

Chapter 26

Spontaneity: The Secret Ingredient of Learning

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ABSTRACT

Higher knowledge, such as reasoning, emerges through everyday common-sense spontaneous activity, said Vygotsky. Consequently, formal education needs spontaneous learning experiences to be perfect. In this chapter, the authors explore knowledge on spontaneous activity from everyday life experiences of 11 second- and third-year students who studied at a Philippine university. Students told their stories through a focus group discussion. Their stories were triangulated with an interview of their instructor, one-on-one interviews with some of them, and an open-structured essay-type questionnaire. The grounded theory approach in analyzing their learning practices reveals spontaneity that fits students' contexts, needs, and expectations. Spontaneous learning is a process of discovery and reflection when students conduct active learning engagements. Students who preoccupy themselves with their spontaneous learning bring to themselves new self-knowledge. The self-knowing process redefines and empowers the self. The implication is that spontaneous activity could be embedded into formal, non-formal, and informal education to maximize students' learning.

INTRODUCTION

“Spontaneous” occurs, according to Oxford dictionaries, as a result of a sudden inner impulse without premeditations or external stimulus. Vygotsky differentiated complementary “spontaneous”

activity and “scientific” activity (Daniels, 2008, p. 14).. He clarified, for instance, that children learn to speak their home language, to name objects, and even to use gadgets as they play or interact with people. Their playing and interaction with other people are external stimuli. The skills that

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they developed or the knowledge that they learned are by-products of their *everyday* experiences generally without prior planning. Vygotsky (1997) and Vygotsky, Cole, John-Steiner, and Scribner (1978) referred these instances as “spontaneous” and distinguished them from “scientific” when children go to school and experience the learning that is planned for them.

Of the many studies on spontaneous activity over the last few decades, studies of the relationship between spontaneous activity and the input or the scientific activity per se are rare (Kurikawa & Kaneko, 2013). There is no study that explored spontaneous activities in the field of accounting and in the context of the Philippines.

In the background section that follows, spontaneous activity is like a river that interplays with its landscape. The theory of spontaneous activity echoes dynamic interactions of the learners alone or with a community, their characteristics, their segments (e.g., primary, secondary, or higher education and formal or vocational type), what is to be learned (e.g., to emphasize skills development first or to emphasize knowledge), their contexts, their learning environments, and the instances in which transformative learning occurs. To understand it means to understand some if not all its elements and their continuous interactions at a time and over a period and to be able to thoroughly and deeply understand the true nature and implications of spontaneous learning. In short, exploring and understanding spontaneous activity necessarily embrace all these complexities.

In this chapter, we used an existing set of data gathered in 2010 (when we investigated the approaches to learning by students in the Philippines studying Introductory Accounting). Eleven students told their life stories. Each story was in itself a spontaneous activity. We aimed to discover knowledge on spontaneous activity from these everyday life experiences at a point in time and in the contexts of accounting in the Philippines.

BACKGROUND

Scientific activity needs spontaneous activity to be perfect (Linkenkaer-Hansen, Nikulin, Palva, Ilmoniemi, & Palva, 2004; Mathewson, Gratton, Fabiani, Beck, & Ro, 2009; Vygotsky *et al.*, 1978). A scientific activity starts with stimulus (the input) that triggers the learning engagements (the response) to achieve skill development or knowledge acquisition (the output). Associated to spontaneous activity are words, such as those referring to natural, uninhibited, common sense, every day, beliefs, and experiences. These words contain the idea of time and space (Deco, Jirsa, & McIntosh, 2011; Fox & Raichle, 2007).

Kurikawa and Kaneko (2013) experimented with spontaneous activity *on* sensory stimuli (inputs) to enhance scientific activity (response) and found that (1) spontaneous activity is “highly structured in time and space” (p. 13) even without a sensory stimulus and that (2) it spreads over many patterns but converges to one integrated pattern by applying an input. Without the sensory stimulus, spontaneous activity can exist by itself (while scientific activity on the other hand needs spontaneous activity). Prior to their study, Linkenkaer-Hansen *et al.* (2004) and Mathewson *et al.* (2009) found that spontaneous activity complements and enhances scientific activity. Spontaneous activity is a form of nuisance other authorities believed it to be. It not only has the power to complement scientific activity, it also has power to connect itself to scientific activity, its inputs, its process, and/or even its outputs. Furthermore it has the powers of divergence and convergence.

In our definition, spontaneous activity could be an individual or a collective activity. We use the term spontaneous activity to refer to the relationship between spontaneous activity *and* the inputs, process, and outputs of the scientific activity and how such relationship is crafted into scientific activity by design.

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