

Chapter 8

Development and Sustainability of Learning Societies

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ABSTRACT

The chapter reviews the development and sustainability of learning societies, and employs an examination of literature to identify the connections that may assist in the-improvement of the 21st century (21st century) workforce. To increase their learning, it is imperative to create a place that embeds the culture, expectations, and appropriate learning behaviors within the environment. The tools are about the cultivation of connections and communities, not solely based on 21st century technology. This case study explored three key concepts: community connection, policy connection, and netizens' connection.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century society is demanding that learning be over the life time of all members of a community and that the learning environment be based on collaborative relationships among various people (Songhao, Maeda, & Kubo, 2011). Even though the literature was somewhat limited pertaining to the scope of this case study, the chapter is a functionalist perspective on the integration of lifelong learning. The chapter does not focus on a variety of issues that affect lifelong learning, such as poverty, mental health problems, crime, or social isolation. However, it does highlight areas of interest that have emerged as a result of

the critical need to not only develop, but to also sustain learning communities. This necessity contributes to form a learning society that collaborates with all stakeholders, including netizens. Gross (1999) defines netizens to be technology citizens, or digital natives, who are the early adopters of innovative learning venues. Bennis and Thomas (2002) describe netizens as geeks who “have been working with digital technology and are the first cohort to have had computers in elementary school. They have 1s and 0s in their blood and they interact with machines as easily as with other human beings” (p. 7). Whatever the label, they encourage communities to think and to consider all factors in developing a society of learners. What is

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2181-7.ch008

needed in this heartening approach to improving the 21st century workforce is access to those who initiate the partnership, the education and the learning, to allow exploration of new understandings within the learning society. By the very nature of netizens, they expect a distinctive bold approach to creating and practicing in a manner that can move communities beyond conceptual awakening and actually change educational behavior (Gross, 1999). Learning societies integrate a set of ideas, and agreed to possibilities for supporting a community in which learners can practice their craft. The challenge is to be intentionally creative in thought and to use three concepts that foster learning across boundaries and between people: 1) community connection; 2) policy connection; and, 3) netizens' connection.

BACKGROUND

The main purpose of this chapter is to develop a general exploratory approach into the literature that identifies opportunities into improving the 21st century workforce. It will also expand on the understanding of the meaning of connections within a society: community, policy and netizens. As Parks (2005) has expressed, the initial stage will require assisting people in moving beyond the edge of familiar patterns into the unknown terrain of new learning, and new behaviors.

Easton (2007) provides evidence that emphasis on lifelong learning is essentially limited to two important themes: 1) sustainability – or the attempt to devise societies that do not self-destruct or destroy their own environment; and, 2) to undertake modifications that will make learning more accessible. He goes on to further surmise that the challenge is that there is a presumption that people have finely honed abilities to adjust to the many internal changes that society and the environment may sustain. Therefore, sustainability entails a highly developed social and individual

capacity for learning. One may ask what is the demand for learning for a sustainable society? What are the challenges of reform to learn new things and to do so in new ways? How are communities to purposefully stress the creation of a 'learning organization' as a reformed workplace knowing the human potential must dovetail with the 21st century expectations?

The nature of the learning challenges posed by sustainability - and of the sustainable learning opportunities built into current social life, is that these needs are unlikely to be met solely by standard curricular and institutional frameworks (Easton, 2007). Communities must provide support for creating lifelong learning opportunities and do so by finding inspiration from the society itself. It is little wonder that the notion of 'learning environments' - and, therefore, more broadly a 'learning society' - has taken on importance. Easton (2007) identifies that the best and most foundational of these contributions in the understanding of a learning environment, is a volume edited by Leymann and Kornbluh's on *Socialization and Learning at Work*, now nearly two decades old. According to Easton, the book carefully examines a basis of lived experience, the factors that contribute to the learning quality of workplace environments, and puts the accent on the organizational and social policy that largely determines how favorable specific jobs are to new learning (2007).

METHODOLOGY, SCOPE OF STUDY, AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

A qualitative case study was used to focus on the literature aimed at identifying areas that would improve the 21st century workforce by developing and sustaining learning communities. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) a qualitative case study begins from a broad exploratory beginning and moves to a more directed data collection and

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