

Chapter 9

Building Digital Learning Architectures of Participation

ABSTRACT

This summative chapter outlines how practitioners, learners, managers, and various participants in education and policy might help build learning infrastructures. The authors try to identify who can lead on these processes and how they might do so. They hope to show what a transformed learner-centric education system could look like after consideration of the possibilities they have presented here. Technology has its greatest impact when its use is appropriate to context. Technology projects divorced from their organisational and community contexts solve technical problems and create unintended consequences for the wider organisation and their intended users, and architectures of participation are a means of dealing with such issues.

INTRODUCTION

In our view, to paraphrase the science-fiction author William Gibson who once said that “the future is already here it is just unevenly distributed” we think that “the answers are already here, we are just asking the wrong questions” both about learning and our educational organisations.

In a New Culture of Learning John Seeley Brown argues that we need to shift from thinking about educational institutions and “broken schools” to thinking about “learning environments” because if we do “the focus of the discussion changes from fixing a problem to growing a solution”. We have

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always been more solution oriented than problem fixated. Brown also talks about boundaries and one of our early pieces of work on AoP was entitled “Beyond a Boundary”. According to Brown the fixed boundaries of educational institutions with “well-defined and carefully-constructed boundaries are not usually thought of as standardized, nor are they tested and measured” A “learning environment (should be viewed) as where the context in which learning happens, the boundaries that define it, and the students, teachers and information within it all coexist and shape each other in a mutually reinforcing way”. Here boundaries serve not only as constraints but also, oftentimes, as catalysts for innovation” This description of learning boundaries identified as constraints means that “encountering boundaries spurs the imagination to become more active in figuring out novel solutions within the constraints of the situation or context” is what we mean by digital learning architectures of participation and this chapter examines this in a summative way based on all the earlier chapters.

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When looking at practitioner projects we described the work of those who worked with or developed architectures of participation (hereinafter AoP) using Web 2.0 digital technologies. This work was/is often realising aspects of O’Reilly’s vision in his Web 2.0 Meme Map and moving beyond it. We now want to look at these AoPs and how they can be built utilising our learning from twenty years of engagement with project and research work around learning, teaching and digital technologies.

As we noted in the chapter on the E-Maturity Framework for Further Education, O’Reilly’s definition of AoPs leaves a great deal to be desired, not least to separate out architectures of algorithmic inclusion and exclusion operated by social media publishers/broadcasters such as Facebook, architectures of engagement, bringing participants into the procedures and practices of AoPs themselves and, finally, AoPs as developed by practitioners, such as Vijaya Bhanu Kote (See Chapter 8), to elicit activity and commitment from participants to each other as well as the wider objectives of the AoP.

In researching the background to the term ‘Architecture of Participation’ there are many books and other publications that explore participation in art and architecture and two focusing on the philosophical and theological concept of participation stemming from Platonic philosophy. It is strange

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