


Digitally mediated learning is crucial

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With the inexorable diffusion of digital technologies in various aspects of society, we , as educators, feel compelled to adopt and use them more in educational contexts.

A distinctive characteristic that distinguishes 21st from 20th century education is the emphasis on inclusivity. In the philosophy underlying 20th century education, Barber (2013) states that differentiation and, up to a certain extent, segregation was accepted as the rule of the day.

Thus school systems that categorised, segregated and branded students for a professional, semiskilled or unskilled track for life were acceptable and went undisputed.

This is not afforded anymore. As work becomes more automated and unless people are well-educated and equipped to be flexible and deliver according to ever-changing economic scenarios, a lot of them may possibly end up unemployed.

Privacy

In the meantime, as we celebrate equal opportunities for all, digital technologies are considered by many to be important to achieve this aim, reach and accordingly stimulate opportunities for more to learn more and achieve better in life.

With the inexorable diffusion of digital technologies in various aspects of society and especially when looking at our students, we, as educators, feel compelled to adopt and use them more in educational contexts. Several teachers also believe that such technologies can make a difference.

In 2009, a poll on the Digital Learning Environments website showed many teachers believed that digital technologies enhanced various aspects of learning, such as the support for project-based learning (38 per cent) and improvement of critical thinking skills (29 per cent).

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Twenty four per cent considered that formal digitally mediated learning also enhanced the ability to communicate. In April 2013, the published results of the Survey of Schools, managed by European Schoolnet and University of Liege: Benchmarking Access, Use and Attitudes to Technology in Europe's Schools, concurred similar outcomes.

“ Despite the saturation of the digital technologies in many cultures, no generation has yet lived from cradle to grave in the digital era

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The survey, involving teachers from 31 countries including Malta, indicated that besides the students, teachers' opinion about the value and impact of ICT in educational settings and for learning was "overwhelmingly positive".

While lack of ICT infrastructure seemed to be a major inhibitor to use, no overall relationship was found between high levels of infrastructure provision and student and teacher use, confidence and attitudes. The presence of technology did not seem relevant to teachers' perceptions of use in educational contexts.

As digital tools and applications diffuse more into educational contexts, educators have to be able to decide and distinguish between various technological qualities and associated behaviours best adapted to use and teach a specific concept.

I do not believe this is an easy task and the situation cannot be portrayed better if not by Palfrey and Gasser (2008) when they say: "Despite the saturation of the digital technologies in many cultures, no generation has yet lived from cradle to grave in the digital era."

Adopting the book approach, where written notes and traditional learning attitudes are transferred to a digital environment, does more harm than actually release the potential of digitally mediated learning.

Educators have to look beyond the digital tool itself and focus more on the 'process' to enhance the learning experience through the technology chosen.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills mentions four important competencies, which can be used as guidelines at the core of digitally mediated learning processes: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

I prefer to include another four: convergence, communities of learners, connectedness and cloud computing, which is becoming more pervasive and integral in our day-to-day activities.

Communication is easily facilitated by digital technologies, allowing students and teachers to have a live dialogue independent of space and time. In the process, both parties will develop and enhance each other's qualities.

Subsequently teachers can also take advantage of the web and ease of connectedness between people to establish communities of learners and practice, fostering and establishing ideas of cooperation and group work.

The alienation from the process of learning to the emphasis placed on the difference between digital devices does not fare well for digitally mediated learning. As a matter of fact, in digitally mediated learning environments convergence should be strongly meaningful.

The core content material and knowledge have always been there. On the other hand, the process by which data and facts are meaningfully transformed to knowledge need to be seriously reconsidered in context of these digitally catalysed attitudes.

Learning, higher order thinking and conceptualisation, which call for a larger chunk of the population to make that independent quantum leap forward for change, adaptation and development, need to be drastically interpreted in context of the world we are living in.

We live in a tangible reality of a global village where the 'cough' of a country will cause other economies to catch a cold, where partnerships, cooperatives and foresight thinking and planning are becoming more relevant.

Enhancing the learning process from its roots by understanding and embedding the Cs at the core of our teaching activities and through other window of opportunities uniquely presented through digital applications would help bring a much required attitudinal shift.

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