Chapter 6

Personalization of Learning Environments in a Post–Industrial Class

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ABSTRACT

The chapter deals with trends of educational processes and learning environments in post-industrial society. A historicist approach is used for this purpose. This approach is based on two theoretical recourses: analysis of historical forms of acquiring knowledge and analysis of historical forms of educational processes. The authors show that the contemporary educational process is greatly affected by two innovative phenomena: social media and personal identity online (PIO). They consider socialization and personalization as two unique entities having opposite characteristics of the post-industrial educational process. Based on such a dialectic approach to the educational process, they define the concept “Personal Ubiquitous Educational Environment”. The authors report the preliminary results of research on a teachers’ training course conducted on the basis of such an environment. The research focuses on clarifying both innovative components of contemporary educational processes: social media and PIO.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of any society is to provide an educational system that includes a set of tools that can be utilized to ameliorate problems encountered in the social and economic world. The corresponding educational process and curriculum usually aim at targeting the knowledge and skills needed for dealing with problems throughout the world.

The transition of our society to the post-industrial epoch (Masuda, 1981; Huber, 1984) serves as a background and an initial point of our study. Post-industrial society has become
more a society of services rather than a society of production. It creates new ways of human interaction with society, where artificial interfaces separate individuals from the real world social environment. One of the trends of the previous industrial society, namely, the globalization and formalization of social institutions, and as a consequence, the decreasing role of the individual, has recently been replaced by personalization, placing the individual at the center of the world (Every, Garcia & Young, 2010).

Accordingly, recently the main objectives of education have changed to reflect these tendencies. The newly conceived educational process requires changing the role of the teacher to the learner (Carolyn & Foster, 2010; Fazal, DeSimone, & Lieman, 2010). Thus, the teacher is not a single content provider any more. The learner becomes increasingly freer to collect knowledge as needed and has the power to decide. Owing to the latest achievements in information and communication technology, e.g., wireless broadband, IP, and cloud computing, the learning has become increasingly more ubiquitous, meaning that the world is adapting to the learner’s mobility with no formal class distinction (Dede, 2011).

Obviously, it is senseless for the educational system to compete with the Internet and other innovative sources of educational content. On the contrary, it is much more promising to utilize this means for enhancing students’ personal skills and abilities to improve the effectiveness of learning.

Western society, in general, and education, in particular, is evolving toward personalization. This personalization is strongly connected with the new phenomenon of Personal Identity Online (PIO) that has been intensively studied in recent years (Bowman, 2009; Rodogno, 2011). The concept of PIO personifies a specific characteristic of an individual’s behavior in a network environment, which manifests itself in a unique opportunity to form the individual’s identity differently from that in reality. The world network opens up new opportunities for self-expression and for forming identity. The PIO is the form of personalization that typifies post-industrial learning environments (Floridi, 2011).

Another remarkable factor characterizing the coming epoch is the phenomenon of social media. Social media are traditionally defined as the use of Web applications supporting the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Here, we give to the concept of social media a more general and culturological interpretation, rather than the technological one. We consider the social media as a cultural phenomenon, substantially intensifying and enhancing interpersonal communication and significantly altering the nature of the relationship between an individual and a society “personality-society”. Note that the relationships “personality-personality” and “personality-society” are immediately perceived as simple and are unprecedentedly multifaceted. The simplicity of relationships/mutual connections is clearly seen in the availability of new communication tools (from mobile devices to social networking sites) for any level of the society, regardless of education, age, and economic status. Diversity of communication connections is a new phenomenon related, for example, to the above-mentioned phenomenon of PIO, and to the fact that an identity (a personality) in cyberspace can be perceived not only as a real person, but also as an “infosphere” directly associated with the person (Floridi, 2011). The infosphere of an individual consists of the memory of the discussed personality/individual, the memory about the personality and multiple media documents related to the personality, lifestyle, etc. Infosphere of an individual somehow exists and functions in the cyberspace, independently of the corresponding personality. It is clear that this has created a new media reality that, in our opinion, is the most important tool for understanding the phenomenon of social media. In the era of social media, social consciousness is formed in accordance with new, previously unknown principles, thus establishing new goals in all public institutions. It is obvious
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