

Chapter XV

Reconceptualising Scaffolding for New Media Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss the ways in which teachers can support their student's learning in new media contexts with the use of effective scaffolding techniques. The authors present two learning scenarios of children to illustrate the ways in which scaffolding pedagogies are deployed in order to enhance learning opportunities that incorporate the use of new media. In Scenario One, the Year 2 children (approximately 7 years) use digital technologies to communicate their ideas and investigations through stop-motion animation. In Scenario Two, the Year 1 children (approximately 6 years) edit digital video to create an advertisement for a new sports drink. This work is important since the use of computers and other new technologies in schools remains peripheral and is frequently an afterthought to be aligned with specific curriculum objectives and mandated learning outcomes. An important question for educators is how can we ensure and describe the learning that takes place in contexts that incorporate new media. Implicit in this is that teachers and students will guide and support each other in order to complete tasks that exemplify specific learning outcomes. Our findings suggest that the main challenges and issues for teachers with regard to new media are centered on how they might incorporate them into their pedagogical repertoire and of finding effective ways to support student learning.

INTRODUCTION

We are approaching the end of the first decade of the 21st century, and one thing that is glaringly

obvious is that there is a growing gap between what goes on in schools and outside of them (Yelland, 2007). New technologies have created new ways of working and we have evolved social practices

that have fundamentally changed how we do things. Yet many schools seem to be impervious to change and maintain a heritage curriculum that was founded in a different age. The rate of change in society has been tremendous. The children who attend our schools today were born on the eve of the 21st century and are called the “Millennial Generation” (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Their lives are digital and they communicate in a variety of modes with a myriad of materials that are made of bits and bytes. Their homes are full of media options that include; TVs, mobile phone, computers, mp3 players, DVD machines, digital cameras, interactive toys, video game consoles and mobile devices. Rideout, Vanderwater and Wartella (2003) reported that 99% of children up to the age of 6 years have a TV at home and 36% have one in their own bedroom. Nearly a half of their sample had a video game player and 63% lived in a home that had Internet access. Additionally, nearly half (48%) of the group under six years of age used a computer and 30% of them played video games. Parent reports of time spent with screen media indicate that this group spent approximately 2 hours a day using them and that this was about the same amount of time that they spent playing outdoors, and three times as much time as they spent reading (a book) or being read to. The report continues by suggesting that many of the toddlers and preschoolers that they surveyed are not passively consuming media that has been purchased by their family, but rather they paint a picture of these young people actively seeking out information or helping themselves to acquire it with the various electronic media at their disposal. Seventy seven per cent are turning on the TV by themselves, asking for particular shows (67%) using the remote control to change channels (62%) playing their favourite DVDs (71%) turning on the computer by themselves (33%) and loading CDRoms with games on (23%). The study revealed that listening to music (and dancing/ acting) is one of the most popular pastimes for young children in this age range with 79% listening to music daily

with just under half (42%) owning their own CD so they can listen when they want to.

Children in the next age range (6 to 17 years) continue to diversify their practices with new media. Over two million American children in this cohort have created their own website (Grunwald, 2004) and there are similar trends in the UK (Livingstone & Bober, 2005). More recently the evolution of social media such as Myspace, Facebook, Club Penguin and the growing use of blogs, wikis and instant messaging enable young people to be in touch almost constantly with all their friends and families. These new lifeworlds require us to reconceptualise forms of communication and notions of identity that are so essential for effective learning in schools. These machines play different roles in the lives of children for different purposes at different junctures in time and in a variety of communities of practice (Lave, Smith & Butler, 1988). Yet, in many contexts, we still don’t have a clear idea about the ways in which students learn in such contexts. We need to be able to do this since when students use new technologies in the classroom we should be able to support their learning to acquire specific learning outcomes that are related to mandated curriculum as well as engage them in critical and creative thinking in new ways that were not possible prior to the use of the new media.

SCAFFOLDING LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

The influence of Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky, 1978) on educational practice is apparent in the popular use of the social constructive perspective to describe and rationalize exemplary learning contexts in schools. One of the main tenets of Vygotskian theory is the notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which was conceptualized as “The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development

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