

Essay Assignment 3

Connectivism as a Theory

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Connectivism as a Theory

Theories of learning were first widely introduced in the 20th century. They were primarily based on didactic pedagogies the outcomes of which required simple yes or no answers as a response to the course content. However, with the development of computer networking, the Internet, and the Web arose the drive for new educational transformations that had to happen to keep up with the inventions in technology. Behaviorist, cognitivist, and constructivist theories were not entirely living up to distance education needs considering rapid changes in ways information was delivered. Development of World Wide Web set the stage for new learning theories in the 21st century (Harasim, 2012). The expansion of technology has shifted learning theories to connectivism that recently started to play an essential role in the development of Distance Education (DE).

Connectivism is based on previous learning theories and is grounded constructivist principles. The theory of connectivism was created by George Siemens and Stephen Downes in 2004 to validate Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) which would later be launched in 2008. According to Siemens (Siemens, 2004) “Connectivism presents a model of learning that acknowledges the tectonic shifts in society where learning is no longer an internal, individualistic activity” (Siemens, 2004, p. 7), but rather a new learning theory based off connectivity of learners to a network. It is essential to understand that without connectivism, MOOCs would not have been created. Online courses that are free were designed to give learners information to subjects that are for anyone to learn. MOOCs are here to obtain significant information for free from respected teachers, provide people with a way to give them knowledge. MOOCs can

influence higher education by providing a way to reach more individuals by utilizing the social media platforms and having a broader audience (Siemens, 2004).

An argument can be made that networks have always existed and therefore the connections made through them to advance knowledge have also still existed. So, in that respect, nothing is really new. The society figured out the way to learn faster. People live in a data-driven environment and want information that is accurate and current. The acquisition of this report, which in turns fosters knowledge, is through established/emerging networks. It is the democratization of information which Siemens (Siemens, 2004), acknowledges as the fuel that ignites the theory. Connection learning is no longer an internal activity but rather a collaborative one that arises from browsing the Web. Connectivism may enhance some aspects of it, but knowledge is internal to self, although, Kopp & Hill (2008) suggest that the theory is not mature enough to be embraced as one.

However, Downes argues that connectivism is a theory and in the MOOC can influence the course of higher education in four fundamental design principles that were identified below (Downes, 2005):

- **autonomy of the learner:** learners can choose what they wish to learn because learning is often personal and does not require a formal curriculum;
- **diversity:** meaning what tools are used, participants partaking, and content involved;
- **interactivity:** regarding co-operative learning, communication between participants, resulting in emergent knowledge;
- **openness:** regarding access, content, activities, and assessment (Bates, 2017).

Downes states that nowadays the structure of connections differs in a network society that does not necessarily have to be an internal entity to check students' understanding. In a network, any person is a member, and it should be considered as a whole because there is no other network against which users can test their conclusions. He argues that before global communication societies did test one against another through wars and different types of conflict, which exist now too, but it is difficult to separate the global network into various societies. It is one entity where people can share their knowledge and connect it to other theories and principles (Downes, 2005).

However, there are different types of networks, which create sets of connections between the global network entities that can be formed and organized. It allows people to rely on networks to generate and contain knowledge. That knowledge is not perfect. In fact, anything of that sort of experience can be even more liable to error because it is indeed dependent on interpretations allowing the users to fill in the gaps of perception on their own. Moreover, the age of connectivism still has plenty of remnants of previous eras when connectivity was limited by control over the perspective of the mind of one man, or one group, scaling the mechanisms of media to their own ends (Downes, 2005).

While parts of connectivism are new, many of its core principles, as outlined by Siemens, are drawn from existing theories (Siemens, 2004). For example, the argument that knowledge can exist in non-human appliances was less likely to be made before the internet and Web 2.0; however, it could always have been made. Does consciousness exist within a book or a library? Or only if one reads the books? Someone wrote the book, but did they make that knowledge live, and whether that experience exists forever or not, whether it is ever consumed, understood, or

interacted with again? Capacity to know more than what is currently known has always been crucial for students, but it is essential for all humans as they move through their lives and increase competency. The knowledge and skills one has already mastered are probably as valuable as ones' capacity for more. This may seem crude but consider a heart surgeon, for example. Of course, one would like him/her to be up to date on his/her professional development, but his/her existing, already gained knowledge, skills, abilities, competency are all really at the center of what he/she has to offer. The importance of nurturing and maintaining connections to facilitate continual learning reminds of constructivism and education as a social process. Connections can be made outside of the interpersonal relationships; they can be created with institutions and knowledge bases. Although, constructivism and social learning theory never denied or shunned those connections. Ultimately, connectivism is not new. However, its recommendations regarding how to interact with the new ways knowledge can be stored, presented, developed, and associated by everyone is. Attention to the underlying framework informing social and public knowledge can find a new renaissance that is not perfection, but often less filled with ignorance and superstition (Downes, 2005).

Conclusion: As George Siemens stated, the impact of technology has caused fundamental changes in the way people think and learn. Having knowledge about a given topic is now less important than the ability to find understanding of that issue. Employers now look for potential employees' skills to think flexibly and solve problems, rather than emphasize a given field of study. The growth of technology and connectivism theory has increased demand for open resources and MOOCs. As Siemens has stated, learning is a continual process, lasting a

lifetime. Learning and work-related activities are no longer separate. In many situations, they are the same (Siemens, 2004).

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