Chapter 14
Advancing Personal Learning and Transdisciplinarity for Developing Identity and Community

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ABSTRACT

Personal learning is an idiosyncratic ability built upon metacognition that fosters identity development. When supported with virtual learning using avatars, collaborative virtual environments (CVEs), and combinations of emerging technologies, personal learning advances identity exploration and community development. Virtual participation in groups and events fosters mentoring for community enrichment especially for vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, and those in need of recovery. Emerging technologies such as extended reality (XR) and the internet of things (IoT) present opportunities to combine physical and virtual world media/interactions useful for improved learning engineering. New expressions of Gemeinschaft and Gesselschaft are possible to co-create the future when empowered stakeholders collaborate to design smart, enabled, blended physical and virtual cities/communities. This chapter explores how concepts from systems thinking, presence research, and transdisciplinarity can advance personal learning and transcend human limitations.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the notion of generating greater responsibility and empowerment for a concept of personal learning framed through the use of embodied avatars, collaborative virtual environments, metacognition, and emerging technologies. The catalyst for cultivating identity will be shown as a function of learners' interaction socially where mentoring abounds. The authors posit that improved self-discovery, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-determination, and self-leadership contributes to the development of authenticity and ownership of identity made possible through immersive, virtual learning. These qualities, when habitually practiced contribute to involvement in communities that serve as brokers of practical innovation impacting quality of life in the virtual and physical world. Several words in this chapter appear to have improper punctuation. Familiar concepts are shown with differences in meaning when applying new lenses such as self-Self, being-Being, and nature-Nature.

Future developments in the IoT are discussed for applications of personal and environmental uses that when combined and integrated into virtual and physical environments provide the potential for transformative benefits. Extended reality (XR) is described as expressions of augmented, virtual, and mixed realities that will blur boundaries between worlds and activities undertaken for personal and professional uses. Implications for supporting under-served populations such as persons with disabilities are considered within the frame of an enabled, smart community.

Reciprocal sharing and appreciation are necessary to create a community. Communing within communities involves a spiritual dimension of hope and optimism that transcends wealth and social status. Across cultures, there is a wide disparity of economic wealth, and yet, people freely learn together in some cases creating a learning community, the bedrock of society. Practicing mindfulness has been widely attributed to promoting spiritual health, and while digital technologies have cause greater human separation in some, on the whole, these technologies have provided the basis for connecting more people continuously from most anywhere. As media exposure from augmented reality becomes more common in everyday life will our awareness diminish due to distraction or will we aspire to create new understanding through new forms of communication? Tuan (1977) said, "People tend to suppress that which they cannot express" (p. 6) and "Exceptionally talented people can live for art and science and go wherever they thrive" (p. 138). Will we create our own safe, virtual havens and dare to discover feelings that which are in us? And then, will we be open to sharing with others creating new forms of intimate understanding? Mentors have a leading role to play, and we can all be mentors in virtual world communities, "Feelings and intimate experiences are inchoate and unmanageable to most people, but writers and artists have found ways of giving them form" (p. 202).

BACKGROUND

Practicing the development of habits of mind require embracing *personal mastery* so that we shape technology more than it shapes our humanity. An essential component of the discipline of personal mastery involves taking the time to focus and reflect on our vision so we can see objectively (Senge, 2006, p. 136). Oelofsen (2012), describes personal learning as how you interact with the experiences you have that involve self-awareness and clarity on how your personal history, past experiences, and personality affect your approach to your work role (p. 295). Social learning is not distinct from personal learning and is often intertwined. Seeing the connections between one's role and job to others involves interdependence.

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