-20-message.html* This site is an internet project prepared for the introduction of Web 2.0 for the personnel of a library in Charlotte, North Carolina. When the users complete the 23 activities in the site, they both have an understanding of Web 2.0 and win presents like a laptop or MP3. The example activities in the site are as follows:

1. Visit http://www.blogger.com/home and prepare your own blog,

2. Visit http://www.flickr.com and share your photos there. Search for a photo on a certain topic, download and upload photos.

3. Activities on RSS (Really Simple Syndication). RSS is a special XML file format used to publish frequently updated works —such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video — in a standardized format. The internet user can subscribe to the site and follow the continually updated content by using a reader. http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english presents a 3 minute comprehensive video on RSS.

4. Visit addresses such as http://generatorblog.blogspot.com/, http://www.letterjames.com/start.php?mod=image-personalization to gather information on photo and image making.

5. Visit http://www.librarything.com to check for the activities in which people online catalogue the books they read and write comments on them. There are also comments on similar web addresses.

6. Visit http://www.rollyo.com to make your personal search engine on the net.

7. Visit http://delicious.com to get information about social bookmarking. There is a 8-minute introductory video on http://www.ottergroup.com/learning2.0/?p=14 about delicious.com. By bookmarking your frequently used addresses in delicious.com, you can easily access your favorite addresses from any computer. At the same time, you can contact others visiting your favorite addresses. So, let's say you are doing a research on the use of Web 2.0 in foreign language teaching. By using delicious.com, you can easily contact researchers from anywhere in the world studying on the same topic.

8. To learn to work with blog pages like Technorati by using bookmarking sites.

9. To learn about popular Web 2.0 Wiki, YouTube, etc. applications.

By following the above steps, you can raise your awareness and experience of Web 2.0 practices. By having been exposed to more Web 2.0 experience we can develop new perspectives and ideas on how to use

Web 2.0 in our language teaching practices. We can encourage our students on the use of blogs, podcasts and social networking sites to prepare their class projects. The Web 1.0 practices of ELT students usually covered listening and reading skills. Web 2.0 practices on the other hand, can cover a whole range of 4 skills including speaking and writing. Therefore, Web 2.0 practices on the net are more appropriate for the course objectives of ELT especially for learners having intermediate and above proficiency.

From the point of language acquisition hypotheses, Web 2.0 sites offer a promising resource of comprehensible input. In the field of second language acquisition we can mainly talk about three general hypotheses (Krashen, 2007). The hypotheses to be considered are these:

1. The Comprehension Hypothesis, the view that we acquire language and developliteracy when we understand what we hear and what we read.
2. The Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, which claims that language acquisition occurs when we are forced to produce language beyond our current competence. We change our hypothesis about grammatical rules and word meanings when we are not understood and have to "try again."
3. The Skill-Building Hypothesis says that we improve when we make mistakes and are corrected, thus changing our conscious idea of what the rules of the language are. According to this hypothesis, we first consciously learn about language, that is, study the rules and vocabulary. Through output practice the vocabulary and grammar become automatic. (The second and third hypotheses are basically the same and in contradiction with the first. But here they are presented as if they are emphasizing different aspects of language development without any contradiction among themselves.)

In all of the above mentioned acquisition hypotheses Web 2.0 applications can claim a role. Comprehensible input hypothesis claims second language acquisition to occur only if learner is exposed to a fair amount of listening and reading input that he understands. To receive this

input, the internet can be a valuable source. Podcasts or youtube for instance, can offer a great amount of listening input. Myers &Linzmeier (2007) coined the term "Free Web Surfing" as a possible means of language development. Free voluntary surfing is doing free voluntary reading on the Internet, or using the Internet to locate printed material of interest for free reading.

From the points of Comprehensible Output and Skill-Building hypotheses Web 2.0 applications can again offer numerous benefits. Social network media like blogs or facebook writings and you tube video presentations encourage language production. Learners should adapt their language output in order to give their intended message to their audience. This output practice, according to output hypothesis, improves the language competency of the learners. At the same time it builds not only receptive skills, but also productive skills like speaking and writing.Web 2.0 applications especially enable post-intermediate learners practice what they have already acquired. An important point to mention here is that the Web 2.0 applications enable the learners to practice their already acquired language skills out of the classroom. With Web 2.0 the English courses are no more restricted within the borders of the language classroom.

Following are some suggestions on how to exploit some example Web 2.0 sites in ELT:

1. Twitter.com: Short writing practices especially for those learners who are not fond of writing long passages. Besides, students have a chance to practice authentic daily spoken language.

2. The blog sites like http://supportblogging.com/ ; http://www.21publish.com/; http://www.edublogs.com/ can be used to share various activities out of the classroom.

3. The podcast sites derived from the combination of words of ipod and broadcast such as http://www.podcastalley.com or http://www.podcastpickle.com can be very useful in improving the speaking and listening skills of learners. Students can also upload their audio and video files or can make narrow listening on following podcasts on a certain

topic. For example, students can be asked to upload their comments on a book or movie they have recently read or watched. So, anyone on the net can follow these comments and students will most likely enjoy contributing to such an activity. In the end, a podcast class library on various topics can be established at the end of the semester.

4. Social network sites like www.myspace.com or www.facebook.com having 100s of millions of users or video sharing sites such as www.youtube.com or http://www.teachertube.com/ can be quite useful in providing our students authentic materials. They can also be used in encouraging the learners to produce something interesting and new by using their English.

5. Students can be asked to upload their visual materials on www.voicethread.com and all students can make comments on other's works. These comments can be written messages, audio files or live connections. So, learners from different parts of the world can have a chance to interact on a topic.

To conclude, Web 2.0 practices are valuable resources in encouraging the students' creativity and personal use of second language. Besides, English instructors can share their successful activities and opinions with their colleagues throughout the world. With the help of Web 2.0, the English can be carried out of the classroom and this is important for especially students learning English as a foreign language. Because foreign language learners, as compared to second language learners, usually do not have a chance to practice their language out of the classroom. For them, the internet can be the most precious medium. Withthe help of Web 2.0 technologies, the whole globe is transformed into an ESL environment.

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