How the Social Learning Theory Impacts Learning outcome

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Abstract

This paper highlights the social learning theory which is rooted in the epistemology of learning in the field of educational technology. Ever since the invention of the Internet, there have been ways in which educators and theorists create frameworks for knowledge to be transmitted to learners. Hence emerging theories have been developing to keep educators abreast with the latest theories to perpetuate learning. The social learning theory has emerged to support this notion and it is being explored in this paper where evidence of its overarching principle has been proven to be rooted in instructional/educational technology. Digital Technology addressed the Web 2.0 tools needed to transmit knowledge and establish social presence, while the learning community fosters collaboration, interaction and some form of connectedness. The theoretical foundations of learning community highlighted four theories which gave rise as a result of the social learning theory. And finally, the impact that the social learning theory has on learning outcome is also addressed using data from studies conducted by scholars and other credible resources.
How the Social Learning Theory Impacts Learning outcome

The emergence of the social learning theory can be traced to technologies primarily concerned with the advent of the Internet. It is evident that various networks have been propagated as a result of this shared public domain. The Internet and web-based applications also allow learners to access multiple resources including expert knowledge from which new learning can be constructed. Active learning and interaction with instructors and peers can be fostered through simulations and virtual worlds that can also be used to build authentic learning contexts.

Web 2.0 tools such as Learning Management System (LMS), discussion boards, wikis, videoconferencing, and blogs can be used to facilitate peer collaboration and social learning. This paper seeks to explore the social learning theory with a view to show its connectedness to educational technology as it is evident that there is a paradigm shift from the basic epistemology of learning that depends on printed media and other sources for the acquisition of knowledge to an epistemology that depends on the Internet for access to, and the dissemination of information.

The social learning theory orchestrated by Albert Bandura has become perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development. While rooted in many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory, Bandura (1969, 1989) believed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning. His theory added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. Known as observational learning (or modeling), this type of learning can be used to explain a wide variety of behaviors.

There are three basic tenets at the heart of social learning theory. First is the idea that people can learn through observation. Next is the idea that internal mental states are an essential part of this process. And thirdly, this theory recognizes that just because something has been
learned, it does not mean that it will result in a change in behavior. Rooted also in the social learning theory is encouraging learners to build self-efficacy. The bridging of the gap between traditional way of delivering instruction and technology integration is at the hallmark of instructional designers who are planning and implementing curriculums to promote this self-efficacy where students can construct their own learning by using digital tools to share, interact, and collaborate in an online community.

**Digital Technology**

It is an established fact that educational technology is the vehicle through which instruction is being driven in the teaching and learning environment. This underpinning knowledge provides educators and learners with the framework of establishing themselves in the technology realm of life by sharing and participating in online learning. Technology use has been “effective in developing higher-order thinking skills, including defining problems, judging information, solving the problems, and drawing appropriate conclusions” (Tam, 2000, p. 56).

The establishment of social presence can only be done through connection to the Internet and by using the appropriate Web 2.0 tools to integrate technology in the classroom and to promote learning in such a diverse society. Web-based collaborative tools can be defined as those tools that allow you to share documents, spreadsheets, projects, artifacts, and collaborate with peers/clients in delayed or real-time situations. They can be used as brainstorming tools, project management application tools, or basic editing tools such as blogs and wikis.

Technological advancement over the past decade have heightened awareness that the traditional method of teaching and learning is fast diminishing and the need for establishing a
social presence in the learning community is becoming the norm (Lankshear, Peters, & Knobel, 2000).

**Learning Community**

According to Hill, J. (2012), creating a community to help facilitate and support learning has been a long-term interest for many educators seeking ways to enhance the learning experience of their students. While creating learning communities remains an on-going interest for many, its formation remains an on-going challenge. Technology in communities is essentially a means of creating fluidity between epistemology segments and connecting people in the network of learning. For example, a university’s Learning Management System (LMS) utilizing discussion forum - emphasizes collective building upon existing threads and extending ideas as learners come together in the community and participate by responding to each other posts within the forum. Web 2.0 tools are used to post ideas and notes related to the topic under discussion using asynchronous or delayed-time communication. At the same time, embedded in most the LMS are videoconferencing Web 2.0 tools. For example, in Moodle, an instructor can use Adobe Connect to conduct virtual synchronous meetings, lessons, or discuss a problem with a student or group of students in real time. Additionally, videoconferencing tools such as [skype.com](http://skype.com) and [vokle.com](http://vokle.com) can also be used to conduct a live lesson and/or meet students virtually to conduct a meeting using synchronous or real-time communication. Social interactions between student-student, and student-teacher relationships online can be strengthened through these avenues by capitalizing on the opportunities to stay connected and establish a sense of social presence in the learning environment which otherwise will not be possible.
Theoretical Foundations of Learning Communities

The advent of the Internet saw emerging theories on the horizon that seeks to support the theoretical foundations of learning communities, four of these theories are briefly dealt with below:

(i) Social Constructivist Theory

This theory builds on the foundations of constructivism, extending into how interaction with others impacts and influences the learning process. Vygotsky’s work with the zone of proximal development (ZPD) relates to an individual’s ability to do work on his or her own or with assistance. Scaffolding relates to the support given to assist learners as they engage in a task.

A strong community can be formed if it considers both the individual and the learning context or social setting. By empowering students to take charge of their own learning process, learner-centered, constructivist teaching can emerge (Palloff & Pratt, 2007).

(i) Social Presence

Social presence is “degree of awareness of another person in an interaction and the consequent appreciation of an interpersonal relationship” (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Social presence as describe by Tu, (2002), is a measure of the feeling of community that a learner experiences in an online environment. Hence the connections between members are building blocks for the formation and growth of the learning community. Additionally, establishing a sense of social presence or a “sense of connection” plays a key role in the effectiveness of a learning community.
(ii) Social Interdependence Theory

The social interdependence theory helps to explain how members of a community may develop more effective and more meaningful environments for interaction. A key characteristic of a learning community is that the community members not only collaborate but they also cooperate together in a variety of ways in order to maximize learning. According to Johnson and Johnson, (2009), social interdependence exists when the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and other’s actions.

There are two types of social interdependence: (1) positive interdependence (when group members’ actions promote success of the group), and (2) negative interdependence (when group members’ actions impede the success of the group).

(iii) Situated Learning Theory

This theory emphasizes that learning is embedded in context, and learners’ interactions. Knowledge or understanding doesn’t develop independently of the social setting; it comes from the interactions of the community. In situated context, learning occurs as learner recognizes the practical utility of knowledge as well as the need to use it for more cognitive purposes in an effort to analyze, interpret, and solve real world problem (Hannafin, Hill, Land, & Lee, in press). Interaction includes both student to student, as well as student to teacher relationships here they of practice were engaged in social interaction to discuss common interests, ask questions, and learn from each other; hence creating continual opportunity for interactions is the key in a situated learning community.
Self-Directed Learning and Self-Regulation Theory

Individuals are the basis of the learning community. Self-regulated characteristics include self-efficacy, which is being able to engage within a social context or learning community, motivation to be part of the learning community, and metacognitive skills where individuals can develop time management skills, critical thinking skills and make judgments related to the learning process. Self-directed learning has two tenets - process and personal attribute.

Creating a learning community takes planning and continuous upkeep to be sustained. Major challenges occur in these areas: (i) a learning community environment needs to have established shared goals and values with input from the learner, (ii) learners need to have a sense of security, (iii) learners need to be able to grow, (iv) learners need to take risks, (v) and know they are supported within the community. Time is one of the most valuable commodities in the learning community, yet, there is never enough of it; therefore, learners need to know that someone is “out there” interacting and regularly sharing news with the community to encourage a sense of social presence as well as respecting the learner’s time outside of the community.

The embryo in the social learning community is technology. It is used to facilitate learning communities through Web 2.0 & 3.0 tools and makes it easier and faster to develop a strong social presence. The community needs to be well organized to allow interaction in several ways with 24/7 support from staff or help desk.

On the contrary, there are several issues and challenges associated with building a learning community. Chief among them are time management, attention to participants, and level of interaction – to name a few. Inherent assumptions in educational technology such as day-to-day versus week-to-week, or online versus face-to-face contact; in addition to hardware/software
technology for online community, all contributed to the success or failure of the online community. At the same time, due to economical constraints on the school system, administrators are experiencing extreme difficulty in purchasing and implementing existing Web 2.0 tools and in keeping track of emerging technologies. Hence, it is believed that certain technology will become obsolete before it is implemented. To counter this trend which is a threat to the survival of the educational system, De Castell, Bryson, & Jenson, (2002), is advocating that administrator re-position common theoretical questions, asking not how education might use these new tools, but instead asking what, educationally, they might offer; instead of theorizing educational technology, then, the focus becomes an educational theory of technology. This way they will likely to embrace technology and solicit grants from appropriate funding agency to purchase the requisite software/hardware to be implemented in the various school districts nationwide.

The cooperative or collaborative model of learning argues that learning occurs as an individual interacts with other individuals. Learning results as individuals exercise, verify, solidify and improve their mental models through discussions and information sharing. The socio-cultural model of learning argues that learning best occurs when the learning event is meaningful, more deeply or elaborately processed, situated in context, and rooted in the learner’s cultural background and personal knowledge.

**The Impact of the Social Learning Theory on Learning Outcome**

The social learning theory creates an atmosphere of student-centered learning opportunities where transformative learning process is evident. The result from a study carried out by Carrington & Selva, (2010), on transformational learning experienced by a group of pre-
service teachers who were engaged in service-learning as a pedagogical process with a focus on reflection, revealed that students think critically. Reported data from the structured reflection log which was designed to illustrate the critical social theory expectations of students provide evidence of transformational learning and highlight how the students critique their world and imagine how they could contribute to a better world in their work as a beginning teacher.

Lotz, (2010), study shows that social learning theory should be extended beyond its rather harmonious learning perspective. This is against the background that rivalry is often critical for learning to take place. The study identifies four recurrent stories of rivalry as a trigger of learning based on two case studies of teamwork dynamics in firms. The researcher draws upon social learning theory and qualitative data from case studies conducted in Danish team-based firms to argue that both cooperation and rivalry are important triggers for mobilizing learning processes within and between teams. Coupled with that is social presence which occurred through the shared experiences of struggling with course material, conflict, and learning to learn in a new way with technology, also promote learning.

According to Hill, Song, & West, (2009), social learning perspectives as they relate to designing technology-mediated teaching and learning environments models and how they can be used in the design and implementation of online learning will optimize learning using Web-based learning environments (WBLEs). Scaffolding serves the role of helping learners to productively engage the complexity, authenticity, and open-endedness of the WBLEs environment. On the other hand, Andres and Shipps, (2010), highlighted that technological, educational/learning, and social affordances associated with the facilitation of project-based learning and problem solving in technology-mediated distributed teams can also promote learning. They integrated the theory of affordances and social impact theory to develop a
conceptual model that asserts that collaboration mode (collocated vs. non-collocated and videoconferencing supported) which dictated the quality of information exchanged, progressive elaboration of ideas, and the social processes that influenced team learning. Results showed that collaboration mode can impact team information exchange and interpretation and ultimately task outcomes. Further, collaboration mode can also create a social structure that influences the capacity for a team to maintain a mutual supportive and positive climate needed for successful project-based task outcomes. This proved their suggestions that team learning yielded better productivity and higher perceived interaction quality.

At the same time, it is important to note that social presence and shared experiences in the online community will lead to a greater sense of connectedness and well-being. This will foster increased engagement, improved cooperation, commitment to group goals, increased flow of information, and group interactions. According to Palloff and Pratt, (2007), collaborative effort helps learners achieve a deeper level of knowledge generation while moving from independence to interdependence, thus strengthening the online learning community.

Another impact of the social learning theory is to establish Professional Learning Communities and Knowledge Communities. DuFour (2004) provides guidance on how to form a PLC: “To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than [on] teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results” (p. 6). Given this definition, one can postulate that learning communities and communities of practice may be created in an online environment and on social networking sites (SNS), as long as collaboration takes place (Sistek-Chandler, 2012 ). Through this method of learning, teacher’s professional development (PD) growth can be catered for when he/she interacts with mentors in the online community or when he/she develops a learning log and/or professional journal.
Conclusion

The social learning theory is rooted in the epistemology of educational technology and both of them are mutually exclusive. That means technology can survive without the social learning theory, but the social learning theory cannot be promoted and facilitated without technology in this technological era where the traditional method of delivering instruction is rapidly giving way to technology integration in schools.

The Internet sparked a resurgence of community and has created a discourse that inspired socialization/collaboration, extending beyond barriers and connecting people in education, military, and in business to a worldwide forum. Social interaction in the online environment has been deeply rooted in the spirit and spark of building community. As educators and theorists endeavor to establish social presence in the learning community, the learning community should be “failure safe”; however, without the contributions of the individual members, the learning community will cease to exist.
References


