LEARNING 2.0: A TRAINING PROJECT FOR THE GREEK LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

A research conducted in 2008 amongst Greek and Cypriot Librarians and Information Scientists, by the group named GreekLIS (www.greeklis.org), indicated the need for further development of lifelong learning programs regarding the Web 2.0 technologies and their implementation in library online services. As a result, the research group decided to design and offer through its web page an open online learning project, also known as Learning 2.0 project, publicly available to anyone with Internet access, providing instructions and directions for librarians, on the effective and efficient use of Web 2.0 tools and applications. The prototype of the Learning 2.0 project was translated and adjusted to fit the specific needs of Greek librarians and information professionals. The program's goal is to leverage the knowledge of Greek librarians in order to make them more competitive in the new world of information evolution. Furthermore, the paper aims to examine the implementation of a strategy for the best-required practices in order to further the development of this program through its evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st century, lifelong learning programs that introduce Web 2.0 technologies have been increasingly important to libraries. There is substantial literature: library conference presentations and publications are filled with Web 2.0 related topics.

So, what is Web 2.0? It is believed that the concept of "Web 2.0" began with a conference brainstorming session between Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty in 2004. Tim O'Reilly used the term in his article "What is Web 2.0" in 2005 to describe the design patterns and business models for the next generation of web software following the technology market crash in 2001.

The term "Library 2.0" was first used by Michael Casey in his blog, Library Crunch in 2005. Library 2.0 visualizes a very different library service that operates

according to expectations of today's library users (Jena and Khuntia, 2008).

Web 2.0 applications allow each Internet user to create and share information online. During the last few years hundreds of Web 2.0 tools and applications have become available. Some of them include:

- Social Networks (such as MySpace, Facebook, Ning, LinkedIn)
- Blogs (Blogger, Wordpress)
- RSS (Really Simple Syndication)
- Wikis (Wikipedia)
- Sharing Photos and Images (Flickr)
- Tagging, Folksonomies and Social Bookmarking (Delicious, Furl)
- Sharing Videos (YouTube)
- Podcasts and Webcasts

Each of the social technologies listed above can be used by libraries and librarians and provide opportunities for staff development.

Nowadays libraries are polyschematic and multidimensional. With the advent of the so-called Web 2.0 platform, the role of librarians is redefined. Rapid technological changes are continuous and dramatically affect not only library information services, but also the library profession itself. Therefore, librarians need to keep up to date professionally, so as to be more competitive, efficient and effective in the new world of information evolution. Lifelong learning is considered to be a very important factor towards this direction.

The term "lifelong learning" recognises that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place in a wide range of situations. Lifelong learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person (Jarvis, 2007). Brophy defines lifelong learning as a deliberate progression throughout the life of an individual, where initial acquisition of knowledge and skills is reviewed and upgraded continuously, to meet the challenges set by an ever-changing society (Brophy, 2000). The changing nature of the library profession itself is totally unpredictable, because librarians continuously face a lot of new challenges. Therefore, the gathering of knowledge or information by reading, research and study should be endless and last or exist throughout their lives (Malan, 2007). Thus, librarians need to be highly skilled and aware of the new added value services that Web 2.0 technologies can offer, so as to be able to meet users needs.

Within this context, our research group called GreekLIS (Greek Librarians and Information Scientists) proposes a training project to librarians who desire to improve and expand their reference skills, knowledge and experience in this area and enhance their competence for the purpose of promoting personal development. GreekLIS is a group of information scientists who study the ways in which Web 2.0 services can be implemented within library environment (Library 2.0). The teams' goal is to keep up to date regarding new library technologies and innovations, as well as disseminate new knowledge by offering seminars, training programs etc. to anyone interested in exploring these new environments (GreekLIS, 2009).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 relevant prior work, which motivated the creation of the proposed project, is mentioned. Section 3 gives a brief overview of the basic features of the design and implementation of the Learning 2.0 program. Finally, the paper concludes with some brief remarks, a discussion of the current and future work, and with a challenge to project managers to further develop the program through its evaluation.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

In March 2008 the research group GreekLIS conducted a survey aiming to investigate the familiarity of Greek and Cypriot librarians regarding Web 2.0 technologies. The librarians and information scientists were encouraged to complete an anonymous web-based questionnaire using the SurveyGizmo tool. The response rate was high with a total number of 146 submitted and completed surveys.

At the survey analysis, the data were entered into an Excel file, and all the statistics, graphs and tables were prepared using Excel statistical tool, while SPSS package was used in second level analysis in order to get more concrete and detailed data. The collected data assisted the team to:

- evaluate the usability and efficiency of Web 2.0 tools from Greek and Cypriot librarians in relation to the provision of library services,
- examine and draw an overall picture of the needs and familiarity of librarians using these tools,
- monitor comments and ideas relating to the use of Web 2.0 applications, and
- provide evidence on areas for future research and lifelong learning initiatives.

The target group of librarians and information scientists that participated in the survey was regardless age range and library type. Data analysis of the respondents showed a peak among the 26-30 age range, suggesting that this group has the experience and interest in pursuing this type of technology.
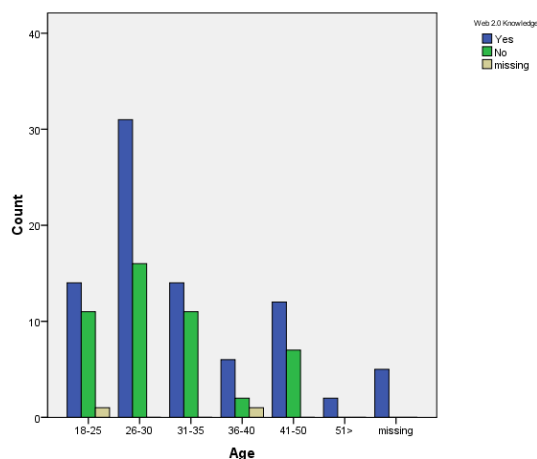
Table 1. Respondents age range

The majority of participants were employed in academic libraries (51.1%), followed by public libraries (18.8%) and special libraries (18%). The questionnaire was separated in seven sections corresponding to the seven examined variables. Those were:

- Social Networks
- Social Bookmarkers
- RSS, Blogs
- Wikis
- Games
- Digital Maps

It became evident that there were certain variations in the familiarization levels and the receptivity of some Web 2.0 technologies. Blogs and Social Networks were the most receptive and best-used tools, while RSS, Wikis, and Social Bookmarkers were the least used and the ones librarians exhibited limited acquaintance.

More specifically, 49.6% of librarians were not familiar with Social Bookmarkers and 84.1% did not use them at all. Participants were not very acquainted with RSS feeds (57.1%) and 63.9% preferred to visit sites of their interest separately. Table 2 provides an overview of the level of participant's familiarization with RSS feeds along with the type of library that they work; almost 60 librarians working in academic libraries do not use RSS feeds.
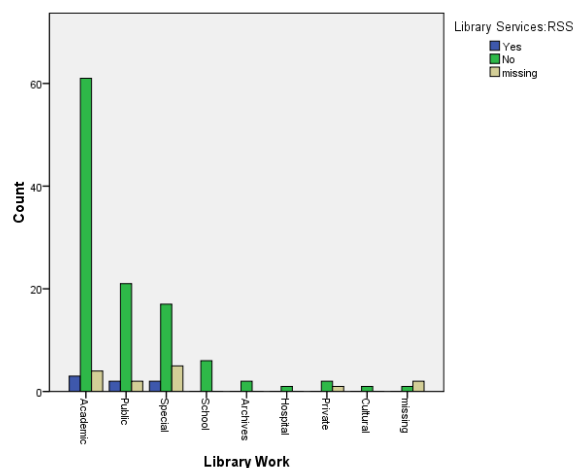

Table 2 RSS

The second application examined was Wikis, a tool that presented controversies on whether it should be incorporated into library services or not. Respondents, in many occasions, questioned the validity of information that existed in Wikis, while 30.5% used them in their libraries as a valid source of reference. The following table provides a similar overview of the level of participant's familiarization with RSS along with the type of library that they work.
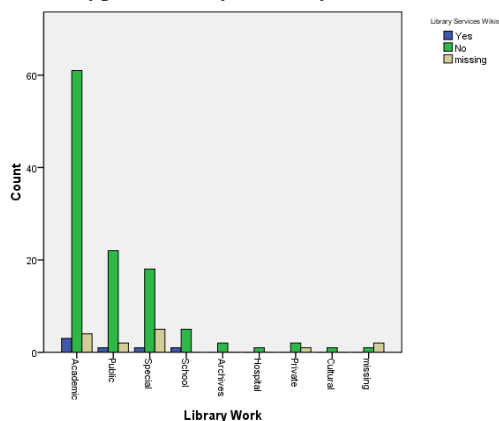

Table 3 Wikis

In addition to the figures mentioned above, the comments of participants represented a variety of opinions concerning the use of Web 2.0 applications on a personal level both in Greek and Cypriot libraries. The majority of the respondents were positive in using these tools, although they were skeptical when applying them within their libraries. They suggested that these new technologies should be examined before they are adopted taking into consideration the type of library that will use them.

To conclude, the results of the survey identified the need and the challenge of building a learning environment for librarians and information professionals. Similar and successful projects such as Five Weeks to a Social Library, Learning 2.0 and Learning 2.1 are a paradigm and prove the appropriateness of the use of Web 2.0 tools in

promoting lifelong learning practices in the modern digital environments of our society. As Guntram (2007) claims:

> "At present, a world-wide movement is developing, which promotes unencumbered open access to digital resources such as content and software-based tools to be used as a means of promoting education and lifelong learning" (Guntram, 2007. p.16).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Design of Learning 2.0 program

After examining the level of knowledge in Web 2.0 technologies of Greek librarians and information scientists, it was essential for GreekLIS to propose an educational program that will tackle the existing "gaps of knowledge" amongst them. GreekLIS took the initiative to deliver such a project in the Greek LIS community by translating and adopting an existing Web 2.0 LLL program in English language. Veria Public Library will be the first one to employ it in order to train its staff.

Greek Learning 2.0 training program had to meet the objectives that the team had set at the initial phase of the project. More specifically, the program had to be:

- Open source
- Web-based
- User-friendly
- Flexible
- Copyright-free

As a result, the program that suited best the initial objectives found to be the one developed by Helen Blowers, Public Services Technology Director of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (PLCMC), under the name Learning 2.0 (http://plmclearning.blogspot.com). The prototype has the form of a blog, using web 2.0 technologies for the interaction with the users. Potential participating librarians have to follow the "23 things" in nine weeks with practical exercises. At the end, participants earned an award for gained knowledge and experience.

In our case the conditions were different. First of all, the team had to translate the entire program in Greek, keeping a common structure near the prototype and considering specific needs of the local community. We did not include all the sections of the original program as we could not support all the parameters. In addition, budgetary concerns forced us to drop the award at the end. As a result, the Greek version of the program consisted of the following sections:

- Introduction
- Blogging
- Flickr
- RSS

- Social tagging & Technocrati
- Wikis
- Online applications and tools
- YouTube
- Podcasts

Whereas the structure was kept the same as the prototype, the content was enhanced and differentiated with examples and practices from the Greek community. As it was indicated in the prototype, the program should combine theoretical elements on the subjects along with relative practical examples. Furthermore, podcasts were available for every section explaining, with simplified terms, web 2.0 tools and applications. The future participants would have to follow certain steps in order to create their own blogs and record their impressions on the program's progress. After the completion of the program, library staff will be in the position to understand the Library 2.0 applications, and be a part of web 2.0 community. The library, as an organization, will be more competitive as staff will be able to make use of these new technologies and empower its position in the information society.

3.2 Implementation of Learning 2.0 program

During the design phase of the project, the team had to make a decision about the project's final outcome. In the PLCMC prototype, the program was hosted in a blog provider (blogspot.com) encouraging the user's interaction. Since the initial idea was to utilize this project for entire librarians' community the team had to choose which way will be the best for the implementation. The options we had were:

a) A website
b) A blog
c) Through an e-learning platform
d) Through a link in Veria's Public Library webpage
e) Through a link in Greeklis Blog

Finally, the choice was to host the program in our webpage, which is in a blog platform (http://greeklis.org) at WordPress. Through GreekLIS blog the participants will have the opportunity to enroll to Web 2.0 training, as well as to be informed about new technologies in our discipline. Interaction with users will be more efficient and the webpage will be a virtual node of exchanging information and ideas about Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 applications. Additionally, the team that developed the Greek Learning 2.0 program will be in direct contact with the participants whenever this will be necessary.

The first deadline of the project was set at the 31st of March 2009, but due to existing problems and delays, a new deadline was set at the end of June 2009. The problems that have been encountered during the implementation regarded coordination between team members and keeping the design phase of the project

close to the time schedule. In addition, the fact that Greek libraries are understaffed during Summer months are expected to cause additional delays. For the next few months, the project will run in GreekLIS blog on a pilot base and will be officially released in September 2009.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH PLANS

At present, there is no feedback from the library community since the project has not yet been released. According to schedule, the Greek Learning 2.0 training project will be published through the GreekLIS website (http://greeklis.org) during the summer on a pilot phase and officially released in September 2009. The libraries that have already implemented the Learning 2.0 project have stated that the program was more than helpful for the participating staff. The libraries have begun to add value to their services as the staff made use of the new technologies. Furthermore, there were strong statements (Titangos and Mason, 2008) on how the training encouraged the staff to be involved in technical services using Web 2.0 applications.

After the release of the project the team is planning to get feedback from the participating libraries in order to evaluate the Greek Learning 2.0 program. For this reason, the team will have to:

- Create an application form in the website for libraries to fill contact details
- Conduct a survey in order to get the feedback from the participating libraries
- Evaluate the results from entire project

The timeline of the evaluation phase will be set from the official release of the project until the end of the academic year 2009-10 (i.e. summer 2010). In the meantime, the members of the team will have to compile a questionnaire for the needs of the survey, condense and analyze the data in order to evaluate the results.

Learning 2.0 is a very promising program which institutes a first time ever lifelong learning interactive endeavor among the community of Greek Libraries and librarians. We are looking forward to libraries participation.

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