Chapter 3
Teaching and Learning in the Cloud: “Anywhere, Anytime.” Anybody, Too?!

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge is no longer produced exclusively in the traditional class-based learning environment. For twenty-first century learners, digitally networked classrooms are the new social spaces where innovative learning perspectives are cultivated. However, like traditional class-based learning environments, digitally networked classrooms need to be sensitive to the social forces of race, gender, and class that will inescapably invade digital cultures. Therefore, even in the cloud, this chapter argues, “difference” as a concept is always already embedded as a contributing feature under which knowledge is constructed and constructing. To this end, this chapter suggests that a consideration of “difference” and its signifying effect on cloud pedagogy is a useful lens to explore the phrase “anywhere anytime” to the term “anybody” in the digitally networked classroom. Finally, this chapter proposes that the model “anywhere, anytime, anybody” must become part of the basic structure of a democratic and collaborative knowledge building community to democratize teaching and learning in the cloud.

INTRODUCTION

The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes. —— Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time

With the ever-increasing reliance on web-based learning environments such as Google Drive, Dropbox, iCloud, Web 2.0 tablets, twitter, and podcasts, knowledge building is being shaped and determined by people who may never meet in traditional class-based learning environments. For the twenty-first century, this is increasingly the rule, rather than the exception. As an interactive epistemic space, digitally networked classrooms have the potential to democratize learning by enabling all voices to share in
knowledge building. Unlike traditional class-based learning environments where teaching and learning are still considered the best method for knowledge building, the social forces of race, gender, and class, still create imagined boundaries of difference between self and others. Although digitally networked classrooms have “positive effects that extend beyond the exact conditions of initial learning” (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999), what is overlooked are the social forces that function outside the cloud, which, I argue, will have some mediating effect on the social forces inside the cloud.

However, while I believe the notion of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) in the cloud is quite possible, we must remain open to what, how, and why some groups are “imagined” into digitally networked learning communities and other groups are not. To be sure, this involves questions of power and agency (Foucault, 1982). For example, despite bodies being physically absent and invisible in the cloud, “issues of marking, racial and otherwise, are unavoidably part of [digitally networked classroom communities] signifying practices” (Nakaruma, Kolko, & Rodman, 2000), which will infect any notion of a collaborative knowledge building community. Therefore, the shift to teaching and learning “anywhere anytime” inevitably beckons more questions regarding knowledge building environments and particularly for digital natives (Palfrey & Grasser, 2008), whose social identities and mode of learning are the most constructed in digital cultures.

With this in mind, digitally networked classroom learning communities, like the cloud, are networked sites of conversation and conflict. To be sure, questions of pedagogy are involved given they are conceptual frameworks where teaching and learning is constructed and constructing. This is important since the “anywhere anytime” notion of learning is the new mantra in secondary and post-secondary education institutions. However, for some groups, the digital divide is a material reality and exclusionary practices are present despite the cross-cultural, multi-centric, trans-national, and global engagement initiatives that will continue to shape twenty-first century teachers and learners. In light of this, this chapter will address the role of cloud pedagogies as being blind to “difference” in digitally networked classroom learning communities. A stance, I believe, is counterintuitive to the collaborative intelligence goals and objectives. In fact, difference (in any form), is arguably one of the defining features of digitally networked classroom learning communities, since unlike encountering sameness, encountering difference asks teachers and learners to take part in “the reality of other possibilities, as well as the possibility of other realities” (Kessler & McKenna, p. 164).

This chapter, divided into three sections with the overarching goal of providing an alternate pedagogical account of digitally networked classroom learning communities and their power to democratize with “difference” as a salient feature in the cloud will shape the discourse in this chapter. The first section begins with an examination of current conceptual and theoretical notions of cloud pedagogy, which is important on two fronts. First, by individually exploring the terms “cloud” and “pedagogy,” a critical analysis of their connection will give a clearer understanding of the implications and the presuppositions of the two terms when combined and adopted as “cloud pedagogy.” Second, it is important to demonstrate that pedagogies, such as “cloud pedagogies” are constructed; and therefore, imbue all of the failures of the social forces that mediate constructed notions of knowledge.

For example, what does racial, gender, sexuality and disability “difference” mean in a digitally networked community, if it means anything at all. Is this the new frontier of difference blindness? Accordingly, in the second section, I consider and characterize knowledge building in digitally networked classroom learning communities, and consider how difference is a counternarrative and yet despite difference as mediating collaborative intelligence, grand possibilities of transformation to difference are conceivable and achievable. The third section explores cloud pedagogies as a discursive site where
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