Managing Issues of Safety, Privacy, Copyright, and Technological Change in Web 2.0 Instruction: Lessons Learned from Teaching a YouTube Course

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Abstract: In 2008, an online course called *YouTube for Educators* was created as an elective for a graduate program in educational technology. As of fall 2011, the course has been offered six times. Some of the most critical problems of student safety, privacy, copyright, and technical change encountered during the six iterations of the course are discussed in this paper together with the approaches taken to manage those problems. Lessons learned while developing, refining, and implementing the YouTube for Educators course over time include the need to: (1) use proactive strategies to promote safety and privacy, (2) emphasize copyright and legal media use, and (3) develop course policies and practices to manage technological change. This work may be of interest to those who develop courses featuring Web 2.0 or other rapidly changing social media technologies.

Introduction

In 2008, an online course called *YouTube for Educators* was created as an elective for a graduate program in educational technology. As of fall 2011, it has been offered six times. The course was developed in response to student interest in Web 2.0 video sharing and the rapid advancement of digital video technologies. When the course was initially conceptualized, it seemed apparent that YouTube was gaining momentum toward becoming the largest and most highly visited online video service and this has proven to be the case. YouTube currently ranks in third place globally for magnitude of user traffic (Alexa, 2012). More than 200 billion online videos were viewed worldwide in October 2011 with YouTube delivering 2 out of every 5 of those videos (comScore, 2011). Video uploads to the site have seen a dramatic increase over time as well. When the course began in 2008, there were about 13 hours of video being uploaded per minute to YouTube. As of May 2011, that number had climbed to 48 hours of video uploaded per minute. This is the equivalent of 240,000 full-length films uploaded every week (YouTube, Inc., 2011). This growth has helped drive the decision to maintain the YouTube for Educators course as a permanent elective course.

Considering the long history of educational film (Saettler, 2004), interest in YouTube's rapidly growing video archive as an educational resource seems natural. *YouTube EDU*

appeared in 2009 and grew to become the largest repository of higher education video in the world during its first year (Greenberg, 2010). YouTube videos for K-12 education are being collected in the *Teachers* channel, which was created to organize lesson plans, tips, tutorials, and video playlists for several subject areas and grade levels (Sanders, 2011). K-12 schools, which often block YouTube access, now have available to them a service called *YouTube for Schools* (Truong, 2011), through which selective access may be granted to educational content on YouTube. This is a step in the right direction for making the best of YouTube available in the classroom.

As exciting as recent trends in online video may be, working in Web 2.0 spaces like YouTube can be challenging at times. Areas of concern related to privacy, intellectual property, and technological support have been noted (Anderson, 2012; Rodriguez, 2011) and did surface while teaching the YouTube for Educators course. Some of the most critical problems encountered during the six iterations of the course are discussed in this paper together with the approaches that were taken to manage them. Lessons learned while developing, refining, and implementing the YouTube for Educators course over time include the need to: (1) use proactive strategies to promote safety and privacy, (2) emphasize copyright and legal media use, and (3) develop course policies and practices to manage technological change. This work may be of interest to those who develop courses featuring Web 2.0 or other rapidly changing technologies.

Use Proactive Strategies to Promote Safety and Privacy

One of the first lessons learned while teaching the YouTube for Educators course was the importance of using proactive strategies to promote student safety and privacy. There are millions of users on YouTube and various types of behaviors, good and bad, can be encountered. There are many instances of respectful behavior on YouTube, but there are also "haters" who browse user channels to post annoying, rude, or hateful comments to provoke others (Lange, 2007). Some students entered the course with little exposure to YouTube. By warning them in advance of negative behaviors they might encounter it has been possible to minimize problems and raise awareness of how to handle difficult situations. The *YouTube Community Guidelines* page (www.youtube.com/t/community_guidelines) provides a list of rules of acceptable behavior and the *YouTube Safety Center* (www.youtube.com/safety) provides a mechanism through which behaviors such as hate speech or cyberbullying can be reported. These two sites are excellent starting points for orienting students to what might go wrong and what to do about it.

The use of *Safety Mode* on YouTube has also been a good tool to point out to students who have young children in the home. Some of the language used in YouTube videos and comments is inappropriate for young children and may be offensive to some adults. Safety Mode can filter out much of the objectionable content, although it is not perfect. Safety Mode can be enabled at the bottom of the YouTube home page (www.youtube.com). The screenshot in Figure 1 shows the Safety Mode settings on YouTube. Safety Mode must be enabled for each computer and web browser used to access YouTube.
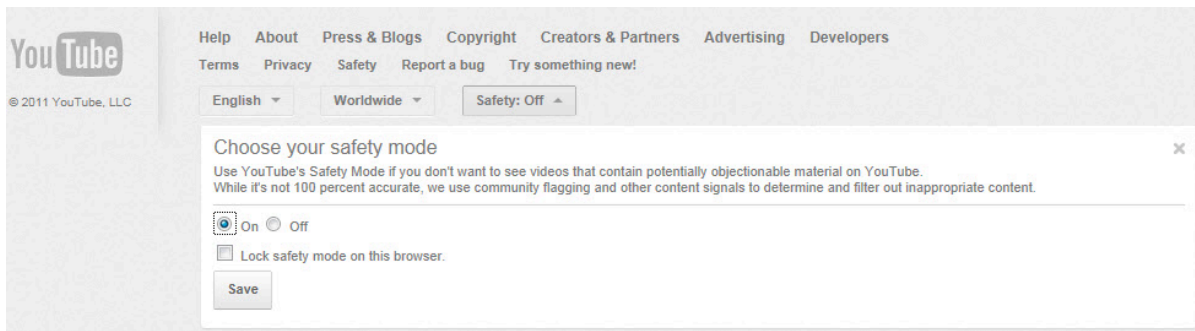
Figure 1. Screenshot of safety mode settings on YouTube (this is the actual color).

Comments on YouTube can be offensive at times. Safety Mode helps to filter out objectionable language in comments that are encountered while browsing the YouTube site. However, channel and video owners have additional tools to restrict commenting. When a video is uploaded to YouTube, the comment settings can be disabled or they can be set to require approval before comments are posted. Channel comments can be left enabled or they can be disabled. If necessary, other YouTube users can be blocked if they post harassing comments or messages. These are all techniques that students are made aware of early in the course.

In addition to safety issues, privacy has been a source of concern when teaching on YouTube and other Web 2.0 technologies. Fear over violating FERPA (Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act of 1974) regulations when posting student names online was reported as the driving force behind the removal of class websites at Georgia Tech in 2011 (Rice, 2011). In the YouTube for Educators course it is essential that students have a channel on YouTube, where they can learn how to use the system and upload video productions created as class projects. Privacy becomes an immediate concern in the public YouTube space, but it can be managed. One strategy is to restrict personal information, including student names on public YouTube channels. Students are permitted to select any YouTube user name they desire and they can leave personal information, including names, off of the channel profile. A list of links was posted inside the password protected online course site so that student channels could be located. This served to facilitate sharing of ideas while protecting student privacy.

Students were asked to upload the instructional video projects they created as public videos on YouTube so that others in the class could view them and collectively learn from each other's work. However, anyone who felt uncomfortable with the public display of his or her work could opt to set the video as private or unlisted and share it directly with the instructor on YouTube. Private videos are restricted for viewing by specified YouTube users. Unlisted videos may be viewed by anyone in possession of the link, but the videos do not show up in search results or display on public YouTube channels. This approach worked very well for situations where students did not wish to display their work publically, such as when they recorded personal reflections in video logs (vlogs). However, students were generally open to posting their instructional videos on their YouTube channels for public viewing.

Emphasize Copyright and Legal Media Use

Hobbs (2010) has described common misconceptions educators have about copyright and fair use. One of the misconceptions noted by Hobbs that has surfaced regularly in the YouTube for Educators course is the idea that anything (e.g., music, images, video) can be freely used as long as it is for educational use. Each semester the course has been offered, at least one copyright violation has occurred despite warnings in the course syllabus and instructional materials. One source of confusion is that copyrighted content has been uploaded without permission to YouTube making it appear as though this practice is permissible. Some users type a phrase like, "No copyright violation intended" in the video descriptions as if this will ward off claims of copyright infringement. In the fall 2011 semester, a new "video mashup" module was introduced in the course to focus attention on the ongoing issue of copyright confusion and legal media use. Students were required to seek out public domain or Creative Commons CC BY (attribution required, remix allowed) content to create a mashup video for YouTube. Great care had to be taken to assure that copyrighted materials were left out of projects to avoid encountering problems during or after upload to YouTube. YouTube's Content ID system (www.youtube.com/t/contentid) scans more than 100 years worth of videos every day to automatically identify copyrighted content. Videos containing copyrighted content may be muted, blocked, or removed and the person who uploaded the video may have a strike placed on his or her YouTube account. Accounts can be suspended after repeated occurrences. This project proved to be an effective way to force attention on the issue, while exploring the practice of remixing media for educational videos.

Develop Course Policies and Practices to Manage Technological Change

When working with Web 2.0 tools and services, including YouTube, there is always the chance that something will suddenly change or go out of service. This was a frequent problem encountered while teaching the YouTube for Educators course. During the first six iterations of the course, YouTube released two major updates and an array of sporadic interface changes that were seldom announced in advance. YouTube would also go into maintenance mode while courses were in progress, which typically meant that students could not upload projects that were due. The problem with maintenance mode was managed by developing a policy to offer students an automatic due date extension when this type of situation occurred. Interface changes were more problematic as they have led to the discontinuation of activities that relied on tools that were no longer available. To manage this issue, several assignment options are routinely offered during each course module. If one assignment option becomes impossible to complete due to sudden changes on YouTube, other options remain. Some core features of YouTube, such as search, video hosting, channels, and sharing, have remained consistent and dependable over time. Major assignments are designed around these core features to reduce the need for emergency curriculum adjustments while a course is in progress.

Concluding Remarks

Teaching the YouTube for Educators course has been a rewarding experience, despite the presence of the ongoing problems faced in the rapidly evolving YouTube environment. The strategies introduced in this paper have worked well to manage some of the problems inherent to teaching this type of Web 2.0 course. The only remaining consideration to mention is that the workload involved in maintaining the YouTube course tends to be high. Course curriculum and instructional materials are continuously revised to keep pace with changes on YouTube and digital video technologies. This may be true for other courses featuring Web 2.0 technologies. It can take a fair amount of time to maintain these types of courses. For those with a passionate interest, it will be worth the effort.

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