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► **To cite this version:**

Claudia Steinberger. Making online-courses more learner centred, more learner driven and more social. Conference ICL2007, September 26 -28, 2007, 2007, Villach, Austria. 5 p. hal-00257137

HAL Id: hal-00257137

<https://telearn.hal.science/hal-00257137>

Submitted on 18 Feb 2008

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eLearning 1.1/2

Making online-courses more learner centred, more learner driven and more social

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Key words: *eLearning 2.0, LMS, learner centred, experiences*

Abstract:

This contribution focuses the question if is it possible at all to follow eLearning 2.0 paradigm using a state of the art learning management system or do we have to replace well established tools in order to advance eLearning. How can teachers develop their online courses regarding to eLearning 2.0 perceptions?

During the last years the author tried to enhance her online courses to make them more learner centred, learner driven and social. Her substantial experiences are summarized.

1 Introduction and Motivation

Web 2.0 characterizes a set of new technologies and applications giving the Internet completely new dynamics. Buzzwords like wikis, weblogs, podcasts, feeds, social software, tagging and user generated content are focused. Web 2.0 applications move previous desktop applications into the Internet using special Internet potentials. Texts, videos and photos can be put into the web. Tagged this produces a totally new experience. Prior private user content can be seen by unknown people forming communities. Applications like flickr, youtube or blogger show the additional quality moving from traditional applications toward the Web. Kerres [1] characterizes Web2.0 through the movement of 3 borders:

- **User vs. Author:** user becomes author
- **Local vs. Remote:** the border between local and remote data storage and processing becomes indistinct
- **Private vs. Public:** private information becomes increasingly public

Based on this new perception and utilization of the Internet Stephen Down formed in October 2005 the buzzword 'eLearning 2.0' [2]. eLearning 2.0 intends learning processes using the opportunities mentioned above, are user centred and learners are motivated, creative, contribute ideas and content of their own and learn in a social way more than in structured courses in form of compulsory content and online tests. To support such learning processes eLearning 2.0 environments are supposed

- to be a portal to the Internet showing learners paths to learning materials in the web
- to integrate feeds form external applications (mashups)

- to export feeds to external applications
- to offer tools for flat content development
- to support tagging of information
- to let the user create his/her own working environment (communication tools, author tools)
- to support social group processes and shows social presence
- to support community building and group engagement
- to document learning processes and learning results (ePortfolio)
- to enable reflections
- to support coaching of learners [see also Kerr06]

But these eLearning 2.0 demands are per se informal. This raises the question how these ideas can be didactically and technically implemented now in practice.

This paper focuses the question if it is possible to follow the eLearning 2.0 paradigm sketched above still counting on established Learning Management systems (LMS). Can LMS be used anymore, do they have to play another part within a new eLearning environment or do we have to replace well established LMS completely. How can teachers develop their courses more learner centred, more learner driven and more social without having to set up their familiar eLearning environment from scratch?

2 On the way from eLearning 1.0 to eLearning 2.0

In practice in many organizations LMS are the core of eLearning infrastructure. Human resource developments aim to train their teachers to apply the LMS within their courses. Typically these courses comprehend a closed group of students and it is unusual for teachers to make an online course general public.

In most cases the success rate of eLearning development in organizations is quantified in 'number of online-courses' offered. But let's have a closer look at these online courses. Most of them are well structured and teacher driven and do not implement the eLearning 2.0 demands mentioned above. They are more alike the course sketched in figure 1. In courses of this type content is teacher driven and students have to accept and use resources that are provided by the teacher. They hold their documents and working materials private and local on their clients and upload only selected files to the teacher for assessment purposes. An online community is quasi not existent and if one exists this is not visible and not embedded into the online course. Students can hardly co-work and are virtually isolated.

Undoubted in some situations this type of online courses fulfils its purpose. But in most cases learning quality could be raised by teachers changing their educational style and with it the look and feel of the appropriate online course. Technology can not work 'eLearning wonders' without appropriate pedagogic. This is guilty the more virtual a course is.

In reality teachers often lack of readiness to change their educational style and are disappointed of their eLearning benefits. They shy to invest a lot into online assistance. To overcome this barrier it is definitely necessary that as well teachers as students find out advantages of efficient learner centred online courses. That means that learning in new scenarios should not automatically increase time and efforts for teachers and students. Teachers and students must be made more flexible in time, location, contribution and

cooperation. To reach these goals educational style has to be changed. To save time and efforts well known eLearning infrastructure and knowledge to handle it should be reused as far as possible.

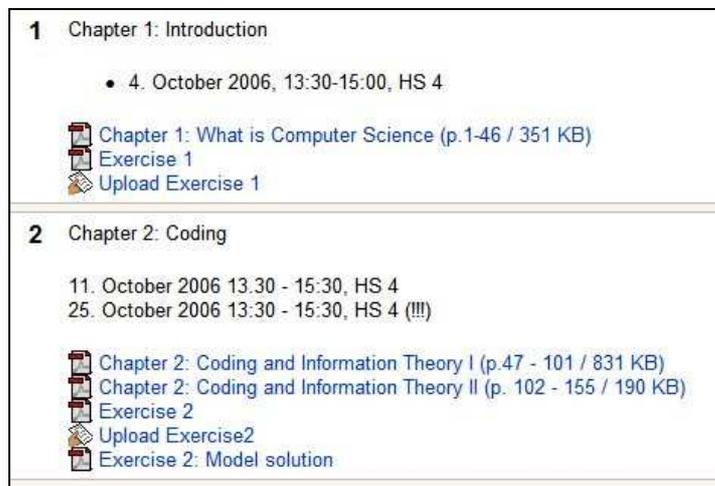


Figure 1: Detail of a typical eLearning 1.0 online course

But is our long established LMS technology adequate for these changes? How can eLearning 2.0 demands be implemented? In the following this will be investigated based on personal experiences of the author.

3 Some Experiences

At Alpe Adria University Klagenfurt Moodle is used as LMS. During the last years the author tried make her online courses more learner centred, learner driven and social. Moodle standard learning activities but also some additional tools (Dokuwiki, Teamspeak, Skype, Persony, Mister Wong) have been used to implement online courses more agile. In the following some technical as well as didactical hints how eLearning 2.0 demands could be implemented are summarized:

- **to be a portal to the Internet showing learners paths to learning materials in the web**
 - forum to upload files and links
 - Wiki to gather and evaluate links
 - forum discussions of actual topics (to acquire knowledge) with references to good content
 - RSS feeds from other resources
- **to offer tools for flat content development**
 - moderated forum to discuss central themes in a structured way
 - agree upon rules (discussion rules, moderation rules, assessment rules)
 - Wiki to develop content (rights assessment, anonymous entries, embedded forum)
 - Wiki to protocol working processes (separate group)
 - use forum instead of assessment tool (especially for group projects)

- move from 'separate' to 'visible' to publish individual/group work and enable p2p learning
- Wiki to let students co-develop questions for tests (incl. model solutions),
- reward online activities

- **to support tagging of information**
 - social bookmarks (del.icio.us, Mister Wong)

- **to support social group processes and shows social presence**
 - chat is sometimes so cumbersome -> tools to audio/video communication (instant messaging, Skype, Teamspeak)
 - use 'who is online'

- **to support community building and group engagement**
 - use playground to introduce the online course, emoderate online course (G. Salmon)
 - let students organize their groups (Forum, Wiki, Choice)
 - reward engagement

- **to document learning processes and learning results**
 - Wiki to write learning/project diary (group, individual)
 - Wiki to protocol f2f lessons for those who could not participate

- **to enable reflections**
 - Wiki to give feedback (anonymous)
 - 'Choice' to find out general opinion and mood of the group

- **to support coaching of learners**
 - stay in contact with learners (audio/videoconferencing, messages)
 - give feedback to their work
 - show online presence

4 Lessons Learned

Referencing the eLearning 2.0 demands of chapter 1 it now becomes clear that the claim to be 'full eLearning 2.0' compliant could not be fulfilled within the experimental online courses.

But it was quite good possible to obtain at least eLearning 1.½ with standard Moodle-learning activities (e.g. to act as a portal to the internet, flat content development, enable reflections, coaching process). Additional tools were used to compensate weaknesses and shortcomings (e.g. another Wiki system, videoconferencing tool, desktop sharing tool, instant messaging tool).

Looking back at the experiences with the management of the online courses following insights became obvious:

- The benefit of an online course is dependent of the appropriate educational style and the motivation of coach and learners to get into the scenario
- Moodle is a very valuable 'brick in the wall' but not sufficient at all times
- Wiki is a very necessary tool for many scenarios but Wiki (Erfurt) is too weak

- using Moodle together with additional tools demanded for redundant user/group management (non single sign on) – exhausting for teacher and students
- It was hard to permanently assess students (online points) – more flexible reports, interfaces to exchange assessment data
- There are insufficient comfortable download opportunities
- security barriers (client installation, locked boards)

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