THE GREAT LEARNING EXPERIENCE PROJECT: AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND *LEARNING* FROM THE VIEWS OF THE MILLENNIAL LEARNERS PART 1

Maria Victoria Pineda and Lennarth Bernhardsson
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines / University West, Trollhattan, Sweden
Email addresses: mavic.pineda@delasalle.ph , lennarth.bernhardsson@hv.se

Abstract

Millennial learners are individuals born after 1985 with very wide exposure to various types of media enhanced by technology. They are persons who had listened to music while in the womb of their mothers and had watched television starting at age 0. Most of them would have had a music player or a game pad or a mobile phone at age 8. (Deterle, Dede and Schrier, 2008) These millenial learners grew up with constant web connectivity at their fingertips to assist them in their homeworks.

The present pedagogies our academic institutions employ to support the learning style of the web generation of students may not be as suitable. Social constructivism, transformative learning or problem-based learning, while prevalent in the Asian context, may be more perfect for cognitively dynamic students. Our students nowadays are more adept to constructing knowledge, content (Attwell, 2007) and even more independent in their learning priorities. This study attempts to understand the new learning practices among our students. This study attempts to find out how college students define what a good learning experience is. It is also the intention of the study to explore new educational practices and hopefully drive ways of designing and developing the future of learning activities.

The study was conceived in May 2011 and was planned to collect data in the form of short videos in a span of six months, from June to December. There will be two sets of samples, one from the students of De La Salle University of the Philippines (DLSU) and the other from the students of University West (UW) in Sweden.

The experiment asked for a two minute video that will be created and expressed by an individual or group of students. This meant planning and organization to compose the thoughts, the message and the content of the video. Since this contains the expression of the students themselves, the self-expression equates to a great degree of authenticity.

This paper will impart the work-in-progress of this experiment, the Great Learning Experience. To date, there are twenty videos from DLSU and fifteen videos from UW. This paper will tell the methods used in the different classes and the initial findings. Comparison of the UW and DLSU videos is not included in the paper.

Background

Attwell (2007) posted that more than the formal settings of the classroom or the university alone, there are limitless ways of generating knowledge because of emerging technologies. The students themselves become producers of knowledge as technologies become ambient. And learning becomes multi-episodic, taking place in concurrence, in multiplicities, different facets, transforming and expanding.

Learning now occurs in countless contexts as technologies have become pervasive as well. Technologies have encouraged, empowered and have made it second nature for learners or students to pull and acquire any information to be translated to knowledge for her personal consumption. As learning is continual and interminable, and so are the opportunities to learn becomes multitude and open-ended.

Who are these students? These are the millennial learners, born after 1985. The millennial learners have great degree of exposure to media starting at age 0. Most of them grew up with exposure to different forms of traditional and technology enhanced media. At age 8, most of them would have possessed a mobile phone, a music player or an electronic game pad. (Deterle, Dede and Schrier, 2008) Many of them grew up with constant access to computers and eventually the web, have constantly visited Wikipedia for their daily homeworks.

This is the premise that drives this study. While the existentialist, the pragmatist and the constructivist views of education still exist, there are many evidences pointing to the direction of learning and use of technology converging. The interplay of technology, the web, the digital media and the millennial learners are too connected that there is no disparity or dependency. Millennial learners are not dependent on technology and technology is not dependent on how millennial learners manipulate technology.

Millennial learners possess a self-service learning skill, the habitual ability to get fast, relevant and immediate knowledge and information, views technology engagement as second nature together with learning. (Pineda, 2009) Millennial learners and technology are coupled together.

Objectives of the Study

Many discussions are taking place whether the old time-tested educational pedagogies apply in these situations.

First, the study aims to explore what drives the educational practices of these millennial learners. How do they learn? How do they use technology to learn? What experience makes them think, tinker and tick? What learning experience is effective and affective to them? This study hopes to understand the answers to these questions, and be able to design and develop the future of learning activities.

Second, the study aims to focus on the learning content experience rather than the student profile or background. This study believes that the video is a very transparent tool that encourages authenticity of material. Millennial learners are individuals who are accustomed and not indifferent in facing the camera. So the video expression of the students is a short story telling their effective and affective learning experience.

Further the approach of producing a two minute video permits more creativity on the part of the students to convey their story.

Third, the study aims to scrutinize the experiences coming from two sets of undergraduate students, both with perpetual access to technology.

Methodology of the Study

After numerous casual discussions on the myriad of observable changes happening in the way students respond to formal education, a group of e-learning researchers planned to perform a study. The initiative was led by an online learning advocate from Sweden. He proposed a study that attempts to extract the many ways students learn but posting the critical question—"what is a great learning experience?"

The team decided to model the digital ethnographic work of Mike Wesch (2011) of Kansas State University, whereby students impart their opinion, ideas and expressions in a short video and upload this in Youtube through his VOST2011 Project. The team agreed to cover a period of six months from June to December of 2011 and include submissions from University West and De La Salle University.

A blog labeled "Beyond the classroom walls" (http://beyonddclassroomwalls.wordpress.com/) was used as the hub of submissions. Instructions and mechanics of the video creation and submission were posted. There was a deliberate attempt to challenge the students to tell or retell their wonderful learning experiences in two minutes or less. The students were also instructed to put annotations on their work to further describe the video they have composed.

The video creation was fused in the course taken by the students. The first set was twenty (20) videos from students of the College of Computer Studies of De La Salle University. They were enrolled in a Social Media elective course and their submissions took place around August. An orientation was conducted to provide relevant information on what the video was all about and the objective of the activity. Series of mini-orientation also followed in class to reinvigorate the goal. A session was used for the student groups to discuss their different worthwhile experiences. They shared with each other their stories and consolidated their ideas in consultation with the class adviser. The focused discussions on the activity played an important role in the video outcome. This paved way to a better experience representation. Lieberman (2008) explained that reflective cognition has contributions that cannot be duplicated by the non-

reflective side of the human brain. The orientation, the group discussions and the informal meetings of the students are perceived to have spawned veritable and quality experiences.

In Trollhattan, Sweden, a similar approach was undertaken. The second set was fifteen (15) videos from the students of the Department of Economics and Informatics of University West. Orientation was also held and different learning pedagogies were discussed. The term started in September and their submissions were given in November.

All video works were required to register under the Creative Commons license. Music incorporated in the work must have also a Creative Commons license. All works were uploaded to Youtube, tagged and submitted with annotations in the blog. Two of the researchers maintain the blog.

Initial Findings

It had been overwhelming and eye-opener looking into two cohorts of learning views, one from a developed country and another one from a developing country. The diversity of expressions were very deep, the focal emphasis varies but there were many similarities. There is learning by doing; learning by practice; learning by failing; learning by youtube; learning by reflecting; learning by immersion; learning by exposure. Of course, and there is learning by having fun.

While the two main authors and researchers have not extensively and critically analyzed all the content at this point, the present work-in-progress indicated many things.

First, the millennial learner is not dependent anymore on the standardized method of lesson or learning deliveries. The effective and affective experiences are derived from her personal learning experience. She has her prudent way of knowing what is effective and enjoyable for her.

Second, the millennial learner is able to define her learning priorities or preferences. The fulfillment is inherent when she is able to perform learning by herself. This means she has her methods and ways of pulling knowledge or information and carryout deliberate learning. At the same time, having access to technology that she is able to source and select the tools that will support her learning.

This study notes that this is an important initial finding. If the millennial learner is able to set her learning priorities, decide on what learning experience she must undergo and consciously decide what, when and how to learn—then our present standardized educational methods of linearity and conformity (Robinson, 2010) may not be effective anymore. It further agrees to Robinson's (2010) urge to revolutionize present educational systems and make it organic rather than push on reforms.

Vassileva (2008) referring to the characteristics of these 'digital natives' in their twenties, equivalent of the millennial learners pointed in this study, "learn mostly in context, in response to a (perceived) demand, or to solve a particular problem" and their "motivation for learning is to satisfy a short-term goal, rather than learning on principle". And that the motivation for learning is purely social. (ibid)

This study partly disagrees to Vassileva even with the initial findings. The millennial learners, if were made to understand and reflect on the purpose of what they will do like in this video experiment, the outcome proves that learning is contextual as much as more personal to them rather than social. The contextual and personal learning is enhanced by the *self-service learning skills* that are second nature to these individuals.

Third, a collective observation in the experiment exhibits the millennial learner as an excellent content and knowledge producer is also akin of story-telling or story narratives.

So future learning designers may consider developing greater personal learning skills, create more knowledge and content generation activities and utilize different forms of storytelling as a strategy to engage our millennial learners.▪

References:

Atwell, G. (2007*). The personal learning environments- the future of e-Learning?* eLearning Papers vol. 2 no. 1 ISSN 1887-1542.
Dieterle, E., Dede, C., & Schrier, K. (2008*). "Neomillennial" learning styles propagated by wireless handheld devices.* In M. Lytras & A. Naeve (Eds.), *Ubiquitous and pervasive knowledge and learning management: Semantics, social networking and new media to their full potential.* Hershey, PA: Idea Group, Inc. Retrieved from http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/space/showimage/Dieterle-Dede-Schrier-NLS-2006.pdf
Lieberman, M. (2008). *What zombies can't do: A social cognitive neuroscience approach to the irreducibility of reflective consciousness*. Chap. 13 pp. 293-316 [Online]. Retrieved from http://commonsenseatheism. com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Lieberman-What-zombies-cant-do.pdf
Pineda, M.V. (2009). *Urban class computing in higher education: promising or perilous*. Readings in Technology in Education: Proceedings of ICICTE 2009, pp 836-846. ISBN: 1-895802-42-3.
Robinson, K. (2010). *"Bring on the revolution"* , a TED Blog presentation. Available: http://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_revolution.html
Vassileva, J. (2008). *Towards social learning environments.* IEEE Transactions on learning technologies. Vol. 1 no. 4, October-December 2008 Issue.
Wesch, M. (2010). VOST2011 Call for Submissions. Retrieved from http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg/?p=288