Web 2.0 Technologies and the Spirit of Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

There are many definitions of learning, all reflecting the academic specialties from which the study is conducted: 1. the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, beliefs, emotions, senses, etc.; 2. the sum total of the process of acquiring knowledge, skills etc, e.g., a learned person; and 3. sometimes, wrongly used as a synonym for education, e.g., adult learning. Significantly, learning is replacing the term education in the educational vocabulary. However, active learning is defined as methods by which learners actively participate in the learning process (e.g., discussion groups, problem-solving, experimentation, and the like). It is differentiated from passive learning in which learners are led by the nose. It is widely believed that active learning may lead to the creation of new knowledge and new skills needed by learners. Because of this belief in active learning, both educators and practitioners have been avidly promoting active learning online since Web 2.0 Technologies were used for online teaching and learning.

Keywords: Active Learning, Andragogy, Contiguity, Reinforcement, Repetition, Situated Cognition, Social-Cultural Principles, Web 2.0 Technologies

INTRODUCTION

Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998, 2005, 2011) define learning as emphasizing the person in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur. They define education as emphasizing the change agent who influences changes in others. Other scholars (Boyd et al., 1980) consider learning as the act or process by which behavioral change, knowledge, skills, and attitudes are acquired. Gagne (1985) defines learning as a process that leads to a change in a learner’s disposition and capabilities that can be reflected in behavior. Like human beings, animals also learn. However, the difference is, while animals learn via reflexes and behavior modification, humans learn through reflection (Wang & King, 2006, 2007). According to Dewey (1933), learners are faced with learning problems and these learning problems perplex and change the mind so that it makes belief uncertain. It is this perplexity that leads to reflective thinking, and hence learning. Without reflective thinking, learning may not occur. Those who are incapable of reflective thinking may be labeled as low IQ
individuals. In some cases, they are termed as “mentally disadvantaged” individuals although this would be a euphemistic term.

Regardless of how learning is defined, there is widespread agreement upon the definition of learning. That is, learning is reflected in a change in behavior as the result of experience (Haggard, 1963). In other words, learning must be associated with development and growth (Merriam, 2004). That is probably why Maslow (1970) sees the goal of learning to be self-actualization. And he explains self-actualization as the full use of talents, capacities, potentialities.

German social theorist, Habermas (1971) suggests that human beings have different interests or needs in life: to control their environment, to get along with each other, and to be free from oppression and constraint. Each of these interests leads to the acquisition of knowledge to satisfy that need. Habermas further indicates that human beings render learning through instrumental knowledge, practical knowledge and emancipatory knowledge. Instrumental knowledge allows us to manipulate and control the environment, predict observable physical and social events, and take appropriate actions via empirical research or teacher directed education. Learners acquire practical knowledge by working together in discussions, group work, group activities and group projects. Learners gain emancipatory knowledge by critically questioning instrumental knowledge and practical knowledge, especially the knowledge that oppresses or constrains them in some way. Twenty-five centuries ago, Confucius viewed learning as focusing on the cultivation of the inner experience, both as a way of self-knowledge and as a method of true communion with the other (Tu, 1979, p. 103). To Confucius, the goal of learning is to free one completely from four things: arbitrariness of opinion, dogmatism, obstinacy, and egotism (Wang & King, 2006, 2007). Further, Confucius thinks of learning as emphasizing meditation to control oneself. Upon the basis of Confucius’s thinking regarding silent reflection, scholars have made the distinction between active learning and passive learning. Learning does not take place in a vacuum, but rather always in a context. Learning takes place in any type of environment, including online. The purpose of this article is neither to solely study active learning for its own sake nor to present an analysis of active online learning. It is rather an attempt to examine the relationship between active learning online and learners’ intellectual growth and development with a more important purpose of promoting active online learning.

Towards this end, the next section to this article covers active learning and learners’ intellectual growth and development. The next section is devoted to how various learning theories can make active learning occur online, hence learners’ intellectual growth and development. The last section of the article seeks to make a summary of this article and point out some future directions for active learning online. As modern institutions launch more and more online learning programs, what concerns educators and parents is whether active learning will occur online. Unless active learning occurs online (or growth and development occur online), online learning will lose its true meaning in this knowledge society and information age we currently live in. It has become the goal for all educators and practitioners to promote and apply active learning online via Web 2.0 technologies. The Web 2.0 phenomenon is described as “a social and behavioral sea change” (El-Ghareeb & Riad, 2011, p. 374). The proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies has provided the tools for active learning in a virtual space. It is essential that the way in which those tools are used assures that active learning is the ultimate goal.

**CHANGES IN DELIVERY**

Online learning is a form of rhetoric. Prior et al. (2005) explain that there are five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery (p. 1). The canon of delivery, specifically, has changed over time through the emergence of Web 2.0 (Prior et al., 2005, p. 4). Bolter (1993) argues that Web 2.0 has changed delivery by making it more multimodal.
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