

Web 2.0 in Education: Policy, Practice and Progress

by James Bosco

Social networking and participatory culture are an integral part of life today. Will schools jump on the bandwagon or be left behind?

There is little doubt that young people today like Web 2.0 and use it a lot. While it is not surprising that they use it to maintain social interaction with friends, as well as for other recreational activities, it may be less apparent that the majority also report using Web 2.0 to talk about education-related topics. The nature of the Internet also makes it possible for individuals with unusual (or “long tail”) interests to find kindred spirits on the Internet. In this way, a young person who is very interested in oceanography or apiculture or forensic dentistry can find resources, share products of their own making, and encounter other young people who share a passion for the topic.

Since digital media – and particularly Web 2.0 applications – are a standard feature in the lives of young people and since there is a proliferation of powerful Web 2.0 learning resources with educational potential, it makes sense for schools to avail themselves of the opportunities these applications provide to enrich the learning environment of classrooms. But is this happening? Are schools welcoming Web 2.0 or are they shutting the door on it?

From December 2008 to February 2009, CoSN conducted an online survey of school administrators to determine their perspective on such questions. According to the survey, district administrators overwhelmingly believe in the educational value of Web 2.0 and expect that Web 2.0 will require a new type of teacher training and result in a blending between formal and informal learning. And yet most respondents say that Web 2.0 tools have not yet been integrated into their district’s curriculum.

What’s standing in the way of more widespread implementation?

Despite the case that can be made for the use of Web 2.0 in education at a philosophical level, the issue of if and how Web 2.0 should actually be deployed in schools is problematic. The way in which school districts respond to the opportunities and challenges of implementing Web 2.0 in classrooms falls into three categories:

- Trying to protect students and instructional time by banning Web 2.0 or setting policies to keep it “safe.”
- Preserving existing programs and practices by using technology in a way that “fits” into what is already in place.
- Taking a progressive approach based on the idea of discontinuous change that allows technology to transform the organization rather than moving it faster and further on its existing path.

The complete article includes:

- A look at the policy and leadership challenges schools face in implementing Web 2.0.
- Case studies of districts that have welcomed Web 2.0.
- An interview with Michael Horn, co-author of the book *Disrupting Class*.
- Resources for learning more.

The monograph summarized here is one of six that make up the **2009 CoSN Compendium**. CoSN members have free electronic access to the complete monograph in the **MyCoSN** section of www.cosn.org and non-members can order a copy in the **Resources** area of the site. To join CoSN or learn more about its programs and activities that support leadership development for technology leaders, visit www.cosn.org or call (866) 267-8747.

