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Factors of Social Learning in an Era of Digital Natives

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ABSTRACT

In an era where learners have grown up with media multi-tasking, that is, simultaneous media use of audio and visual gadgets as well as Web-enabled computers and mobile devices, it is more critical than in prior generations to foster learners' social learning. The teacher of 21st century has a need to manage more diverse learning styles with more diverse strategies. They need to orchestrate social learning which is more relevant to learners. The new teacher necessitates managing combinations of human and machine learning as well as learning that are generated through more extensive interactions across more widely distributed settings and rooted in a sound understanding biological processes. The paper responds to some of the crucial questions among academic paraphernalia: Which kinds of new trends are compatible for social learning? What are the challenges involved in the learning process? Which factors influence this process? And how can we promote a more holistic way to link reason and emotion for personal and social development? This paper focuses on the current challenges and new trends in social learning in the 21st Century where multitasking is an essential skill.

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INTRODUCTION

The invention of social networks has brought about a communication revolution where the people have received a platform to freely and easily communicate at any time. This has also fostered the written communication among the internet users (Halliday (1993), Kaplan (1995) and McLuhan (1962)). In the 21st century, communication has become a techno-social activity where conversations are open method on the social networking platforms.

SOCIAL LEARNING AND DIGITAL NATIVES IN THE AGE OF MEDIA MULTI-TASKING

The development landscape of learners in the twenty first century is drastically different from that of pre-digital age, partly or largely due to advances in technology. In 2001 Prensky identified kindergarten to college age students as the first digital generation, or “Digital Natives”.(Prensky, 2001) Given a high technology and media-drive environment, Digital Natives might lack opportunities to develop their social and emotional skills if they rely on technology as their primary source of social networking. While the students might be competent in conducting a rich and active “virtual life”, but that will not help in honing social and emotional skills which are required for successfully navigating through their ‘actual life’ and that lack of social learning gives birth to aggression, confrontation, prejudices and several social problems. This provides us an opportunity to think about strategies or trends in social learning to work with ‘hot issues’ in an educational context.

TRENDS IN SOCIAL LEARNING

Social learning is a process for helping individuals develop fundamental skills for successfully dealing with daily living in an effective and ethical manner (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003). In his stimulating article on social learning, Natriello (2007) identifies these following trends of present modes and processes of learning and the implications of such trends for future:

- Learning is becoming more diverse
- Learning is becoming more contextual
- Learning is becoming less discipline-bound
- Learning is moving outside of institutional settings
- Learning is coming to span professional and institutional sectors
- Learning is moving beyond and between nation states
- Learning is moving online
- Learning is moving beyond human to machines
- Learning is moving to machines/human blends
- Learning is becoming less solitary and more interactive
- Learning is becoming less concentrated and more distributed
- Our understanding of learning is becoming more biologically connected

As these trends suggest the need to rethink social learning within the society and its organization so a deep change in the process of learning implies a deep change in the processes of teaching also. The same thing can be said for learners also as the developments in contemporary societies demand new profiles of competencies for individuals to be effective, to be able to adapt and keep a sense of purpose, self-fulfillment and worth.

Currently according to the needs, the process of learning has passed from simple self-organization to a collaborative, social, problem-solving activity much dependent on talk, practical involvement and experimentation involving teachers and learners.

PARENTS' TASK IN SOCIAL LEARNING

Firstly it's the role and responsibility of parents to foster proper social skills in their kids while maintaining the balance with the use of technological gadgets which is taken over by the schools and colleges stepping in and becoming surrogate for the family. Institutions must develop strategies to involve parents actively to discuss their children's social development. Following are the ways to involve parents:

- Informing the parents about the attitudes of their child towards social problems such as food and co-operation.
- Sending a written evaluation report weekly to the parents.
- Running a number of successful plan on issues such as emotional behavior and sending copies of what was discussed in the day home to parents
- Providing an opportunity for parents to continue the conversation with their child at home and add their own perspectives to that.
- Encouraging them to give extra information and their point of view through the internet and email.

TEACHER AS THE THIRD ADULT IN SOCIAL LEARNING

According to Versteylen, there are three categories of adults who relate to young people:

1. Loving and concerned parents, who want the very best for their children;
2. The consumer society itself- not at all loving, but concerned to profit from the desires of the generation of young people and
3. In between these two, there is a relatively rare third type of adult, often as loving than the parents themselves but not concerned with the profit- the approachable teacher. They do not sell goods, and they simply offer simply offer values. Without such people, education is not possible- certainly not social initiation. (Versteylen, 2002)

Teacher and pupils can become each other's partners in dialogue, in which the central element is not the transfer of knowledge, but the interaction between learners and subject, not least making visible the teacher's own cultural background (Versteylen, 2002)

In such a dialogical teaching-learning situation, this learning dialogue is of primary concern, in which special attention must be paid to mutually open relationships, to the personal contribution of participants, to the question-and- answer structuring core words and to the skill needed to distinguish between core words.

Collaboratively taught classrooms can be the most wonderful, because there will be another set of eyes and ears, and another brain. But teachers must calculate some of the following factors if this is not to be counterproductive. The question arises, "which kind of teacher do we need to avoid indoctrination and manipulation?" The answer to this fundamental question distinguishes several pedagogic models (Bulckens, 1997, 2003), one of which can be shown as forming a triangle.

PEDAGOGIC MODELS

1. In first model a triangle is formed. The base of the triangle is the subject matter and the pupil: the top is dominated by the teacher, who looks on the pupils as empty vessels or tabula rasa. The teacher fills them up with knowledge and asks yes/no questions. There is no room left for difference: this is an example of a monologue.
2. In a second model, pupils and teacher set off together on an adventure. It is not the teacher's knowledge that takes the lead, but the abundant experiences of the group itself. The teacher is only a pacemaker, driving the learning process but remaining in the background. The teacher, familiar with group dynamics and social skills, leads the discovery of new worlds and perspectives. Pupils and the teacher may bring new things to the learning process and look at the subject material from the same perspective. In doing so, they examine a painting and interpret it together. This leads to a new role for the teacher: s/he becomes a facilitator and moderator in working with art or cartoons. This model has a structure based on commitment.
3. In a third model, the teacher tries to support children and young people to develop themselves through contact with others and at the same time with other realities. In this model we find a tria-logue. The teacher helps the class group

*To appropriate intellectual patrimony and religious heritage actively, constructively and creatively
(Antone, 1997).*

Children look for visual data and in collaboration with other children and the teacher, they investigate and organize critical talk.

THE EMOTIONAL FACTOR IN SOCIAL LEARNING

Educators increasingly believe that without the most basic rules of decency, teaching and learning cannot take place. Principals and older teachers often maintain that increasing numbers of children are coming to school without fundamental values, without a minimal sense of right or wrong, and without basic trust. Institutions know that if they do not do develop character; they will not be able to accomplish much else.

For example, educational environment can be created for social learning by focusing on a value a week. By gathering the students into a philosophical circle, the teacher asks a series of questions about a doll or pet animal. Then the teacher makes a visual map of all of the students' responses, and displays this at the front of the room. He reads a story or fairy tale about caring, and starts a discussion with the students. Subsequently, He looks for opportunities during the rest of the day to make connections between the discussion about the caring and the students' personal behavior.

He should give the feedback if a child behaves in caring way. If a child behaves in an uncaring or thoughtless way, he should privately- not in public- ask the child if that behavior showed caring. Each day of the week he should read a different story or shows a video on caring and again set up a discussion. By the end of the week, he says that caring has turned into flesh and blood. This is one of many ways to weave core values into the fabric of the classroom.

THE ECOLOGICAL FACTOR IN SOCIAL LEARNING

In the environment of computer based learning, if the digital natives just connect themselves with technological devices, there would be a lack of being linked. The basic sense of connectedness can be seen as a cornerstone that prevents criminal behavior or action that damages things and people.

In early childhood and in primary and secondary education children are helped to develop this attitude of linking with themselves, with others, with the material world, with society and with the ultimate unity of the ecosystem (Cuvelier, 1998).

The Leuven Research Centre in Belgium has developed a process-oriented child monitoring system that helps teachers identify children with socio-emotional problems and with special developmental needs. These are children

“who have not been successful in achieving a satisfactory interaction with the environment. They are pressured, and lose contact with their inner experimental stream” (Laevers, 1997).

John Abbott pronounced in his latest book some outlines for a learning community:

- Relationships between young children and adults for much greater investment in the personal, social and intellectual development of adolescents; for taking greater responsibilities and for contributing to their communities.

- connection with something smaller than most current educational administrative units, but larger than a single school where they can feel a sense of identity and hopefully responsibility (Abbott, 2010).

THE HOLISTIC FACTOR IN SOCIAL LEARNING

Gardner speculates about a future of digital natives transformed by a genetic revolution, mega cities, global economies, virtual realities and machines replacing human beings in tasks and decisions. He focuses on his “five minds” concept for infusing social learning in digital natives in the media-multi tasking age. His “five minds” is less a psychological or philosophical concept and more an educational policy and an educational vision for the expected future (Gardner, 2008).

Gardner elects the following:

1. The Disciplined Mind: The Disciplined Mind values knowledge and informed and rigorous thought.
2. The Synthesizing Mind: The Synthesizing Mind controls chaos and disorder by extracting principles from intricate and intriguing situations.
3. The Creating Mind: The Creating Mind plays with complexity and excels, by renovating the shape of events, thoughts and feelings.
4. The Respectful Mind: The Respectful Mind is the excelling mind in what regards peace keeping and preserving social wellbeing and sustainable interrelations.
5. The Ethical Mind: The Ethical Mind envisages a co-responsible, active and committed citizenship.

THE 'ETHOS-FACTOR' IN SOCIAL EDUCATION

Values such as respect, responsibility, honesty and fairness promote and affirm human dignity, supporting the development and welfare of the individual person. They clearly serve the common good, and meet the classical ethical test of reversibility: would you want to be treated in this way?

Social learning does not simply wait for teachable moments to arise: it creates teachable moments itself. It creates opportunities to teach, model, promote, and celebrate core ethical values.

The two threats to the moral health of any society occur firstly when many people do bad things, and secondly when many people do bad things and don't have a clue that what they are doing is wrong. (Lickona, 1991; Turnbaugh-Lockwood, 1997).

A comprehensive approach should be used where-

1. The teacher act as caregiver, a model and a mentor, treating students with love and respect, supporting prosocial behavior and correcting hurtful actions.
2. The teacher should create a moral community, helping students to know and respect each other, ant to feel valued in the group as a whole.
3. The teacher should include the practice of moral discipline and teaching values through the curriculum.
4. The teacher should use cooperative learning to develop students' appreciation of others, developing the 'the conscience of craft' by fostering student's work ethic, developing the habit of moral reflection, and teaching conflict resolution.

THE 'VISUAL FACTOR' IN SOCIAL LEARNING

Teachers use lot of visual data. In relation to learning, the use of two-dimensional and three-dimensional images offer three major advantages. Firstly, they are highly memorable. Like songs, pictures stick in the head. Secondly, they are highly motivating, particularly so for children, adolescents, and young adult learners. Thirdly, using 2-D and 3-D data gets children on the same wavelength and creates common goals, targets and terminology, and makes formal modeling much easier, faster and more accurate. Concepts such as identity and sense of public responsibility can be visualized this way. Using games and pictures can create various environments and instruments that facilitate global discussion and dialogue (Vandemaele, 2002).

People often fail to recognize the validity of visual learning, and believe it is something less intelligent people resort to – an attitude that cannot be sustained in light of common observations. Young children generally enjoy pictures and animation films, and they can be seen as fun and helpful when used to explain difficult ideas. They are easy to relate to, and cartoon art is a powerful way to talk about difficult and scary issues. Also, the teacher trainers must still resist on a lot of myths and romantic views.

Art for children isn't about adjusting, modifying, limiting, making it sweet or tiny or less dangerous anymore. As for grown-ups, modern art for children on Flanders today is about sharpening, expanding, making clear, daring, sensualising and making bodily.

CONCLUSION

In fact, teachers, parents and policy makers must be aware of all these factors for the sake of adaptation, survival and wellbeing. The teacher for the 21st century will need to manage more diverse learning styles with more diverse teaching strategies. She or he will need to function outside institutional settings and disciplinary boundaries and orchestrate learning in contexts more relevant to learners and learning tasks. It will be a challenge for these teachers to operate in face-to-face online modes. The new teacher will need to manage combinations of human and machine learning as well as learning that is generated through more extensive interactions across more widely distributed settings and rooted in a sound understanding biological processes (Natriello. 2007, p. 14-15).

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