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Connectivism – a Critical Look

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Abstract

Connectivism is not a learning theory but it is a concept that describes how to use the Internet in education. It appeared when two conditions were fulfilled: there existed the information overload and there were advanced tools used for searching for information (include Google). In addition, by the year 2008 the negative consequences of the influence of the Internet on human brain (shaping of the hypertext brains and making shallow of thinking) had not been known.

The misconception is an assumption that knowledge may exist out of the human – in the resources of the Internet. This misconception is to regard knowledge as a technological category, whereas it is a purely intellectual phenomenon with a spiritual aspect. Peter F. Drucker, an authority in the field of management states that wisdom and knowledge do not reside in books, computer programs and the Internet.

There is only information there. Wisdom and knowledge are always embodied in a person.

The human brain performs two main functions: remembering and processing of information. Connectivism situates the former in the Internet and the latter in the human. Leading the process of remembering – de facto the part of the brain's function – out of human, has deep educational consequences.

The research of neurologists (Gary Small) reveals that persistent usage of the Internet decreases the ability of information processing, as well as of criticism and deeper reflection. Thus we deal with double intellectual crisis – we do not train the ability of information remembering and we cope with weaker and weaker information processing.

There is only information in the Internet – tiny bricks, which in the course of the learner's own cognitive activity build up the edifice of knowledge in the brain. Knowledge is an individual model that reflects a certain fragment of reality in the human brain. The influence of information technology on intellectual functioning of the human depends on rationality of tools usage. Intellectually rich individuals are able to use the Internet resources for further intellectual development, and for those who are intellectually poor, the Net can easily become a tool of mental decline.

A characteristic feature of connectivism is the fact of focusing on the category of "know-where". It is a considerable impoverishing of cognitive processes. It is not a task of school to deliver information, but to prepare the learner to own building up of knowledge. "Know-where" is meta-knowledge understood as knowledge about sources of information. In the contemporary world of information overload it is quite useful and appreciated, yet it should not be identified as knowledge. Knowledge is connections between neurons in the human brain, and it is not the Internet connections between nodes and hubs.

The main misconception of the authors of connectivism is to show that information and knowledge are equivalent and to disregard its spiritual dimension.

Knowledge is not only what we “know”, it is also what we feel and experience. As an intellectual (spiritual) category it is also the awareness of having knowledge as well as the awareness of own ignorance, putting questions, defining problems, discerning uncertainty. These categories are unique for a human only, they are utterly not technological.

Keywords

connectivism, knowledge, processing of information, hypertext brains, digital dementia

Biography

Janusz Morbitzer is the professor at the Pedagogical University of Cracow (Poland), The Head of the Chair of Educational Media and Technology. He is a member of The Council for Information Technology in Education (an advisory body of the Minister for National Education) and of The Committee on National Education Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He specializes in aspects of electronic media usage in education. He is an author of more than 200 publications.

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