

Chapter 12

Ratchet Head Pedagogy: A Narrative Autobiographical Inquiry about How We Learned to Customize and Tune Italian Motorcycles through Asynchronous Online Discussion

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ABSTRACT

This narrative autobiographical study is a tribute to do-it-yourselfers who have long worked on their own, patiently troubleshooting motorcycle-related problems often without having all the information or the parts at hand and frequently without having the proper skills to do so. The authors address a peculiar phenomenon that emerged at the same time as Web 2.0 technologies, deemed to be more social: the capacity for anyone to solve problems that would be otherwise impossible. The specific narratives looked at are the authors' own experiences with Italian motorcycles and how they learned to customize and tune them through joining asynchronous online discussions. The authors present the context of the study, the theoretical framework inspired by Csikszentmihalyi, Foucault, Freire, Dewey, and Wenger, and the methodology. They make an effort to present the results sequentially so that the reader is given a good sense of their experience. The authors offer a discussion that shows the relationships between their experience and progressive concepts of education, which could be useful for the traditional educational system that is currently adrift.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter strives to explain the phenomenon of informal and incidental learning when people (us) face quasi-impossible problems to solve (in this case: to understand Italian mechanics) and the only way to acquire the knowledge and to develop the competencies to solve these problems is through the use of asynchronous blogs and Web resources. To illustrate the phenomenon, we explain the context of our study and the issues that emerge, which we attempt to solve in a narrative perspective. We rely on several theoreticians, namely Csikszentmihalyi, Foucault, Freire, Dewey, and Wenger, and the literature in the domain to define the problems. We use a narrative of our experience to reveal to the reader the steps we followed to solve our problem and how asynchronous online discussions were an essential part of our learning process. We discuss these results by triangulating our narrative with our reflections and the literature.

CONTEXT

The traditional schooling system has long been criticized for its inadequacy to cater to diverse learners and for the rigidity of values and ideals that it pursues. In a world where technologies are pervasive, we have found that many learners who lag behind in school, excel at learning outside of school. Four decades of research in educational technology have shown that, if used appropriately, technologies can help to improve learning and performance (Kozma, 2005; Reiser, 2001). We often quote video games for the same reason, because research has shown that they are engaging and that they help the learner get motivated (Gee, 2003). We have also made a lot of progress in the sciences of education in understanding how to adapt pedagogical interventions to cater to learners who are not as well suited to learn in the traditional schooling system (Francis & Join-Lambert Milova, 2011; Perrenoud, 2001). Researchers in the field

of differentiated pedagogy have noted that when pedagogy is adapted to the needs of a particular set of learners in a classroom, these learners tend to be more successful. However, practices do not change as easily as stating the obvious and we often find teachers in schools using technologies as a reward for good behavior, and not as a powerful teaching tool (Davidson & Desjardins, 2011).

When looking at differentiated pedagogical practices, we notice they often consist of decontextualized ways of packaging lessons and that they do not necessarily suit the characteristics of the learners for which they were intended (Kozochkina, 2009). Despite all these good intentions, learning in school is often detached from real-life and power relationships are often detrimental to the learning process.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In an attempt to provide some grounding to the autobiographical data we present later in the chapter, the conceptual framework we present here brings together the thoughts of several philosophers in an unconventional way.

When facing the challenge of integrating technology within learning environments and differentiating pedagogy, many educators hold two traditional arguments. First, technologies are pervasive and learners will stumble upon them sooner or later. There is no need to address this issue in school, because learners spend most of their lives using technologies and school has many other challenges to tackle. Second, school serves the purpose of delivering precise curriculum content each year until the learner is ready for higher education or for work and it is important to go through the curriculum thoroughly. Educators are often open to differentiated pedagogical practices, but in the end, they are primarily concerned with the content that has to be conveyed. While these two arguments are logical, they are founded in a traditional view of education, which strives to

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