Chapter 3

Enhancing Learning Through Digital Technology in the Practice of Youth Work

Lee Kwan Meng
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Ismi Arif Ismail
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Nor Aini Mohamed
Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The goal of youth work is to facilitate and contribute to the positive development of young people, as well as to resolve issues that are problematic to them. In the process of this growth and development, their learning is paramount, particularly in the nonformal form of learning. While learning has to be anchored on classical learning theories and concepts, the advent of digital technology has caused a paradigm shift in the learning approaches of youth learning. How they relate to each other is what this article is about. It examines the theoretical concepts of learning, what these digital tools and platforms are, and how they relate to each other. Nevertheless, youth workers have to be equipped with a foundation of youth development before they can effectively use these digital tools to facilitate learning. Digital technology tools with their platforms are merely a medium for learning, not part of the end process of learning, and youth workers have to differentiate the specific role of these digital tools.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of youth is very crucial in our society because they are our assets and our future. The youth carry the role and responsibility to take our next destiny to the next level in a new era. Unfortunately, they are often equated with personal, social, career and other problems that other members of society have to resolve for them. This is the label they often carry with them. Dealing and engaging with such youths have been categorised in the deficit and equity and welfare model by the Commonwealth, while in contrast, the other positive models of youth are the asset-based/empowerment and development/instrumentalist models (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017).

While the former two models are about engaging with the youths to resolve their problems and support them with their basic needs and security such as in the social work sector, the latter two models are about tapping and developing their strengths, talents and capacities to become instruments of nation building. This is where in this developmental process of their asset development, learning takes place. It is through learning that development and positive growth and change takes place (Knowles et al. 2005).

To facilitate the task of developing the youth, this is the job of youth workers who directly engage with the youth in their daily work, or indirectly plan policies and strategies, manage and studied them behind the scenes for their development. Youth workers have varied roles while engaging with the youths. And since learning is an important component of their development, sometimes they also take on the role of facilitating their learning and education.

Youth work is the process of a service in delivery to the youth. It is also a profession where the youth workers engage with the youth to build their personal, social, political and economic capital by empowerment through supports in non-formal learning with a matrix of care (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017; Belton, 2012). An important goal of youth work is ‘to develop avenues to exhibit creativity and begin to practice the skills needed for later stages in life’ (Edginton et al., 2005, p. 3).

In engagements with youth, the youth workers have to work in diverse settings, employment situations, and be equipped with multiple skill sets whereby they can utilise the various different approaches and tools to facilitate youth development. Their work can also be found in many settings such as in social and welfare services, in sports and recreation, in arts facilities, in libraries, hospitals, children and welfare homes, in institutions for young offenders (Belton 2012). These are frontline youth workers in daily engagements with the youths. Then there are also those who work in the background such as youth event programme planners and managers, in management and administration of organisations, and at the top level as policy makers.
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