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Why new media are/aren't game changer for education.

I remember less than a decade ago when I bought a first generation iPhone. At that time, it wasn't common to have such a powerful mobile device that could access so much information. Now this sort of access has become a common feature of everyday life. Anywhere we go we see people using tech devices to check email, search the Internet, read books, watch TV and communicate through a variety of media. It seems like people have always assumed technology would change education but I think technology has to change everyday life before it can start to change education.

Looking at our current life, learning can happen anywhere, in any space and information is always accessible. This has important implications not just for how we learn but also for the habits we develop around learning itself. For example, I remember a time growing up when penmanship for assignments was a big part of the grading criteria. For my nieces and nephews, this should no longer really be the case because many students now type and hand in assignments electronically. Yet talking to them, I know that some of their middle and high school teachers still give them critical marks for their handwriting, simply because this is a traditional element of formal schooling. This seems out of sync with the type of skills people are developing in the real world. These include being able to “decode, evaluate, analyse and produce both print and electronic media” (Aufderheide, 1992). In my opinion, schools are often institutions with long memories and change does not come quickly. *Schooling* itself has an even longer memory and does not often adapt quickly to new ways of doing things. It is no surprise that technologies often have a greater impact outside schools than inside. I think educators and school administrators often have to see the impact of new technologies and the changes that are possible before they are willing to bring them into the classroom.

Technologies that are common outside of schools have the potential to help us rethink our approaches to education and make significant changes to the ways we go about teaching and learning. Just recently we held our exhibitions to showcase our websites to our classmates. I

was in one part of the world, talking to people in other parts of the world, discussing in real time the digital products we designed on home computers. What a powerful and empowering experience! Sometimes I have to step back and realize I even am doing it myself now taking an online course at Michigan State University. Learning is no longer just sitting passively in a classroom or library. People can earn higher education from taking online courses and people also can connect to global learning networks. Powerful devices and online tools make resources available to learners everywhere. In the case of my teaching focus - yoga - technologies may not make an immediate change to how students practice the actual poses; there are some things that remain the same for learning the different physical elements of yoga. Technology, however, can broaden the ways a person experiences the phenomena associated with yoga. Where yoga students before only had a small community of learners and maybe one or two instructors with whom to practice and exchange ideas, now they have an almost unlimited online network of resources. A yoga student can compare the practices of other yoga students from different schools simply by joining an online thread. She can also choose the ways she wants to engage with others, from silent reading to active participation and in-depth engagement with others in the thread. The choice is hers in terms of learning and engaging the content and the community on her terms.

I think schools need to adapt to the new “rules” of the game, one in which information can be found everywhere and the choices of students can be heard and respected. For example, when I was growing up there were only 5 television channels and roughly 7 newspapers. These accounted for almost all the daily information and content delivery in the country (not including books). This meant that not only was our daily information limited to a select times of the day, it also meant we had very little choice in where we got our information and the ways in which we could participate in its creation and experience. In other words, getting the news was a very passive experience with little choice as to how it was experienced. But new digital technologies have transformed getting the news from a passive experience to a potentially active one. DeSchryver and Spiro, talking about post-Gutenberg methods of experiencing information, note that new media technology “facilitates multiple conceptual comparisons and contrasts, allows for increasingly complex but cognitively manageable learning, provides an acceleration of the acquisition of experience, and develops open knowledge structures that can be tailored to new contexts” (DeSchryver & Spiro, 2008). For a layperson, this means that powerful new media elements like searches, keywords, and tags

can show the interconnections of topics in ways that are richer and more complex than reading or viewing a single source of information at a time. In the case of getting the news, it also means a person with an Internet connection and a browser can create their own meaning and interpretation of current events from multiple sources. With the increasing use of social media, elements like hashtags on Twitter can make staying up-to-the-minute on breaking news an active task of engagement and information synthesis that is performed in real time. Coupled with more static resources like Wikipedia, new media technologies have the potential to empower students to make connections to what they are seeing in the news and what has happened in the past faster and from a greater number of perspectives. In other words, in terms of traditional school subjects like history and current events, new media technologies have the potential to change not only the nature of the content students experience also the kinds of skills they need to make it happen.

Information is now more diffuse and distributed - there are less and less “definitive” sources and user generated content is now an important part of the information landscape. Perhaps schools can adapt in ways similar to libraries. When the Internet started to become more common in homes, people were predicting the end of libraries. But libraries are as popular as ever, if only because they changed their techniques but kept their mission the same – providing people their expertise to find, organize, and make use of the vast amounts of information now available.

References:

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