IN SEARCH OF LEADERSHIP: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO BUILDING ADAPTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Don Olcott, Jr., Charles Sturt University, Australia, Lisa Marie Blaschke, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany

Introduction

Learning is about making connections. This range of teaching-learning connections permeates the teaching and learning environment. We connect new knowledge to existing knowledge; we connect the digital world with the real world; we connect students to content, students to students, and students to teacher. We connect the classroom to the world, competencies to skills, individuals to groups, and groups to communities. And, most importantly, we connect technology to information – information to knowledge and knowledge to application in the real world. We connect students to life (Olcott, 2014).

The mission of this paper is to explore innovative new learning environments, seek out new digital applications among teachers and students, and to boldly go where no leader has gone before. Indeed, this is a formidable challenge for all of us. It requires us to think differently about how we think, how we teach, and how we learn; and to resist a fundamental tendency of human nature – to retreat to the status quo where we feel comfortable and safe from ambiguity and the unknown. *Indeed, transformation is entirely about leadership; digital technologies are simply enablers for this transformation in the hands of the right leader, for the right reasons, and the right partners.*

Adaptive Learning Communities (ALCs) look at digital learning through a broader lens than personal or digital learning environments. Adaptive Learning Communities (ALCs) can be defined as:

> *The mobilization of digital technologies to transform schools through personal and community learning environments which serve as the catalyst for creating new relationships through a 'community for innovation' that connect all stakeholders to a common community action agenda.*

Digital technologies are not simply for use in the schools by teachers and students; nor simply a showcase for Open House and parent briefings on an ad hoc basis. They are a collective community resource. ALCs explore how students and teachers adapt to these new innovations, how geographic communities play an integral role in the deployment of these innovations, and how 'flipped communities' may serve as a catalyst for schools to leverage

outputs by assuming new roles to create optimum educational, social and cultural impacts for community development.

The term adaptive learning has been applied to adapting technology to meet individual student learning needs. This approach is consistent with student expectations that experiences, services and products can be aligned with their individual learning needs and preferences (Boyd, 2014). Conversely, we must broaden the dialogue to explore how individuals and communities can adapt to digital technologies.

The 7Es of Adaptive Learning Communities (ALCs)

Adaptive Learning Communities (ALCs) extend previous research and theory about learning theory, PLE's, mobile technologies, and expanding real-virtual learning spaces to a broader community context. ALCs 'connect' all stakeholders in the community rather than just students and teachers. Parents, business leaders, community representatives, government agencies – the entire community is engaged in building one *mega-learning space* across the community for formal learning – but also for the collaborative linkages to address community development in all its guises.

Engage

Universities are often viewed as Ivory Towers, insular and protected from outside influences. Public schools also have this tendency to keep the broader community at a distance – when do parents come to schools? They come for open houses, parent conferences, and perhaps ad hoc events when the school district needs another bond, levy or financial initiative passed. ALCs are predicated on active engagement and parents would be in schools every day. Teachers would do their own internships in local business to align content with real world skills. Community groups would use school facilities to promote community action events and initiatives. And, all of these activities would be supported by digital innovations to make and sustain these 'connections.' Schools must do a better job of inviting everyone in to the classroom.

Experience

Experience is cumulative. Students, teachers, parents, counsellors, business leaders, government personnel, social service agencies all bring extensive experience to the community. In essence, the community is its own meg-repository of knowledge and strategies for the community. This is an infinite resource for all member of the community. ALCs recognize this invaluable repository for empowering communities to empower schools and personalized learning across the community. Moreover this experiential repository is reciprocal – it can be exchanged and re-distributed among all stakeholder groups in the community. Communities for 21st century schools must tap this experience repository – for formal education and for community development.

Empower

The core foundation of building ALC's is to create a 'community for innovation' (Olcott, 2014). Innovation is not synonymous with technology. Innovation, in fact, exits along a continuum that includes much more than just hardware and software (Rogers, 2003). Innovation is thinking and creativity. Innovation is new policies, processes, procedures, curriculum, pedagogical practices and more. Moreover, using by-lines such as building a 'culture of innovation' or a 'culture of technology' is not only doublespeak – it is misleading to students, learners, and other stakeholders. ALC's are predicated on engaging the entire community in innovative ways of thinking – about everything, not simply technology.
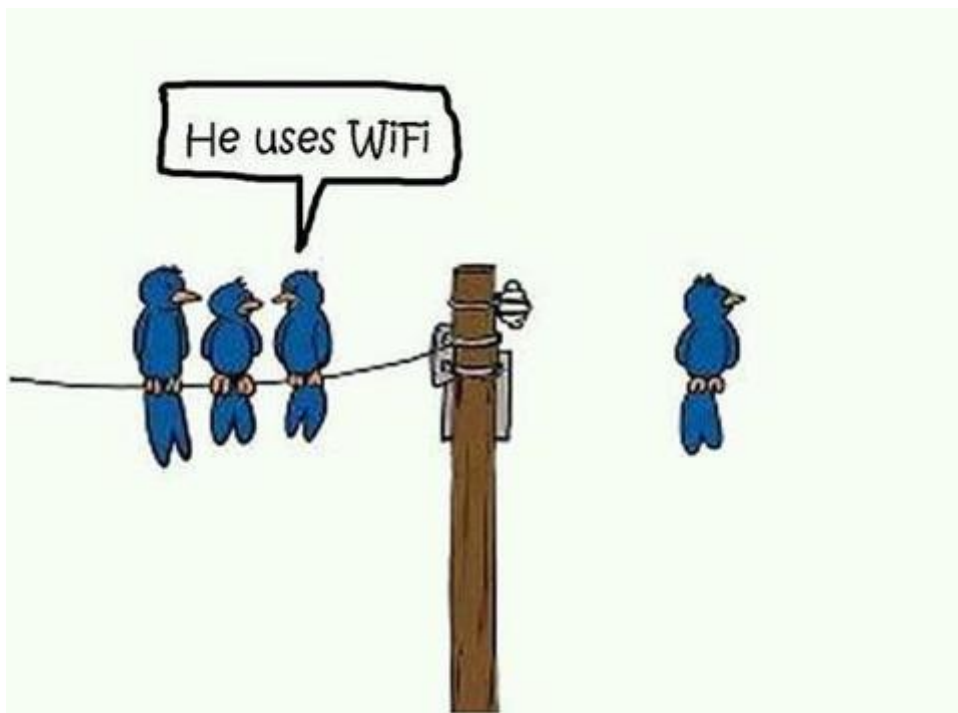

Figure 1.

Effect

Similar to experience, effects from learning are cumulative. The community repository of experience must be supplemented with evidence and data that demonstrate precision effects – effects of teaching on learning; effects of digital technologies and PLEs on metacognition of learners; effects of schools on community action initiatives; effects of business partnerships with schools; effects of parent engagement by active participation (not simply coming to Open House) in the educative process. Moreover, decision making at all levels, from the classroom to the mayor's office to the corporate CEO's beach house, must be embedded in a commitment to continuous quality improvement through performance based management – using data to make good decisions (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 2010; Hickman, 2010; Yukl, 2013).

Emote

ALCs presume that the affective domain – the open and honest expression of emotions in the education process (teaching and learning) are as valuable as intellectual gains by students. Schools must engage students in the emotional context of being students, peers, citizens, and adaptive learners through the digital resources of the 21st century. Emotional health is an area that tends to be overlooked unless there is a problem – healthy expression of emotions, views, values, attitudes, and belief structures are an essential part of the educational process.

Figure 2.

Evolve

Transformation is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. ALCs suggest that transforming schools take creativity, re-assessment of traditional practices and approaches, a 'community for innovation,' collaboration, and the recognition that we are not preparing students for today's world – we are preparing students (and ourselves) for the 2030 world. We not only need to think outside the box – we need to take the risks to think that the box doesn't exist. The author was once asked who invented the mobile phone – this was in front of 500 people. I answered Gene Roddenberry. The woman who asked the question did not understand. I explained that the first mobile phone that I saw was Captain Kirk talking to Scotty aboard the

U.S. S. Enterprise 'beam me up Scotty.' There were no cellular phones when Star Trek hit the airwaves in the mid-1960s but they did exist in the imaginations of people and creators.

Efficacy

Ask any principal, CEO, university president, government leader or other leader this question: How do you reward your employees for failure? Most will escort you to the door without a return invitation. The rhetoric of innovation, imagination, creativity are politically correct sound bites – but actually engaging people in the creative process without adding the punitive or retributional consequences takes real leadership and visionary capacity to see the forest through the trees. Does this mean every organization just lets people spend away the organization by trying every creative and innovative idea that pops up? No. What it does mean, however, is creating a 'community for innovation' where great ideas, great applications, and yes, great technologies can be created in a 'community for innovation' that taps the unlimited creative spirit across the community. How many great ideas and practices do we lose every day in business, government and education because people fear negative consequences for their creative talents?

Summary

Digital transformation takes more than technology. It will require a rediscover of leadership and putting innovation back in to the core of each leader. Building a community for innovation requires a synergy of the entire community – educators, government and ministry leaders, students, faculty, private providers, social service organizations, religious leaders, parents, and more. Indeed, what we should be developing with ALCs are '*communities for innovation*' that collectively embrace innovation in all its guises and creative capacities (Olcott, 2014).

Digital technologies are not simply for use in the schools by teachers and students; nor simply a showcase for Open House and parent briefings on an ad hoc basis. They are a collective community resource. ALCs explore how students and teachers adapt to these new innovations, how geographic communities play an integral role in the deployment of these innovations, and how 'flipped communities' may serve as a catalyst for schools to leverage outputs by assuming new roles to create optimum educational, social and cultural impacts for community development. We have moved beyond flipped classrooms. ALCs are about 'flipped communities.' We invite you to get aboard the U.S.S. Innovation and take this journey towards StarDate 2030.

References

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