Research Article

The Scope of Integration of Web 2.0 Tools in a Social Science Classroom

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Abstract

Social, collaborative, interactive, and creative are all some of the key words that can be used to describe Web 2.o technology in today's times. The recent researches conducted in the field of educational technology elaborately talk about the plethora of web 2.0 tools that are being used every day by the students and teachers in varied disciplines, but even then the knowledge and competency among the teachers about the scope of integration of web 2.0 tools specially in context of teaching of social science are still less better known. This paper elaborately discusses mainly about the scope of integration of web 2.o tools in a social science classroom based on some useful reviews from recent researches done in the field of social sciences. Specific web 2.0 tools such as- Popplet, iCivics, GeoSpace and community walk are some web-based software that cater directly for the purpose of enabling teachers to create an environment in the classroom for the students to learn better in an experiential style. The paper also talks about the methodology of how to use these tools effectively in the social science context. These technological applications are some of the latest educational strategies related to the process of teaching & learning to enter the classroom thus enabling the students and teachers to integrate and innovate with new knowledge and understanding of the societal elements.

Keywords: Web 2.0 tools, Social science classroom, Web based technologies integration

Introduction

The technology advocates of the 21st century suggest that the Web2.0 applications over the last few decades have inspired a tremendous potential to transform education strategies in terms of its discourse in teaching and learning. Recent studies and surveys show that the internet today offers a plethora of web based tools out of which some are so common that they are used as a social platform every day by everyone such as Facebook, Doodle, WhatsApp,etc. Clearly these web based technologies are a part of nearly every students and teachers life & career.Recent researches suggest that although these technology based web tools are used on a daily basis they are barely used efficiently enough to render the maximum potential benefit for the students in the process of their learning.(National Center for Educational Statistics,2010).

The present technological tools presents educators from all disciplines with numerous opportunities to facilitate students to use these tools synchronously or asynchronously in their own self-regulated virtual learning environments allowing them a chance for active collaboration, connection and curation leading towards acquiring 21 century skills.(Unger and Tracey ,2014).

Martorella (1997), a pioneer in social studies education suggests that Social studies is a content area that has a lot to gain through the integrating of web based technology

into its teaching and learning practices in the classrooms.

In recent years through the means of constant research in the field of social sciences researches suggest that the content area of social studies have undergone an evolution mainly due to the rapid development and advancements in technology over the years. All of this has resulted in several pedagogical changes due to the effective integration of technology. The decade of domination of knowledge transmission by orientated teaching have now turned with the wheels of time. (Crocco & Cramer, 2005)

This paper mainly focus on the scope of integration of web 2.o tools in a social science classroom and provides some reviews based on recent researches of some useful web 2.o tools for a social science class such as Popplet,iCivics,GeogSpace and Community Walk along with strategies to use them effectively in class . Lastly the challenges faced in the integration process of these web based technological tools will be addressed for in context of a digitally & globally connected social science classroom.

Evolution of technologies in social science context

Social Science has been a discipline of arts and humanities that has undoubtedly been under constant research form generations. Several of the social studies education researchers such as Martorella, (1997); Whitworth & Berson, (2003) all keenly suggested that the integration of web based technology into social studies classrooms surely has a tremendous potential to encourage active student inquiry (Lee, Doolittle, Hicks, 2006).

Martorella (1997), a pioneer in the field of social studies education, describes the use of technology as a part of the social studies curriculum as the "awakening of the sleeping giant." The emphasis of technology here in terms of evolution is connected to the "awakening," which is specific in teaching and learning strategies for social studies have evolved as well as believed by the social studies researchers. (Friedman & Hicks, 2006).

In general, the term Web 2.0 mainly comprises of a wide range of web-based tools that actively support the user to build their own virtual learning spaces that facilitate in collaboration, communication, and sharing of content through easy user friendly interfaces (Butler 2012).

The scope of using web 2.0 tools in a social science classroom

- Web 2.0 tools have tremendous potential due to their knowledge-sharing and knowledge-building capabilities to enable students to develop active participation traits and harness 21st century skills such as collaboration, communication, and critical-thinking skills, as well as digital literacy from the classroom itself.(Discipio

2008; Pascopella 2008).
- Another characteristic of Web 2.0 tools is that many are numerous open source that are freely available, which could benefit both teachers and students by giving them access to use them 24/7, both in and outside of school. (Solomon and Schrum 2007).
- The core of the purpose of social studies curriculum is well served with the use of Web 2.0 tools in the classroom as they support problem-based learning and guided inquiry learning in any social science class irrespective of the age. (Bolick, Berson, Coutts, & Heinecke, 2003).
- The participatory culture enables the students and teachers make meaningful connections through the web which leads them to building up networks as a community of learners from all walks of life as a medium to strengthen the understanding of self and society along with one another (Light & Keisch, 2010).
- The students are offered ample opportunities to be able to explore and experience and most importantly apply the key research skills for the better understanding, interpretation, evaluation and analysis of different disciplines under social studies. (Kirkpatrick, 2006).
- Web 2.0 tools fosters an environment that supports inquiry based learning and constructivism and reduces the technical skills required to use their features by the user, thus allowing the users to focus on information exchange and take well informed decisions making skills in order to prepare them to be players on a global stage. (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

These latest web based tools can also force educators to rethink the way we teach and learn and to transform our education practices so that we can support more active and meaningful learning that involves "learning to be" as well as "learning about."

Reviews of web 2.0 tools for a social science classroom

Recent researches conducted by the social scientist reveal that the increase of inclusion of technology in the classrooms has allowed social studies to become a more active and hands-on content area. It is also important to note that the students today are all digital natives and therefore they are more comfortable with constant utilization of new technologies in every sense. (Jones & Fox, 2009).

The following sections highlights how various Web 2.0 tools can be utilized in the social studies context to support and enhance teaching and learning process in a classroom.

Popplet- https://popplet.com/

Popplet is a wonderful i-pad web 2.0 based tool for mind mapping with click-and-drag options that easily facilitates easy organization of information, pictures, and drawings

for the student in a way to develop a sort of mind mapping tool by the students themselves. It can be used in a social science classroom for any class of history,civics & geography. Kelly Schrum (2011) Director of Educational Projects at CHNM, at George Mason University supports the fact that using such web based tools in a social science classroom provides ample opportunities to students to find a quick way to organize information, color-code topics, type in data, and add comments to help the students brainstorm ideas. Here are some of the examples done by students-http://blog.popplet.com/category/popplet-examples-2/ The students can even create a group that can further create a sort of a mind map on one space by adding their own ideas or commenting on group mates' ideas at different times without meeting each other face-by-face. If necessary, students can even add multimedia files directly from Flickr, Facebook, or own computer and also add Google maps and videos from YouTube directly into their mind map to make it more comprehensible. In the end of the session each of the groups can have its own mind map ready for sharing and getting feedback from their peers and teachers.

iCivics – https://www.icivics.org/

iCivics is a free web-based 2.o resource founded by Sandra Day O'Connor which engages the students & teachers to create an environment that is highly interactive and engaging in teaching & learning Civics content in any classrooms. It uses the form of games, activities, lesson plans and other digital content. iCivics puts the students in such unique civic roles that makes the student themselves as critical thinkers to solve real-world issues. The features of the games are good as they have great audio, video and usability ratio of good commercial games An extensive dashboard on the top lets teachers create classes and assign games for the students by adhering to the state and Common Core standards and by grade of students. Teachers can also access the readymade material from the iCivics curriculum, including some interesting lesson plans (with step-by-step teaching instructions and handouts for students) and some correlating games, with Web quests for the students and an activity so as to connect their lessons to the available Web content. Some games aren't designed to be multiplayer, but the teacher can also use a projector to make the games or the Web quests as an whole-class activity. Some examples are https://www.icivics.org/curriculum/foundations-government . If the teacher creates a new class, then a unique code will be received by the teacher which has to be further distributed to students. Each class can have assignments, announcements, and discussions areas, and teachers can easily add or edit new content or even create polls. Print outs of the detailed report of the progress of students on games can also be taken. iCivics is definitely a fantastic tool so useful to integrate game-based learning into the social studies curricula.

GeogSpace - http://www.geogspace.edu.au/

GeogSpace is an exclusive online open access resource it was initiated by the Australian Geography Teachers Association (AGTA)supported by the resources of Education Services Australia (ESA)· Developed in 2013 it was designed to provide e-resource materials to support primary& secondary teachers mainly those who were involved in the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Geography. It was exclusively developed by AGTA's team of practicing geography teachers solely dedicated to ensuring good quality educational resources are free of access in all schools across Australia that reflects best practice using current technology and pedagogies. GeogSpace offers various tools & illustrations of practice that are not just activities for students but have been designed in such a way to provide materials for quality professional learning for all students and geography teachers of primary and secondary level. The resource materials are now made open for all geography teachers across the globe including those that are very experienced and those just commencing their involvement. The materials will support teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and pedagogical capacity to teach geography of the highest quality. It also provides a good quality the framework &content pedagogical knowledge along with teaching approaches and resources to support professional learning &teaching among students and teachers.

CommunityWalk- http://www.communitywalk.com

CommunityWalk is an online web 2.o tool designed for creating informational, interactive, and engaging maps by the user. Through this tool the user has the ability to upload and display any interactive media such as videos and images, it also gives the additional feature of adding comments. For a social science class, the students can use this tool to personalize any map to a specific event or content of their choice. The maps made with the help of Community Walk are very powerful tools as they offer both features of an interactive and engaging tool. It encourages students to become active learners and provide a window with a venue for demonstrating their knowledge in a creative format to the whole class.It is an excellent tool for describing local, national and global history& events. It conveniently serves as a tool to enable students to create an interesting interactive multi-media map. One example is the movement for national struggle of India for independence. The students can construct maps using all the resources from local to national to international events to represent key movements of the Indian national struggle all over the world. Using this tool the teachers can encourage the students to annotate the Dandi March of mahatma Gandhi. They can also include different available images, sound clips, and notes on the historical event. Students may insert sound clips from

the speech of Jawaharlal Nehru "Freedom at Midnight" and illustrate that voice-over by inserting images from the final independence in 1947. Some examples of are given herehttp://blogs.umb.edu/placebased/2006/12/04/communitywalk_b/ .

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