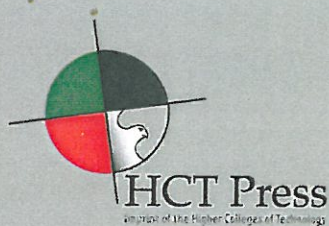


E-LEARNING IN ACTION

Redefining Learning

CREATING AND SUSTAINING POWERFUL
AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS



HCT Educational Technology Series, Book 2

Edited by

SEAN DOWLING
HELEN DONAGHUE
CINDY GUNN
JOHN RAVEN
SIMON HAYHOE

Series Editor

SEAN DOWLING



كليات التقنية العليا
HIGHER COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY

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E-Learning in Action
REDEFINING LEARNING

HCT Educational Technology Series. Book 2

Editors

Sean Dowling, Helen Donaghue, Cindy Gunn, John Raven, Simon Hayhoe

Series Editor

Sean Dowling

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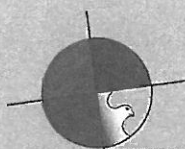
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Training Teachers in Web2.0 Tools for Teaching and Learning EFL

Vance Stevens

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<http://vancestevens.com/papers>

Abstract

In this article, the author describes how a course using Web 2.0 tools to exploit an individual laptop environment, originally designed and successfully implemented for students in the UAE navy college, became a basis for training teachers at the aviation college in using the same tools and rationale toward mounting similar courses there. The training was organized in a blended environment with a blog portal outlining 20 steps emulating the way classes had been conducted at the navy college, where students had been set tasks in the class wiki portal, shown in class how to master the language and software needed, and then guided in completing their tasks and projects. As the teachers at the aviation college completed the steps suggested for them, they tracked their progress in an online spreadsheet, and posted the URLs of online artifacts they created in other shared GoogleDocs spaces. Tabs in their blog portal pointed the trainees to a model wiki portal providing links to these artifacts online. The article concludes with a report on how the teachers responded to the blended environment used for their training.

Keywords: professional development, web2.0, teacher training, instructional technology, EFL

Introduction

There has been some focus lately on the generation gap between people who in their long lives started their academic careers immersed in paper-based ways of accessing, storing, and processing information and have since had to transition to digital ones, and those who in their much briefer lives have lived only in a world where digital technology has been taken for granted. There are many aspects to this phenomenon. One is that the notion of literacy, or the way that we communicate successfully in a world where not only text but digital imagery and multimedia sound and visuals are an important part of the message, has drifted away from the old print dominance (The New London Group, 1996). Another is that there have been significant paradigm shifts in who controls this message, from the top-down gatekeepers of the past to the anyone-can-publish reality that we find ourselves in today, which is why students today should be taught to be not just consumers of knowledge, but to exploit available online tools to become creators of knowledge as well (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005). Yet another paradigm shift is seen where individual work used to be guarded and considered as proprietary more so than it is today, where sharing online is becoming more and more the norm, and it has become apparent that collaboration skills are highly valued in the modern workplace.

Considering the proliferation of degree programs available now that did not exist just a few years ago (Kulla, 2009, lists ten), the challenge for teachers today is to prepare students to be adaptable enough that they will be able to learn to cope with jobs they will likely have that have not yet been conceived of today. Siemens (2006:10) says that "the skills and processes that will make us people of tomorrow are not yet embedded in our educational structures ... the vast majority are ensconced in structures preparing students and employees for a future that will not exist."

These considerations have led to significant changes in the nature of teaching and the expectations of learners. It is no wonder that Marc Prensky has received so much attention with some of his more provocative titles, e.g. *enrage me or engage me* (Prensky, 2005), and his characterization of teachers as digital immigrants (who will never lose their 'accent') thrust awkwardly into classes full of young digital natives (Prensky, 2001). However, closer examination of digital natives and immigrants shows digital immigrant teachers often being more sophisticated than their students when it comes to learning (as Linda Price [2013] pointed out in her featured talk at the 2013 TESOL Arabia conference in Dubai). Students know more intuitively which icons to try on an iPad or smartphone than people brought up on typewriters, or even the various iterations of Windows, but often these activities are directed at quick

gratification, such as checking Facebook, or watching YouTube without purpose apart from relaxation and satisfaction of social needs. But experienced teachers, whom David Warlick calls master learners, know more about learning than their students (Warlick, 2010). When master learners working as teachers find time to learn what affordances of technology work best with novice learners, and can direct these affordances to outcomes targeted at curriculum goals, then powerful, some would say transformational, learning can result.

As Price and Kirkwood (2010) put it, "the problem appears not to be technological but pedagogical: knowing why and how to use technologies effectively in practice is a complex matter". Training programs for teachers need to not just introduce the tools but to get learners, whether they are students or trainee teachers, to experience using them for powerful, even transformational, outcomes. Warlick explains simply how to do this in a keynote talk he gave at the 2012 Learning 2.0 online conference: "A connected teacher connects learners to each other through their accomplishments...through their success". This is the essence of what a teacher needs to impart to those to whom he or she is master learner.

Preliminary research

I was recently given the opportunity to create courses that would appropriately exploit the one-to-one laptop environment for students in the UAE navy college. When I started my work there, I found the Internet had been cut off to the classrooms at the request of teachers who were becoming frustrated by the students' near-addiction to going online during class, at the expense of attention paid to teachers. Brought in as English teaching coordinator to address the situation, I first got the Internet restored. I also discovered from student writing that many of the students were aware that abuse by some students of their always-on access to Internet was creating an atmosphere unhealthy to everyone's learning. Accordingly, I gradually created courses there that adapted existing syllabuses designed to teach academic writing and presentation skills so that the courses utilized a number of Web 2.0 tools, in particular Google Docs, Prezi, Blogger, Survey Monkey, and Jing.

My class dynamic allows students flexibility in what they are doing at a given moment as long as they produce deliverables to show they are keeping their learning on track. To manage this (and to make what's required clear to the students), I gave handouts setting discrete tasks each day and archived all instructions in a class wiki portal, where I showed how small steps lead to completion of larger projects. I might begin my classes by introducing work on the language required and how to use the software needed for the projects, but my adolescent male students focused on learning only when they worked actively on projects. They were eventually assessed on what they produced, and its quality.

Student work was often produced in online spaces, in Prezi for example. One of our projects was to create presentations elaborating on slogans for the environment. The students seemed to enjoy working with Prezi, and their work displayed imaginative zooms in and out of text, images, and YouTube videos. Not only could they see links to each other's work but the thrust of the project was to connect our work to a global Earth Day event organized via yet another wiki at <http://earthbridges.net> (Adams, Montagne, Rodriguez, & Stevens, 2012). The students appreciated that their work was in some way connected to a wider audience, as counseled by Warlick in his previously cited 2012 keynote address.

I gathered data on students' attitudes toward these tools and the task- and project-based approaches to learning they enabled, and I documented my findings in various articles and presentations (Stevens, 2012). Thus, at the end of the course I had accumulated online artifacts and data to show positive outcomes deriving from the approach I had taken.

Setting

In recognition of success in managing a one-on-one laptop situation, I was shifted to the UAE aviation college, in the long term, to implement a version of the presentation course I had developed at the navy college, but first to train the teachers at the aviation college in the tools used and to explain the rationale for using those tools. Toward this end, I planned an ongoing workshop which in the end took place over only four days. During this time, I found that busy teaching schedules left the teachers at the aviation college almost no time in the day where we could meet all at once. Teachers were sometimes individually available to work with me face-to-face, but only a few at a time.

Recognizing that this was similar to what my approach was designed to overcome at the navy college, where I had the students in the same room, but not necessarily all their attention all at once, I adopted a blended approach that would emulate the way I had conducted the classes for which I was training the teachers. That way, I could model asynchronously the techniques that had worked with students, and the teachers could work at their own pace with me in ad hoc workshops in moments they were free, or by themselves in their offices, or even at home, to address the training I had set up for them online.

This approach carried with it notions of the flipped classroom, where rather than use class time to marshal students en masse along a predetermined path of learning, materials are created to allow students to do some preparation prior to (or briefly, at the start of) class, and then, while in class, work at their own pace to create deliverables against which their work can be evaluated. In this respect, the approach also has aspects of task-based or project-based learning, where students are given tasks (any of which might be part of a larger project) and are responsible for managing their own completion of those tasks. (Wikipedia has comprehensive treatments on "Flip Teaching", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flip_teaching and "Task-based language learning, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Task-based_language_learning).

Design

In order to manage this, I set up a blog portal for the training at <http://toolkit4learning.blogspot.ae/2012/09/introduction.html>. The first posts explained the rationale for what we were about to do, how we would break the training into 20 discrete steps, and how the teachers could record their progress in a shared Google Docs spreadsheet. The blog and its accompanying explanatory materials were intended to illustrate and model for teachers possibilities they might apply to creating their own portals for students when they taught the presentation course themselves.

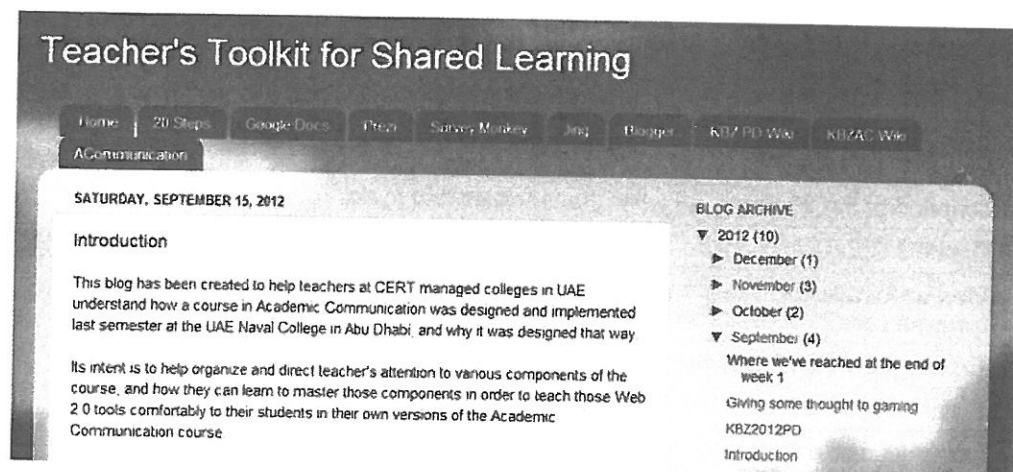


Figure 1: Screenshot of the blog portal with its tabs

Figure 1 shows tabs at the top of the blog leading to an explanation of the 20 steps the teachers were asked to do toward completing the training and to information on the tools introduced in the training (Google Docs, Prezi, Survey Monkey, Jing, and Blogger). The last three tabs linked to wikis I had set up for use with my own past and present students, especially to the "KBZ PD" (professional development) wiki where I placed instructions and screenshots intended to organize the training in a way that teachers might emulate when setting up courses for their own students. Thus, the thrust of the training was intended to be experiential.

This wiki had more detailed instructions for what I had asked the teachers to do in the course (later changed to what we did, as an archive of the class). As I do with classes I teach, the sidebar had links to the blogs, surveys and Prezis individual teachers created during the course. In the classes I teach, "publishing" student work both encourages those who have not completed tasks to get theirs online, and also gives students a sense of what the standard is as measured by the work of their peers, and hopefully challenges them to do even better (and finally, if the work is an online Prezi presentation, having a list of URLs handy in one place greatly facilitates presenting, when students need just click on their link and their presentation appears). Having their work on public display seemed to encourage greater effort from students I had taught at the navy college (especially when this was tied in with a larger global effort, as with our participation in the Global Earth Day [Stevens et al., 2012]). It was hoped that the teachers would respond similarly.

The sidebar in the wiki linked to (among other things) the shared Google Doc where teachers recorded their progress in the 20 steps they were asked to accomplish in the course (see table 1 below). The tasks started simple and became increasingly more involved, and all were explained in the blog portal.

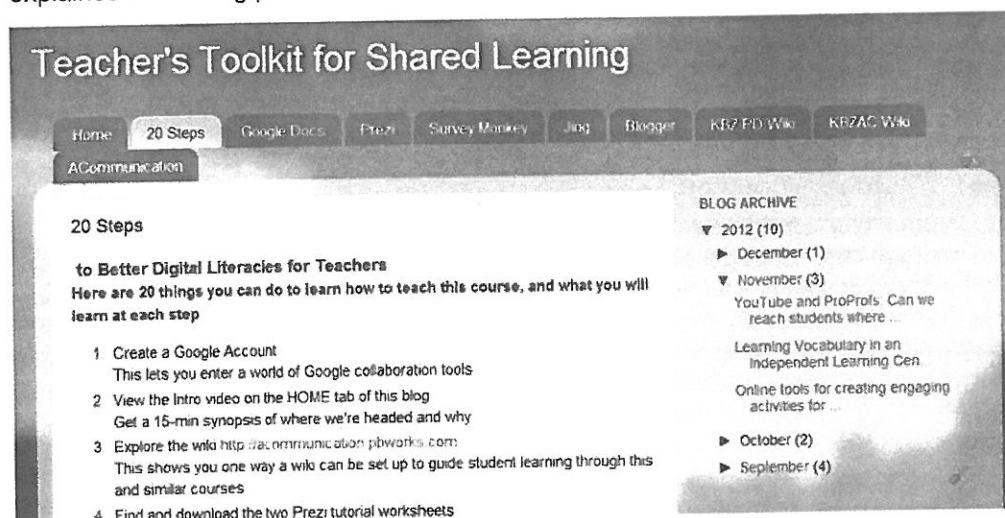


Figure 2: Description of the 20 steps in the blog

Table 1

Brief description of the 20 Steps, i.e what the teachers had to do

1	Create a Google Account
2	View an introductory video on what the course was about at http://toolkit4learning.blogspot.com/2012/09/introduction.html
3	Explore the wikis already being used with students
4	Watch online Prezi tutorial videos
5	Complete online worksheets on their understanding of those videos
6	Create a first Prezi

7	Contribute to an existing Google Doc
8	Create a blog in Blogger
9	Make a post with a link to a Prezi and a reflection on learning
10	Add blog and Prezi links to a shared Google Doc (from which the teacher gets the link to put in the wiki sidebar to model how students might learn from each other's work)
11	Brainstorm a survey topic and questions to address it using a Google Doc
12	Create a short survey in Survey Monkey
13	Publish the survey link in their blog, articulate its purpose, and invite others to take it
14	Download and install a screen capture tool such as Jing
15	Capture the Survey Monkey chart data using the screen capture tool
16	Embed the charts in PowerPoint, Prezi, or blog post
17	Use guidelines and an animation video tutorial to make a PowerPoint presentation to specified standards
18	Upload the PPT to Slideshare.net
19	Start a wiki portal they might use with students using PBWorks, Wikispaces, or Google Drive
20	Create a blog post discussing and linking to URLs created during the course, to serve as an ePortfolio

Implementation

In September 2012, the blended learning environment was designed and mounted on the online platforms indicated, and teachers were informed by the supervisor who had requested the training that I would be coming to their workplace to implement it. As mentioned, there was no opportunity for me to meet with the teachers and explain in one setting what they were to do, but I was assigned a lab where teachers could drop by whenever they could, and this, the blog and wiki, and email was how I launched the course. This part of the course lasted for four days, after which everyone (including me) was called on to teach intensively for the next six weeks, so it was not until we had a break from classes in November that we were able to resume training. As they completed each step during their two windows for working on this, the teachers indicated their progress in the Google Docs spreadsheet which modeled a practical reason to write collaboratively in a shared Google Docs space, and provided me feedback on steps they had completed. A dozen teachers had started the training in September but by the start of the new term in January four of these had been replaced by other teachers at the aviation college. Of the remaining eight, three had completed 16 or 17 of the 20 steps, and two had completed 12 or 13. The remaining three participants completed 6, 7, and 8 steps respectively.

KBZ Professional Development (progress checklist) Sept-Nov 2012										
File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Help All changes saved in Drive										
Dustin										
20 Steps to Better Digital Literacies										
Skills for Teachers										
INDICATE under your name when you										
1 Have a Google Account (please write your @gmail.com at night)										
View Intro video at										
2 http://tools4learning.blogspot.com/2012/09/introduction.html										
3 Explore ACommunication wiki at http://communication.pbworks.com/										
Find and print the two Prezi tutorial worksheets OR better yet find and										
4 take the online Prezi follow-up materials										
5 Watch prezi tutorial 1 (and take the two ONLINE tests)										
6 Watch prezi tutorial 2 (and take the two ONLINE tests)										

Figure 3: The Google Doc spreadsheet progress self-report of progress (names deleted)

Results

These eight teachers were polled on their assessment of the effectiveness of their training and their overall impressions of it. Of the eight, six completed the survey.

The survey asked teachers to comment on what they had learned from the PD, on its clarity and effectiveness, on how interesting and relevant it was to them, and since none of them completed all 20 steps, on why they had decided to only go so far with the training. It also asked them to rate the portals created for the PD and comment on how they felt about the self-reported Google Docs spreadsheet being visible to peers.

There is not space here to report these results in detail, and in interpreting the results we must take into consideration many changes taking place at the aviation college during and after the training, not only in terms of staffing, as has been mentioned, but also that when the supervisor who had arranged the PD left the aviation college. This led to a cancellation of the course the training had been meant to prepare the teachers to teach, so that tools they had been shown were ultimately not needed for the purpose they were intended, and they never came to experience connecting themselves and their students with each other's successes in the way that had been envisioned.

If because of this, then unsurprisingly, the teachers generally didn't find the tools relevant to the teaching they were actually doing. Thus the six teachers were evenly split on whether the course was worthwhile or covered material already familiar to them. Of course, the tools themselves were not the whole story. The complete picture was how these tools could be put into play in a course geared to improve students' enjoyment and confidence in presentation, and how the structure and logistics of that course, and its outcomes in terms of what students produced and left online, could be realized by those taking such a presentation course. However, the teachers were in the end never asked to get their minds around teaching such a course.

Participants were also evenly split on whether the training was effective or ineffective. Responses clustered in the middle three of the five possibilities. One participant found it effective but not always clear, and two found it effective but sometimes frustrating. Three found it ineffective and often frustrating. However, it was also apparent from another question that unfamiliarity with the mode of delivery could have been a factor. The participants in the training were asked to rate their preferred mode of PD (checking any that applied). Hour-long lectures, all-day PD events, and blended environments such as the one reported on here got only one vote each. There were two votes for two (or more) hour PD workshops, and half-day PD events got three hands up, while "no formal PD, learn on my own as needed" attracted no takers. It appears the respondents favored the more directed modes of PD "delivery" which happen to be the modes most commonly encountered in these teachers' workplace.

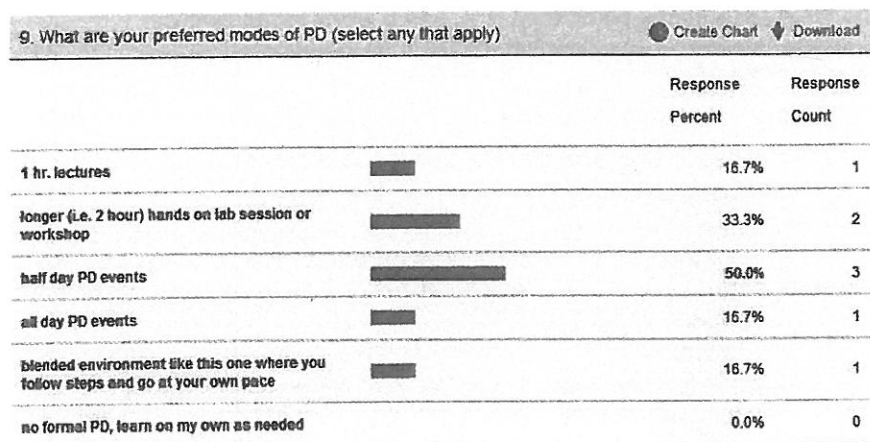


Figure 4: Preferred mode of PD

The teachers were also asked how they felt about the publicly viewable Google Docs progress-report spreadsheet. Three reported they felt it was an appropriate use of the tool, though two said they would have preferred it were anonymous, and one respondent reported: "Not happy with the surveillance implications or violation of privacy." Despite all this, four of the participants rated the training "Somewhat interesting and informative" and one "Occasionally interesting and informative". Only one participant said it was "Not very interesting, not particularly informative".

Conclusions

These results are revealing in that they uncover realities we might have otherwise overlooked. Dan Pink has written on how technology is bringing about striking changes in what it takes to achieve success in this new era. He is perhaps best known for *A Whole New Mind* (2005) in which he argued that the ability of computers to do algorithmic tasks better and cheaper than left-brained people paid well to do them, is opening up new vistas for people with right-brained predominance. In a later book, *To Sell is Human* (2012), he accentuates the critical importance of tolerating failure and rejection to achieving eventual success and breakthrough. In today's world, success can be associated with finding the cloud attached to the silver lining. He cites research to suggest that problem-finders, people who look at ways to approach solutions that reveal other underlying problems, can be more valuable than problem-solvers, people who focus more narrowly on what appears to be the problem. If the results of the teacher survey were not as sanguine as I would have liked, they at least touched on aspects of teacher training that might have gone unnoticed had the survey not been conducted.

The edusphere is awash with re-examination of learning in an age of abundance, where online content is plentiful and most often free. Students are expected to be producers of online content, not just consumers of it. MOOCs, or massively open online courses, are starting to have an impact on how education is distributed across populations who are finding they can access both formal courses online, almost on demand and for free, as well as indulge in their just-in-time learning needs with searches of YouTube videos offering tutorials in just about anything (Stevens, 2013). If this is not a revolution in access to education then it is at least a significant evolution.

One recurring echo in educational theory these days is to point students in the right direction that enables them to take greater responsibility for teaching themselves. Sugata Mitra pioneered empowering children who had never before used computers to teach themselves with windows on the world enabled through technology (Mitra, 2013). Writers such as Will Richardson (2012) and Seth Godin (2012), to name just two, have called into question traditional schooling, and how there needs to be a whole new learner-centric approaches to countering systems originally designed to produce well-trained factory workers (Gatto, 1992). This rich personalization of learning is what MOOC theory seeks to address, as articulated by Siemens and others (particularly well in this video interview [2012] with Howard Rheingold). In this interview Siemens asks "Have you ever thought about how completely irrelevant structured learning is?". Alexander Hayes is even more irreverent, predicting:

"Educators will need to shift to a networked learning theory for the digital age, a connectivism so profound the very architectures of educational participation are set to become only but a loosely bound accreditation arrangement." (Hayes, 2013, p. 24)

While teachers are increasingly coming to notice dysfunctions in many aspects of the institutions in which they teach, experiments in implementing educational models where participants do indeed teach themselves are not widespread. This is not the model that many teachers practicing their trade these days grew up in and now find it hard not to perpetuate. And despite the general ubiquity of technology in educational settings that can make student-centered learning a reality, there remain pockets of scarcity in this world of abundance.

All this helps to explain why the learner-centered task-based learning model trialed on students with some success in one technologically well-endowed context, as reported in Stevens (2012), has not carried well to the aviation college. This has been due in part to the supervisor driving the change having departed, and in even larger part by students neither having their own computing devices nor sufficient access to computers in the Independent Learning Center there. As a consequence, students and teachers at the aviation college have limited opportunities to indulge in methods where students can consistently use Web 2.0, and are thus faced with a restricted context in which the potential of greater access might be brought to bear on greater engagement in learning through appropriate use of connectivist pedagogies enabled by technology.

It's good to remind ourselves that implementation of technology is in major respects dependent on conditions at the place where it is implemented, and that attempting to graft the same technology onto a different context might therefore produce different results. I believe that the course of training reported here has validity despite the shortcomings noted in this small survey vis a vis expectations of the trainees and perceived and intended application of the training. These should be addressed in further iterations of such courses at the aviation college or elsewhere, but it is likely that better results would be had if this type of blended training were applied in contexts where conditions were more conducive to success.

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E-LEARNING IN ACTION

Redefining Learning

CREATING AND SUSTAINING POWERFUL
AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS

HCT EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY SERIES, **BOOK 2**

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Sean Dowling, eLearning and Educational Technology Coordinator at the Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE, is the series editor.

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