# *Digital Media, Teaching and Learning: Pedagogical Implications for Teaching and Learning in a Participatory Culture*

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The Asian Conference on Education 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**
The era of digital media has come to create a youthful and pervasive participatory culture featuring different forms of affiliation, expression, problem-solving and information circulation among its members. The generation of digital media savvy individuals has now populated classrooms all over our college and university campuses. Concomitant with their arrival to the campus are the inevitable challenges for educators to instruct effectively members of this newly created powerful participatory culture. From the perspective of intercultural communication and based on research in cultural adaptation and teaching innovation, this paper examines (1) salient features of the current participatory culture; (2) primary characteristics of the digital media generation; (3) major components of cultural competence for educators teaching this digital media generation; and (4) specific relevant and applicable pedagogical strategies for educators to enhance their teaching effectiveness and students' learning outcome in their classrooms. Impact of participatory culture on teaching effectiveness is further analyzed and implications for educators' adaptation and teaching innovation are also explored and discussed.

Keywords: Digital Media, Education, Teaching and Learning

## Introduction: The World of Digital Media

The world we live in today has quickly turned from a global village (McLuhan, 1960) to a networked society owing primarily to the development of information and communication technology (ICT). Social network sites such as Facebook, microblogging services such as Twitter, and content-sharing platforms such as YouTube have advance us all into a digital world full of opportunities for wide-scale, online social participation and media content creation and consumption.

Within education, particularly in higher education, ICT has begun to yield significant influences and substantial impacts on the way we teach and learn. Fundamentally speaking, education is a socially oriented activity and quality education has traditionally been offered by instructors with the highest academic degrees in their field. Teaching and learning primarily occur in a face-to-face interactive setting. Instructors with top credentials often teach students in a formal educational institution and teacher-centered instruction of knowledge characterizes the obtainment of information. The emergence of ICT in education has now shifted this traditional focus to a student-centered learning situation in which all members contribute to the creation and sharing of knowledge. The rapid development and fast spread of digital media on college and university campuses has changed education in this 21st century.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the development of a digital culture in education to uncover key features characterizing members in the learning community. From the perspective of intercultural communication and based on research in cultural adaptation and teaching innovation, the author discusses the different forms of affiliation, expression, problem-solving and information circulation among the members of this participatory culture. The paper further explores the development and application of cultural competence as an appropriate and effective pedagogical strategy for educators to succeed in this participatory culture in education.

## The Participatory Culture in Education

In an effort to define the concept of participatory culture, Jenkins, Ito and Boyd (2016) proposed that we view participatory culture as "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations and some type of informal mentorship where by what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (p. 4). In addition, they (Jenkins el al., 2016) further suggested that members of a participatory culture often share a feeling of social connection and each member's contribution to the whole community is viewed as equally important and valuable. Comparing with people in a traditional learning community, members in a participatory culture share different forms of affiliation, expression, problem-solving and information circulation.

While conventional teaching has typically emphasized the development and teaching of content and in most cases, content from the texts, contemporary teaching and learning are more focused on application and practices, that is, competence and performance. What the content is becomes less important than how the content will be applied and used. The ability to utilize the information is being emphasized. In other words, curricula now tend to be more performance-based, oriented to the development of learners' competence in applying what is taught. This orientation to competence and performance is catalyzed by the digital media

available to teachers and learners as they have access to a variety of information, including sources of information. The learning become more student- rather than teacher-centered as what the content is tends to be less important than how the content will be applied. Therefore, teachers are now functioning more like coaches and mentors rather than content experts. Concomitant with the change of their functionality in the educational setting, the affiliation between teachers and leaners in the learning community become different from what it was as sources of information are equally accessible to all members.

In addition to affiliation, with the wide spread of contemporary ICT, members of a learning community have numerous ways of expressing themselves. Teachers and students are no longer limited by physical environment of the learning place; they can express themselves whenever they like and wherever they are. Not only do they have the freedom in time and space, but also in platforms as well. There are a multiple levels of media platforms through which they creatively express themselves. Further, members of a participatory culture tend to collaborate more when dealing with challenges and solving problems as they are more connected with each other than ever before. Enhanced by the digital media available to them, they are much more likely to work in teams, formal and/or informal groups, online and/or online settings, which promotes collaboration amongst members of the culture.

Furthermore, in a participatory culture, the circulation of information is substantially facilitated by the wide spread of ICT on college and university campuses. Not only do learners learn from their textbooks, their teachers and peers, they also create meaningful content by themselves as they publish their views and constantly share their expressions with members of the communities. Because of the opportunities for members to freely publish their views via the media platforms available to them, the circulation of their published content is constant, speedy and widespread. Members of a participatory culture in higher education is on longer limited in creating and publishing relevant content as the barrier for information circulation no longer exists for the community.

In the last few decades, as pointed out by Lai (2008), learning has increasingly became a social and communal activity which has primarily turned into a constructive process in which learners actively participate in the construction of knowledge through close affiliation, creative expression, collaborative problem-solving and speedy and large scale circulation of content. All of these is made possible through the digital form of media.

**The Digital Media Generation**

Given learning as a social and communal activity, compared with the previous generations of learners on college and university campuses, the digital generation are much more capable in acquiring, generating and circulation information available to them. They become much more involved in their learning as the activities are more often self-spontaneous motivated by their desire for close affiliation and total inclusion. They are more satisfied with their learning outcome as well when they can actively involve themselves in expressing themselves and in creating content for circulation.

In their study of generation Z (born and raised in 1990s and 200os), Singh and Dangmei (2016) found the digital generation was born and raised with the social web and “they are digital centric and technology is their identity”. They are most ethnically diverse and technologically sophisticated who prefer informal, individual and straight way of communicating. For this Do-It-Yourself generation, “Social networking is a vital part of their

lives" (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Schawbel,(2014) found that the digital generation is "more entrepreneurial, trustworthy, tolerant and less motivated by money" as they tends to be more realistic and more optimistic about the future. This generation is also found to be impatient, instant-minded, lacking the ambitions of previous generations; they have acquired attention deficit disorder with a high dependence on the technology and a low attention span, individualistic, self-directed, most demanding, acquisitive and materialistic (Generation White Paper, 2011). They are sensitive about natural resources and conscious of environmental conservations (Mihelich, 2013); they desire to be heard, are technology savvy (Slavin, 2015), but have not demonstrated the ability to put things in perspective, analyze them and come up with a decision (Coombs, 2013).

As research findings demonstrate that learners on college and university campuses, the digital generation characterize themselves as technology savvy, instant-minded with a short span of attention. They are more socially connected with others around them and they are more realistic and practical in orientation. As such, they welcome curricula that are of diverse interests, practical and useful. In their eyes, learning is an activity-based acquisition of applicable information that enhances their performance and competence in life and at work. The ICT savvy digital generation are particularly strong in using all sorts of media tools and platforms to affiliate with others, to express themselves, and to involved in problem-solving, content creation and distribution. They are a group of strong participants who like to involve themselves in the community, have the skills needed to access information and share it with others in no time. They are also highly capable in creating content and distribute them. Thus, consistent with research findings, the kind of education they need is one that would enable them to critically evaluate the information available, synthesize what they have acquired and analytical skills for content creation.

**Developing Participatory Cultural Competence**

Given learning as a social activity in this digital media age, it's ideal for all educators to adapt to this participatory culture quickly, develop participatory cultural competence to enhance their teaching effectiveness for the digital generation. To begin to adapt to the participatory culture, digital competence (or skills) are necessary literacy skills for the twenty-first century. Jenkins et al. (2006) define this literacy as skills that enable us to participate in the new communities emerging within a networked society. According to them (Jenkins et al., 2006), these skills consist of:

- play (the capacity to experiment with the surroundings as a form of problem-solving)
- performance (the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery)
- simulation (the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real world processes)
- appropriation (the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content)
- multitasking (the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus)
- distributed cognition (the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities)
- collective intelligence (the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal)
- judgment (the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources)
- transmedia navigation (the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities

- networking (the ability to search for, synthesize and disseminate information
- negotiation (the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms)

The main categories of 21st skills, based on The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills –project are:

I. Ways of Thinking
II. Ways of Working
III. Tools for Working
IV. Living in the World

Specifically, these include:

1. Creativity and innovation
2. Critical thinking, problem solving, decision making
3. Learning to learn, Metacognition
4. Communication
5. Collaboration (teamwork)
6. Information literacy
7. ICT literacy
8. Citizenship – local and global
9. Life and career
10. Personal & social responsibility – including cultural awareness and competence 'Tools for working' was the group which mainly focused on digital skills.

The concept digital competence is an emerging concept and related to the development of technology as well as the political aims and expectations for citizenship in a knowledge society. It consists of a variety of skills and competences, and its scope is on several areas: media and communication, technology and computing, literacy, and information science. Digital competence consists of 1) technical skills to use digital technologies, 2) abilities to use digital technologies in a meaningful way for working, studying and for everyday life in general in various activities, and 3) abilities to critically evaluate the digital technologies, and 4) motivation to participate in the digital culture. Digital competence is regarded as a core competence in policy papers; in research, however, it is not yet a standardized concept. Several policy- or practice-related projects are currently working to find a common and acceptable definition.

**Conclusion and Implications**

Digital technologies have the potential to support and shape a pedagogy which is more active, participatory, personalized, flexible, and inclusive (Laurilland, 2008).While it is acknowledged that the socio-political factors discussed in the previous sections may discourage institution-wide use of technologies in teaching and learning, and it is likely that these macro factors would not disappear in the short term, it is believed that at the micro or grass root level technology use can have an impact on student learning if there is a better understanding of the pedagogic potentials and a wider dissemination of exemplary and creative use of these technologies to show how they can be embedded in teaching to enhance student leaning outcome.

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