

What does it mean to “know” today?

Are today's students so overloaded with information that they are learning in a different way? Is our education system so antiquated that it isn't teaching anything anymore? Are educational institutions government funded dictatorships?

George Siemens a Canadian based leading theorist on the changing nature and needs of learning believes so. He will be in Sydney in mid-October as a Provocateur for the *education.au limited* Global Summit.

Students are no longer learning through the traditional cognitivism or pure construction of knowledge, but by actually connecting with each other and technology. Essentially, the theories of learning that teachers teach (and were taught) are no longer adequate for (or representative of) how people learn today. From this understanding, comes Siemens' theory on Connectivism.

“With Connectivism, I wanted to create a conversation about what it means to learn and know today. The existing theories used by educators come from an era where computers didn't exist,” says Mr Siemens.

“We are trying to use theories of learning from a predominantly physical era, and force them to work in a digital era. We need a new pedagogy, a new view of learning, a new view of knowledge, or interacting.”

At the same time, learners are experiencing a tremendous increase in information and are simply are not able to handle and process information. As a result, learners need to offload the act of learning to a network.

Siemens believes we learn by forming connections and creating rich networks of distributed cognition and meaning-making.

“The skills we need are different today - we need to learn how to learn for life. We need to learn how to recognize patterns in the rapid knowledge landscape. “We need to stop thinking of knowledge as a reservoir, and begin seeing it as a river”..”

The way forward, using technology, is not to create virtual classrooms which is simply duplication. Technology's potential to facilitate transformation will be unearthed once we can shed our existing views of learning.

"We are seeing a continual rise of change pressures - social networking tools (myspace, Bebo), personal publications (blogs, podcasts), and collaborative work tools (wikis) are prominent enough to demand educators to rethink what it means to learn and know. Unfortunately, our institutions are not structured for change. We have built them for stability."

"Blogs and social technology as a whole can be very effective for enabling learners to form connections and to promote deep or reflective thinking. Too much of education is passive."

"When people blog, or connect and interact with others, they are actively involved. Our co-workers no longer sit at the next desk...they sit in the next country. The same is true for learners. And blogs in particular can enable this global conversation."

Seimens believes that existing educational perspectives need to be revised to meet the needs of today's students through "democracy, as educational institutions are government funded dictatorships. While that statement is a bit harsh, and intended to force thought and reflection, few spaces in society suffer the power differential of education."

"We need to begin creating learning ecologies and networks for learners - spaces where we can attend to the diverse needs of learners at different levels. There are times where the best learning happens in an engaged conversation in small groups...or in the reflection of writing a journal entry."

While these can be mediated with technology, we need to ensure that we are not adjusting our institutions to meet the daily fads of today's learners.

So to the future, and Siemens believes the role, of ICT in education is one of support. "ICT and education do influence (and drive) each other. Our real challenge is one of creating a compelling vision for education, learning, and knowledge in our society today. And then to leverage the tools at our disposal in making that vision a reality," says Mr Siemens.

Global Summit

George Siemens will be one of the leading thinkers and educators from around the globe sharing their ideas for the development of technology connected futures at the 2006 Global Summit.

Hosted by *education.au* limited, it will be a workshop and think-tank that focuses on the use of ICT in education, training and careers.

When: 17-19 October 2006

Where: Shangri-La Hotel, Sydney

Cost: \$895

More information & registration:

<http://globalsummit.educationau.edu.au>

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