Evolving purpose: Mary Parker Follett's dialogic concepts as instructional design patterns in a Web 2.0 world

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This paper suggests a pattern language for a dialogic process of instructional design based on the works of Mary Parker Follett (1868). Follett, a pioneer in the field of social science in the early twentieth century, was concerned about "making human interplay productive" [1]. Follett's ideas about vicarious experience, creative experience, circular response, integrative behavior, power, participation, representation and evocation create a dynamic design language that can guide instructional designers who utilize Web 2.0 developments where integration of the learner into a community is a vital part of the learner experience.

Keywords evolving purpose; instructional design language; Web 2.0; pattern language; community; creative experience; integration

1. Introduction

The learning environment of the 21st century is set in an era of ubiquitous connectivity where the use of certain communication technologies is "dramatically transforming the basic patterns of communication and knowledge interchange in societies, and automating the component processes of thinking and problem solving." These alterations brought on by interactive technologies are redefining—in undeterminable ways— how humans know and understand, and how they become literate and educated citizens [2].

Roy Pea and John Seely Brown comment that although it may be obvious that "human minds develop in social situations, and that they use the tools and representational media that culture provides to support, extend, and reorganize mental functioning," there hasn't been adequate response in the literature to questions surrounding these relationships. They remark that the "need for responsiveness has become salient as computational media radically reshape the frontiers of individual and social action, and as educational achievement fails to translate into effective use of knowledge." They are convinced that there are "new and exciting interdisciplinary syntheses" underway as scholars and practitioners from diverse fields seek to analyze and influence the new transformations of social and mental life, and to understand successful learning wherever it occurs" [2].

This paper seeks to demonstrate the significance of Mary Parker Follett's concept of evolving purpose as central to defining, understanding and utilizing the social dimension of learning in light of new technologies and suggests "what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place"[3]. This paper outlines Follett's dialogic process of learning within a community environment and recommends some ways in which the ideas of Follett can add to the practice of instructional design as designers design curriculum embedded with Web 2.0 applications where the intention is to increase the learner's way of thinking about and working within the community. In particular, the suggestions center around Follett's concepts of evolving purpose, evocation and integration where these ideas, in practice, grow social consciousness and can increase a learner's ability to resolve problems. In turn, the proper applications of these concepts lead to individual and group empowerment through the development of the evolving learner and his/her learning environment in the process to become a literate and educated citizen.

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The paper suggests that the Follett model is generative, adaptive, and scalable. The model is comprehensive enough to be used as a pattern language that can be applied to any learning community. The paper suggests that the purpose of an instructional design language is to, in Follett's words, "make human interplay productive" and particularly addresses the capacity of the Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate evolving purpose and fresh satisfactions that sustain the learning process and enable the learner to contribute to the many communities of which he/she will be a part.

2. Follett and the practice of community

Follett has been described as one of America's "preeminent thinkers about democracy and social organization." Follett was "keenly interested in enhancing individual growth and development and fostering a capacity for organizational learning and change" [4].

According to a close friend of Follett, she "devoted a lifetime to searching for the true principles of organization which would ensure a stable foundation for the steady, ordered progress of human well-being….[and] the principles which she outlines are fundamental to all human progress" [4].

Follett believed that the object of education is to fit people into the life of the community. She believed that life and education must never be separated [5]. The practice of community, for Follett, was a *creative* process. It is creative because it is a process of integrating and the unifying of difference. With Follett, the genuine social will, or community, is always a moment in the process of integrating. She believed that "Conscious achieving is leaping into view as the possibility of all" [6].

Participation meant two things to Follett: (1) the contribution of each individual and (2) the coordination of such contributions. Participation was supported by four principles of coordination: (1) coordination by direct contact of the responsible people concerned, (2) coordination in the early stages, (3) coordination as a reciprocal relating of all the features in a situation, and (4) coordination as a continuing process [7].

Many business leaders have used Follett's concepts to support certain organizational change methods. Follett's concepts are being used in holistic organizational models that emphasize democracy. In addition to management organizations that have realized the potential of Follett's methods, several social change groups have adopted a participatory democracy model based on Follett.

Follett's ideas were clearly pioneering in her time and are contemporary with 21st century directions. Follett believed her framework was a way for communities to be self-sustaining. Her concept of creative communities is a fundamental model for realizing human potential through the process of being able to create and retain leadership, integrate differences and sustain individual, group and community change.

Mary Parker Follett poses the question "How do we make human interplay productive?" She wanted to know how "men can interact and co-act better: (1) to secure their ends; (2) to understand and so broaden their ends" [1].

You can find the rest of this paper at http://www.yvettearts.com/conference/icte.html

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