Groups vs Networks
The Class Struggle Continues

Stephen Downes, September 27, 2006

The Personalized Web

2006 has seen the emergence of the personalized web, the interactive web, the web that places a premium on participation and community. Web 2.0

How should the learning sector respond?

The Response

The initial reaction from educational institutions has been negative, with access to many of the new applications blocked and banned by administrators.

But in the longer term we will need to meet the students where they live, learning how to participate in their online world.

The Challenge

Can we, when we explore their world, resist the urge to make them just like us?

Danah Boyd…

"The dynamics of identity production play out visibly on MySpace. Profiles are digital bodies, public displays of identity where people can explore impression management..."

Identity Production in a Networked Culture: Why Youth Heart MySpace

http://www.danah.org/papers/AAAS2006.html

Sherry Turkle

"We do not feel compelled to rank or judge the elements of our multiplicity. We do not feel compelled to exclude what does not fit."

Life on the Screen

http://www.transparencynow.com/turkle.htm

Groups and Networks

"Groups require unity, networks require diversity. Groups require coherence, networks require autonomy. Groups require privacy or segregation, networks require openness. Groups require focus of voice, networks require interaction. "

http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=35839

Rethinking Learning

http://static.flickr.com/109/252157734_9e6c29433b_b.jpg

http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4126240905912531540&hl=en

Their Natures

- A *group* is a collection of entities or members according to their nature; what defines a group is the quality members possess and number

- A *network* is an association of entities or members via a set of connections; what defines a network is the extent and nature of this connectivity

Groups, Schools, Classes

- A group, in other words, is a **school** (of thought, of fish…) or a **class** of some sort.

- Or: classes and schools are just groups. They are *defined* as groups.

- Can we even think of schools – and of learning – without thinking at the same time of the attributes of groups?

Again, The Challenge

Stanley Frielick kirjoitti 27.9.2006 kello 12:35:

"Education and authentic learning, like freedom, is wrapped up with the notion of responsibility and accountability. We need to learn in groups because that's where we form our identities – not in some vast chaotic network where there is no responsibility, no authenticity."

Elements and Ecologies

- A group is **elemental**, defined by mass and sameness – like an ingot of metal (Aside: democracy is a group phenomenon)
- A network is diverse and changing, defined by interactions – like an **ecosystem**

Can we achieve order, responsibility, identity in an ecosystem? Do we need the iron hand? (Aside: Solon, learning, justice)

Group Unity

- A group must be *cohesive*, *united,* *"*out of many, one*"… "the people, united, will never be defeated…"* The melting pot… the encouragement is to conform, to be like the others

- Group technology appeals to the **mass**: television, radio, newspapers, books

- Internet technology includes: all-staff email, corporate website, portal

Network Diversity

- A network, by contrast, thrives on *diversity* … *"to each his own"* … the salad bowl… the encouragement is to be distinct, to create

- Network technology includes: talking, telephoning, writing letters, personal email

- Internet technology: personal home pages, blogs

Group Coordination

- Groups require *coordination*, a leader, someone who will show the way… and to be *managed*… a group will often be defined by its *values* (aka the leader's values?) and then a way to get members to follow, to share the *vision,* will define *standards* - members *belong* to a group

- Associated technology includes the Learning Management System, Learning Design, LOM, etc

Network Autonomy

- Networks require *autonomy,* that is, that each individual operate *independently* according to his or her *own values and interests* – cooperation entails mutual exchange of value rather than follower and leader – members *interact* with a network

- Associated technology: e-portfolios, personal learning environments

Group Borders or Boundaries

- Groups are *closed* - they require a *boundary* that defines members and non-members – **walls -** membership, logins and passwords, jargon and controlled vocabulary, lock-in (staying on-message, speak as one)
- Technology: enterprise computing, federated search, user IDs and passwords, copyrights, patents, trademarks, assertions of *exclusivity*

Network Openness

- Networks require that all entities be able to send and receive messages both (a) *in their own way* and (b) *without being impeded*

- In their own way: open source software, platform independence, APIs, RSS, communities of practice

- Without being impeded: Creative Commons and GPL, distributed identity

Group Centralization

- Groups are *distributive* – knowledge, information, money, etc., flows from the centre – an 'authority' and is distributed through to their members

Why Networks?

- Nature of the knower: humans are more like networks than

- Quality of the knowledge: groups are limited by the capacity of the leader

- Nature of the knowledge: group knowledge is *transmitted* and *simple* (cause-effect, yes-no, etc) while network knowledge is *emergent* and *complex*

Thank You

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