CREATING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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ABSTRACT

There is general agreement that learning is the key ingredient for creating both productive and socially just societies. Learning can take place anywhere, anytime. Yet schools have a special role in supporting young people to become active learners who can better understand the world in which they live, develop strategies for improving it and make a difference in their lives and those of people around them.

Yet there is no single prescription for ensuring learning is successful and accessible to all. Western learning theories have often been developed as though culture and context do not matter – what works in one place will work everywhere. Yet we have seen research from Asia that suggests learning takes place in unique ways depending on the learners, their teachers, the contexts in which they learn and the values they bring to the learning task.

This presentation will argue that the way ahead is to focus on the influence different contexts have on learning and to understand how these contexts can be shaped to support the development of active learners.

The agenda is global – enhancing learning. The action is local – understanding local contexts. Research will play an important as we seek to understand learning and the contexts that create it.
OUTLINE

• Creating “theoretical towers” : Do we need a new mission for learning theory ?
• Context based learning theory – an example.
• Understanding contexts and students in context.
• Changing mindsets
• Partnerships between learning organizations.
• Next steps – a regional agenda.
CREATING “THEORETICAL TOWERS” : SCIENCE & LEARNING THEORY

Learning theorists of different kinds often seem to focus their attention on a “one size fits all” theory:

- Gagne’s “conditions of learning”  
  **BEHAVIOURISM**
- Lave’s “situated cognition”  
  **CONSTRUCTIVISM**
- Bruner’s “modes of representation”  
  **COGNITIVISM**
- Vygotsky’s “zones of proximal development”  
  **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTALISM**
- Piaget’s “cognitive development stages”  
  **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTALISM**
- Bandura: “observation, retention, reproduction and motivation”  
  **SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY**
- Bronfenbrenner: “microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem”  
  **ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

*Do we need a new mission for learning theory?
Too narrow an identification with science, however, has fixed our eyes upon an inappropriate goal. The goal of our work, I have argued here, is not to amass generalizations atop which a theoretical tower can someday be erected... The special task of the social scientist in each generation is to pin down the contemporary facts. Beyond that, he (sic) shares with the humanistic scholar and the artist in the effort to gain insight into contemporary relationships, and to realign the culture's view of man (sic) with present realities. To know man (sic) as he is is no mean aspiration." (p.126)

OUR GOAL: MAXIMIZING STUDENT LEARNING

Understand the contexts in which we work
Understand the students whom we teach
Match context and students specific learning needs
BE PREPARED FOR DIFFERENCE

- Contexts
- Students
- Needs
- Support
- Expectations
Context based learning theory -
The "Chinese learner"
There is now a significant range of research from Psychology that has focused on the characteristics of Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners, some of the most important being:

• Chan & Rao, 2009,
• Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001;
• Salili, Chiu & Hong, 2001.

At the same time there has been a body of work that has focused attention on the unique cultural characteristics of different societies and, in particular, Chinese societies (Bond, 1986, 1996).

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?
‘THE CHINESE LEARNER’

• Memorization strategies can lead to deep learning;
  [thus it is always not about rote learning]

• Passive students are not necessarily disengaged students;
  [“engagement” is the students’ responsibility];

• Teachers in Chinese classrooms have a deep sense of caring for their students.
  [irrespective of class size]
Li (2009, p.49, 61) advanced the view that for Chinese students “perfecting oneself morally and socially” is a fundamental purpose for learning. He talks about “learning virtues”: “resolve, diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance and concentration”.

Lee (1996) described Confucian learning values in which self perfection plays a very important role. Thus not only does the immediate classroom context support Chinese learners but so too does a tradition that is thousands of years old.
‘The Chinese Learner’

Learning is characterized by:

Attention
Effort
Practice
Extrinsic motivation linked to Confucian values
Achievement motivation linked to family

Thus culture/psychology/sociology work together to influence the Chinese learner
It is bound by Confucian cultural values
It relies on specific motivations (personal & social)
There is considerable variance within Chinese student populations

BUT it is a research based
This is the key task!
CONTEXTS FOR LEARNING

• How can learning be facilitated in different contexts?
• What resources are available in different contexts?
• What can teachers do in different contexts?
• What do students need in different contexts?
• What do families want in different contexts?
• What are society’s expectations in different contexts?

• THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE DIFFERENT IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS
There can be no single/simple solution

TEACHER CENTRED TEACHING → STUDENT CENTRED TEACHING

But what if we add a twist?
How can learning be facilitated in different contexts?

STUDENT CENTRED TEACHING

INVOLVES A CHANGE IN MINDSET

LEARNING CENTRED CLASSROOMS
The use of the student-centered label obviates the need to envision the classroom as a dynamic, multifaceted relationship between teachers and students. (Rauscher, 2013)

The label "learning-centered" rightly suggests the need to put learning at the core of the educational agenda. This label supersedes the mere naming of a movement, but really encapsulates the ultimate goal of the Classroom (Rauscher, 2013)

http://www.readperiodicals.com/201304/2956942891.html
Different contexts...
Different students...
Different needs...

WHERE IS THE LEARNING?
WHO IS LEARNING HERE?

Teacher talking

Teacher demonstrating

Teacher facilitating

Students discussing
What are the “conditions for learning” in each context?

How can they be maximized?

How can student learning be tracked & improved?
Partnerships – schools/universities
Teacher researchers
Active classrooms
Learning focused inquiry