# Breaching the Garden Walls? Social media, institutions, infrastructures and design for learning

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## Introduction

In this symposium we bring together four papers from a variety of viewpoints that focus on the interrelationship between the introduction of new social media forms and social networking, in what has been dubbed Web 2.0, and the institutions and underlying infrastructures that influence the ways in which we design for learning. Each of the four papers takes a different aspect of the way in which Web 2.0 technologies and social practices interact with the institutions and infrastructures in education. Dohn argues that introducing Web 2.0-practices into learning activities in an educational setting leads to tensions in practice. She argues that these tensions in practice are the result of conceptual tensions in the teleology and epistemology implicit in Web 2.0-practices on the one hand and the educational system on the other. As a consequence of the integration of Web 2.0 in teaching and learning there arise a number of questions for educational programmes. From this it is argued that social software, social media and web 2.0 tools and services can be seen as a materialisation and radicalisation of the sociological trends of networked individualism, the individualization of trajectories of identity and the horizontalisation of knowledge.

Ryberg argues from the perspective of technological infrastructures that an incorporation of web 2.0 and social software is not only a matter of adopting new technologies, but equally concerns the interaction between, technological, pedagogical and organisational understandings of practice and knowledge. Due to the tensions and contradictions between institutions and web 2.0 practices, Ryberg argues that the 'interface' between institutions, teachers and students in the form of the networks, the nature of shared content and the management of identity need to be carefully negotiated in adopting web 2.0 technologies and social software as part of institutional technological infrastructures. Ryberg also argues that these tensions and contradictions cannot really be resolved in advance, but are tensions and contradictions that must be dynamically negotiated as part of institutional technological infrastructures.

Jones goes on to develop the conception of infrastructure and learning infrastructure in particular. He takes a particular case to illustrate this analysis of the idea of infrastructure; the Open University VLE project. Through this illustration he shows how infrastructures are not just present in education but they are developed through an active process of engagement between the university and technologies both internal to the university infrastructure and external in the wider infrastructure available to citizens in general. Jones also argues that The Open University VLE illustrates some of the reasons why universities are likely to be reluctant to take down the walls around institutional provision of the learning infrastructure. Issues of security and equality stand alongside concerns about cost and uniformity.

Land and Bayne suggest that print and digital cultures seem to favour distinctive temporalities. Whereas print culture and the cloistered academy required 'slow time' and private space to foster contemplation and deliberation, the digital would seem to thrive on 'fast time', immediacy of response, and universal virtual space. They argue that fast time drives out slow time. Despite unquestioned benefits of speed, there rise potential threats from fast time to reflection, creativity and to the academic estate. The contemplative space becomes dis-placed to the domestic sphere, where it is compromised anew by the digital. Using the notion of

*anti-structure* to account for the counter-cultural quality of much Web 2.0 type activity they like Jones point to the eventual re-absorption and appropriation of Web 2.0 technologies by the formal system, before further anti-structural activities of a different nature would be likely to emerge. The important question arises, from a learning perspective, of whether the space of *liminality,* the transformative threshold space and process in which troublesome knowledge is negotiated and conceptual difficulty encountered and overcome is truncated by fast time and the linear, consumptive' university it ushers in.