

THE CONDITIONS OF LEARNING IN THE WORLD OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTION TO THE
DEBATE ON “THE NEW PEDAGOGIES STEMMING FROM NEW TECHNOLOGIES”
DURING THE FIRST DAY OF THE “RENCONTRES DE VERSAILLES – 2001”

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This document presents a brief summary of key thoughts in relation to the proposed debate on emerging pedagogies and technologies. A more comprehensive presentation of these and related thoughts is available online at the Learning Development Institute website (<http://www.learndev.org>) and the website of UNESCO’s “Learning Without Frontiers” program (<http://www.unesco.int/education/lwf/>), which I directed during the second half of the past decade.

First, *the relationship between new pedagogies and the emerging new technologies is best discussed in a context that places both technology and pedagogy in a wider framework of considerations.* Failing to do so entails the risk that important opportunities to respond to the specific concerns of our time are missed. This wider framework takes into account three essential factors:

1. In the literal sense, the term “pedagogy” is restricted to the facilitation of *learning among children*. However, because learning is a never-ending process, the term should be generalized from its original meaning to refer to *learning at any age*, or be complemented by the term “andragogy.”
2. The reference in the theme of the debate to “pedagogy” places an emphasis on the instructional context as a major factor for the promotion and facilitation of learning. This emphasis is debatable. *It is important to look at the role of instruction – and the pedagogical and andragogical processes involved in it – as a constituent part of the wider learning landscape.* The learning landscape should thus be recognized to comprise other important elements, including, for example, the media landscape and the socio-cultural organization landscape, in addition to simply the instructional landscape.
3. Basic concerns regarding the learning landscape at large should focus on its *integrity, completeness, and comprehensiveness*, as well as the *interconnectedness and harmonious integration of its constituent parts*.

Second, *it is potentially dangerous to start from the assumption that every new technology calls for different ways to facilitate human learning.* The learning process and our ways of knowing are in the first place determined by the features of our body. The human mind is an embodied mind. Its potential and its limitations are determined by who we are and how we developed throughout evolutionary history. Technology extends the

capacities of our bodies, both in terms of our motor behavior and our cognitive functioning. *Technology must thus be considered not as an independent phenomenon, but as an evolving aspect of the human condition.* It is important to draw attention in this context to the obvious fact that the human condition, including its technological dimension, varies widely across the globe.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the overriding issue implied in the proposed debate has to do with a single question: “*What does it mean to be ‘learning’ in the 21st century?*” The answer to this question on one hand, has to do with considerations about the world in which we live (including the limitations of the planet and its resources, as compared to the explosive growth of the world population; the sustainability of our futures; our increased interconnectedness; and the need to live together peacefully and harmoniously with and within our human habitat). On the other hand, however, the answer to this question has also to do with the state of development of consciousness among human beings. It can be argued that from both perspectives we have, during the past century, reached critical points that require serious and thoughtful attention.

Elaboration on these three ideas leads to the conclusion that human learning should be considered as a *multi-faceted phenomenon that requires flexibility and openness for its development.* Much of established instructional practice runs counter to these requirements, making change imperative. More importantly, the conditions of learning must be developed not only in instructional contexts, but also in multiple other parts of the learning landscape. Thus, a serious reconsideration of, for instance, the media environment as a space for learning is called for. In addition, a look at different socio-cultural contexts of human organization – the family being one of them – in terms of their role in nurturing human learning is an equally important requirement. The notion of the “learning community” presents itself as a particularly powerful concept in rethinking and reshaping the world of learning.

In the broad picture that emerges, learning pervades all aspects of the life of human beings along the entire lifespan. In that perspective, learning is an inherent feature of the life of both individuals and purposefully organized collectives of human beings. If everyone learns, the distinction between learners and teachers becomes less relevant. Consequently, *pedagogy and andragogy must be rethought in a context in which everyone is both a learner and a facilitator of the learning of others,* people flexibly moving between different communities that contribute to the development of their learning and to whose collective learning behavior they contribute. *Technology becomes an important enabling factor in that process.* Current technologies have features that position them strongly to reinforce the use of already existing technologies, as well as for their own autonomous use, in generating and supporting such learning communities.