

Chapter 19

New Constructions for Understanding using Virtual Learning– Towards Transdisciplinarity

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ABSTRACT

Transformative personal growth is explored through use of advanced forms of virtual learning and application of concepts from systems thinking, presence research, and Transdisciplinarity. The result is a practice of a technology-enabled, embodiment of hope. When thriving is likely, the implications of increased individual and collective consciousness enables development of a fusion of Gemeinschaft and Gessellschaft. The harmonization of such a fusion of community and society creates a new form of society, where space, place, and relationships interact like a blended urban village. As communities shift to incorporate and extend the Arts and culture in this new Society, complexity is appreciated from its reciprocity with Nature. Awareness of selfhood and society is more integrated through Being providing new possibilities to co-create the future and transcend human limitations.

INTRODUCTION

People everywhere yearn to commune. An awareness and appreciation of selfhood is necessary to commune and share with others. Reciprocal sharing and appreciation are necessary to create community and imply an awareness of society. Communing also involves a spiritual dimension of hope and optimism that transcends wealth and social status. Across cultures, there is wide disparity of economic wealth, and yet, people freely learn together in some cases creating a learning community, the bedrock of society. Practicing mindfulness has been widely attributed to promote spiritual health and while digital technologies have caused greater human separation in some, on whole, these technologies have provided the basis for connecting more people continuously from most anywhere. The central question is how do we use these

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digital technologies to help us thrive individually and collectively? As media exposure from augmented reality becomes more common in everyday life, will our awareness diminish due to distraction or will we aspire to create new understanding through new forms of communication? Tuan (1997) said, “People tend to suppress that which they cannot express” (p. 6) and “Exceptionally talented people can live for art and science and go wherever they thrive” (p. 138). Will we create our own safe, virtual havens and dare to discover feelings that which are in us? And then, will we be open to share with others creating new forms of intimacy of understanding? If Tuan is right then educators have a role to play, “Feelings and intimate experiences are inchoate and unmanageable to most people, but writers and artists have found ways of giving them form” (p. 202).

BACKGROUND

What Makes a Community Community?

In developed countries and especially in the United States, initiatives abound to incent the development of designed communities where a blend of residential and commercial affordances provide environmental, social, and health benefits. Such communities attract economic development that may also include technological investments such as smart city capabilities of sensor-based devices. These planned communities include walkable spaces to reduce traffic allowing greater appreciation of cultural resources. Architects attempt to create new neighborhood identities and a sense of place. Governance is required and must be created to unite the uses around smart cities. Governance cannot be manufactured like the communities. Some designed communities aspire to enable citizens live to be at least 100. The focus of a study described by National Geographic in 2015 sought to find the factors that made the citizens so robust. These special regions are called Blue Zones.

It is easier to design a community rather than revitalize a community that has suffered decline. And yet, some initiatives are incentivized to attempt a techno-revitalization. For some people living in depressed economic areas, technology offers an oasis of refuge and a portal to possibility. Every member of society from the very young to the aged benefit from the advantages made available through technological connections that act as tethers to health and education. An example of an initiative is the Connect Your Community 2.0 program. The initiative provides infrastructure, training, and technology-enabled health and services to Cleveland, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan. In order to thrive, both affluent, designed communities and revitalization programs need the spiritual dimension of human connectedness that form the essence of true community or *Gemeinschaft* as described earlier in this book.

The author asserts that in order to promote *Gemeinschaft*, a personal awareness of and connection to nature is required to acknowledge oneness with community. When we experience this connection of being and recognize our ability to author nature, this actualization contributes to a state of *Being*. Nicolescu, 2014, describes the characterization of this state, “... understanding means fusion of knowledge and being” (p. 212). Previously Nicolescu had cited Jakob Boehme’s work *Aurora*, as showing how the multiple ‘splendor of Being’ is reflected in the ‘mirror of Nature’ (2013, p. 66). He goes on to state that a new Philosophy of Nature can only be modern science, demanding an opening to being, which only takes place through a transdisciplinary approach, a new type of scientific and cultural approach. He says this approach opens an ‘incredible space’ for a free dialogue between the past and the present, between science, art, Tradition, and all other forms of knowledge (Nicolescu, 2013, p. 66).

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