

Chapter 12

Creative Coexistence, Value, and Transformative Online Education for Social Self-Actualization

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the concepts of creative coexistence and value-creation pedagogy as foundational components of transformative online education for liberation and social self-actualization required in the 21st century. The author couches this discussion in recent socio-political (mis)uses of new media in Iran and China and presents examples in practice by pre- and in-service teachers and adolescent second and foreign language learners in the United States.

If democracy were to be given any meaning, if it were to go beyond the limits of capitalism and nationalism, this would not come, if history were any guide, from the top. It would come through citizens' movements, educating, organizing, agitating, striking, boycotting, demonstrating, threatening those in power with disruption of the stability they needed. - Howard Zinn

INTRODUCTION

Digital, Internet and computer-based information and communication technologies bring a contradiction of light and dark that warrants scrutiny when considering online education, transformative learning and their intersection with language, culture, power, identity and social engagement in the push for more pervasive models of liberation

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and participation. The light can be characterized by the time-space compression these technologies afford individuals for communication, democratic participation, education, business and so on. It is also present, as Bowers (2009) argues, in the,

range from scheduling airline traffic, analyzing changes in natural systems, providing more effective medical procedures, enabling people to access and exchange information on a global scale, and to keep in touch with friends and families spread over vast distances. To list all the benefits would take too many pages, and would still not be inclusive enough. (p. 72)

At the same time, the dark can be characterized by such things as the eased advancement toward materialism (Ikeda, 2000); the rise of international e-waste pollution (GAO-08-1044, 2008); young people's occupation in hours of solitary online video gaming and social networking; availability of an open forum for extremists' threats, recruitment and violent acts such as real-time beheadings; the decimation of minority languages because of growing Internet access in majority languages; and the limited and/or commodified access to bandwidth, which Bowers (2009) calls a new "commons." Again, as Bowers argues:

But there is a downside to computers, such as enabling corporations to outsource work to low-wage regions of the world, and to keeping their profits offshore--thus enabling them to avoid taxes. Other negatives include how computers have enabled scientists to genetically alter seeds that, in turn, threaten genetic diversity, how they now are the basis of a national surveillance system that is one of the hallmarks of a police state, and how they contribute to the enclosure of the diversity of the world's cultural commons that are essential to slowing the rate of global warming. The list of negative attributes is also too numerous to be fully identified here. (p. 72)

In addition, an honest discussion of online education and transformative learning requires us to note the perversion of "technology" use in education, whereby schools rush to provide technological availability for availability's sake without altering pedagogy or pedagogical goals—it is, for example, the exchange of overhead projectors for Power Point, incorporating iClickers for en masse multiple choice Q&A, or (filtered) Internet access with no meaningful engagement from or production by students. Pre- and in-service teachers in my graduate education classes lament the lack of courses that teach them how to integrate technology meaningfully in learning, instruction and social participation, despite the existence of literature on the topic (e.g., Borko, Whitcomb, & Liston, 2009). Thus, in light of the theme of online education and transformative learning, we must ask ourselves two important questions: First, what is the purpose of education and what role should digital and Internet technologies play in achieving this purpose? Second, what do we mean by transformative learning?

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

I believe the answer to the first question is the same one influential thinkers such as Francis Parker (1837-1902), John Dewey (1859-1952), Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), and Paulo Freire (1921-1997) advocated: social self-actualization and the liberation of the marginalized. That is, the aim and purpose of education is not the rote memorization of prescribed "facts," what Wertsch (1990), following Vygotsky, calls "decontextualized rationality," but, rather, the preparation for meaningful and life-long learning, critically social engagement and creativity. Digital and Internet technologies, then, must be used to achieve this goal. In an American context, however, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the current administration's

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