Technology is Transferring Human Education to Computers

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Matthew Etherington, the author of the article “E-Learning pedagogy in the Primary School Classroom: the McDonaldization of Education,” (2008) writes about the dehumanization of primary students as a direct result of online pedagogy. Human evolution has led to the creation of better technology. That technology has led humans to become reliant on machines, which do not require or necessitate any social interaction to be effective. This is confirmed by Etherington (2008) when he stated “when a child gets on their computer….there is no sense of a physical connection – there is only a mask” (p. 34).

To delve further, socialization is defined from an industry perspective by John Macionis in his book *Society the Basics* (2009) in this statement: “sociologists use the term socialization to refer to the lifelong social experience by which people develop their human potential and learn culture” (p. 72). Macionis also stresses that socialization is also significantly enhanced by children attending a physical school. It is in school that they begin to recognize cultural, racial, social, and gender differences between themselves and others and what makes them different, in addition to being able to decipher which characteristics allow them to connect with others. Additionally, while in school, children also begin to form their own peer groups, which permit “escape [from] direct supervision of adults” (Macionis, 2009, p. 81). This freedom is how they first begin to establish personal relationships outside the family.

In demonstration, W. E. Ross, who wrote the article “The Promise and Perils of E-learning: A Critical Look at the New Technology” in 2009, attended the Wired Culture Forum that was hosted in the city of Toronto. At this forum, he found that more than 400 high school students expressed remarkable concern that technology is beginning to take over their lives.
Those students noted a continually increasing reliance on their own personal devices, that the internet isolates them from interacting with others, and that “technology threatens their… ability to relate to others” (Ross, 2009, p. 483). While some high schools in many states and countries have already converted to the online format, in Pennsylvania, there is “currently a proposal for a cyber-school that would enroll children as young as 5 years old” (Ross, 2009, p. 482).

In order to understand some of the reasons for the issues that children face in pedagogical technology, it is imperative to understand some of the definitions of behavior. In *Psychology: An Introduction*, Benjamin Lahey (2007) defines psychology as “the science of behavior and mental processes” (p. 5). To further understand this, here are some of the common terms that define psychology and help to accomplish the goals of psychology: Lahey (2007) defines science as “psychologists attempt[ing] to understand people through careful, controlled observation” (p. 5); next, behavior is considered any direct, physical action that can be observed; finally, mental processes are any “private thoughts, emotions, feelings, and motives that others cannot directly observe” (p. 5).

Additionally, Lahey (2007) also compares our closest evolutionary ladder match in which he illuminates the “nature versus nurture” debate as inapplicable to childhood socialization, by illustrating how two researchers (the Harlows) studied the effects of early social deprivation on monkeys by taking a small group of infant monkeys and raising them in isolation for the first few months of their lives. These monkeys seemed to be completely normal at the conclusion of this stage. At adulthood, the monkeys were then released into population with normal monkeys, and later (at 3 years of age) they were placed in specific breeding cages; “it was then that the Harlows first noticed that the social, sexual, and emotional behavior of these monkeys was distinctly abnormal” (Lahey, 2007, p. 319) in both the male and the female of the species,
characteristically. The females were afraid and withdrew from their normal male counterparts, while the males that were paired up with normal females were clumsy, awkward, and overly anxious. The research was further proven by the reactions of these same monkeys upon the birthing of their own baby monkeys and their extreme behavior to their own offspring, which often included murder.

To add to these findings, John Macionis (2009) quantified that “humans need social experience… to survive” (p. 72). Mead (as cited in Macionis, 2009), who developed social behaviorism and the central concept of “self,” stated that, “the self develops only with social experience” (p. 77). This indicates that without the social experience, the self does not develop.

According to Etherington’s (2008) postulation of “dehumanization,” some of the potential problems that will stem from a child’s sole online pedagogy are “isolation, lack of community, and decreased socialization of its learners” (p. 34), and also more physical problems as “repetitive stress injuries, eyestrain, [and] obesity” (p. 43).

In addition to these physical dangers, there are also abnormal personality disorders that can occur as a result of de-socialization. Some of those disorders are explained in detail by Nevid, Rathus, and Greene in their book *Abnormal Psychology in a Changing World* (2009): avoidant personality disorder (similarly, social phobias), increased proneness to different types of phobias, and a terror of rejection and criticism that renders that person generally unwilling to enter relationships. As a result, they do not often have close relationships outside their family.

Another possible disorder is separation-individuation: a process by which children learn to “differentiate their own identities from their mothers” (Nevid, Rathus, & Greene, 2009, p. 456). Failure for a child to complete this process can create a personality disorder in an adult,
and lead to separation anxiety. To expound on this issue, the type of anxiety disorder that could easily result from this could lead to a borderline personality disorder in which people lack confidence about their individual characteristics (which can include both personality and sexuality), leading to constant feelings of emptiness and boredom.

Furthermore, physical communication disorders can quickly breed in children who are unsocial because they do not experience proper enunciation and articulation of different letters and sounds. These disorders range from an expressive language disorder, a mixed receptive/expressive language disorder, a phonological disorder, to stuttering (Nevid, Rathus, & Greene, 2009). Indeed, other physical and personality manifestations can result from a lack of socialization: children become “more passive … [and] less likely to use [their] imagination” (Macionis, 2009, p. 82).

Ross (2009) establishes that technology can certainly benefit a professional environment by his statement that, “over 85% of Fortune 500 companies use remote training” (p. 482). In fact, most companies today actually utilize remote computer training for new hires as a part of their orientation to a new job. Some places even offer distance education as incentive to further one’s career, not only by offering a raise, but also offering monetary gifts as well. Again, the correlation between adult pedagogy in technology and child pedagogy in technology is demonstrated by Etherington’s (2008) further study of a child being in a physical school, and a teacher being absent from the classroom, but elsewhere conducting an interactive activity. His study noted that the child would not only leave the computer, but would have no interest in or recollection of the computer during this physical activity. To recap, John Macionis (2009) stresses that necessary socialization is significantly enhanced by children attending a physical school and interacting with other children on a constant, daily basis.
References


