

Connection Pedagogy: A Pedagogical Shift for Millennial Learners in the Digital Era

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Abstract—The irruption of the millennial learners shakes the academic institutions that believe in the old pedagogy whose infrastructure is sociologically conditioned by the predigital era. Despite the inquietude of academic institutions, the introduction of new pedagogies as creative responses to the irruption of millennial learners requires a transitional period that is often longer than what we, educators, previously estimated. Starting from the autobiographies of the millennial learners and educators that meet in this era, as well as the rich literature on the subject, this research paper attempts to fill at least temporarily this pedagogical vacuum. This paper proposes connection pedagogy to respond to the irruption of millennial learners in the digital era.

Keywords—millennial learner, pedagogical transition, institutional quake, a sense of disquietude, connection pedagogy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Accessing the latest scholarly works about education in the digital age, their diversity and richness astonishes me. Though the exposure and penetration of the new digital world is still limited, i.e. 2G to 4G or now, even the new 5G network, like walking with dim light, even in the darkness, scholars have sought to articulate new pedagogies for the millennial learners. These scholarly studies motivate educators to incorporate digital pedagogy into academic institutions. However, the autobiographies of Indonesian educators and millennial learners have not yet gained much in terms of depth of reflection. These new pedagogies for millennial learners are not yet articulated completely. It becomes imperative for Indonesian educators to engage in the articulation of new pedagogies for millennial learners.

Which new pedagogies are suitable for millennial learners? What are the main contents of these pedagogies? I believe that new pedagogies that welcome the disruptive spirit of digital era might be suitable for millennial learners. This research paper engages in academic colloquiums by proposing a connection pedagogy and elaborating its content. The notion of 'connection' contains complexity, even in some parts a set of complex problematics. The use of this term in the context of the digital era is still rarely followed by clarifications and further elaborations. I join in efforts recently done by contemporary scholars from across study programs who listen to the sacred call to articulate new pedagogies in the digital era.

The articulation of connection pedagogy, borrowing John Potter's terminology, is a 'new curatorship between the autobiography of Indonesian educators and the autobiography of millennial learners [1]. I focus mainly on the autobiographies of a group of students who share their experiences as millennial learners. Their autobiographies provide an in-depth understanding of learning, classrooms, and academic institutions which enrich my articulation of the connection pedagogy. Recognizing the limitations of the wisdom of experience from the autobiographies of educators and millennial learners, I complement them with recent scholarly works on the related topic.

The narration of connection pedagogy for millennial learners is as follows:

- a. I start with the autobiography of millennial learners attending my two religion classes this semester. I observe the formation of digital selfhood when millennials fully embrace digital culture.
- b. I also pay attention to their painful struggle during schooling hours whose the academic infrastructure is predominantly predigital.
- c. I do similarly when reading my own autobiography of encountering millennial learners in class.
- d. I detect conservative attitudes containing lack of trust, even distrust at times toward them.
- e. Borrowing vocabularies from other scholars, I sketch a connection pedagogy starting from the wisdom of educators and learners in the digital age.

Motivated from aforementioned explanation, this paper presents a pedagogical shift for millennial learners in the digital era.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section II describes proposed method. Section III presents the obtained results and following by discussion in Section IV.

II. PROPOSED METHOD

The consideration of current discussions about education in the digital age helps me in engaging in conversation about it. The encounter with the digital world, more precisely millennial learners, has created new vocabularies, such as 'user-led age', 'participatory culture', 'digital selfhood', 'digital academia', 'from an analog to a digital university', 'pedagogical mashups', and 'new curatorship'. The articulation of pedagogy for



millennial learners coming from Indonesian contexts is still underway, even ignored. There is an urgency for Indonesian scholars to have an academic asceticism in the midst of teaching activism to move from downloading new pedagogies ideas to uploading them for millennial learners.

Pedagogy is not a topic that most educators discuss consciously every day. We deal most of the times with a semester credit system, workload, and curriculum. Pedagogy in our daily activism as educators, borrowing psychoanalytic vocabulary, is at the 'unconscious' level that we take for granted. We consciously discuss pedagogy when problems shake its existence. Borrowing terminology from computer science, pedagogy is like an Operating System (OS) that users start talking about when it encounters problems. The encounters of educators with the millennial learners reveal the limitations of the old pedagogy that for some time has become the credo among educators during the teaching-learning process.

To emphasize the necessity as well as the urgency to sketch a new pedagogy for the millennial learners, I look for a metaphor taken from Christian Scripture that I am familiar with. Jesus used the metaphors of "wine" and "wineskins" that are close to his listeners at the time. Newer wine needs a new wineskin. "Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserving [2]. Recognizing that the old pedagogy has been torn apart with the irruption of millennial learners, the articulation of a new pedagogy is necessary and urgent.

Instead of an obligation, our profession calls those of us who may not have an academic degree in pedagogy to engage in articulating pedagogy for the millennial learners. This call becomes even greater for higher education institutions, further educators who affiliate with the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. The false belief that the task of articulating it belongs to a minority elite who has the degree in pedagogy results in the scarcity of scholarship and discussion about it. This research paper encourages the engagement of more educators to present, at least discuss, new pedagogies for millennial learners.

Although addressing new pedagogies especially for the Teacher Training and Education Faculty, its articulation requires the contribution from other disciplines. The simplification of pedagogy in the digital age as an exclusive issue of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education or the Faculty of Science and Technology, or to both of them, results in a very poor sketch. I believe that the articulation of new pedagogies for millennial learners requires the involvement of educators across disciplines. Since the irruption of millennial learners breaks through the traditional barriers of study programs, collaboration within the university becomes an 'educational imperative [3].

Related studies indicate that the slowness, even postponement in articulating new pedagogies for the millennial learners is associated with educator's conservatism, even

educational institutions in the digital era. The half-hearted attitude of embracing the digital technology has resulted in its limited replacement of the learning instruments in the classroom with the latest technologies and providing workshops by inviting information technology experts. Involvement in discussions, further articulations, of new pedagogies for millennial learners need to depart from a more positive attitude of educators to the digital era [4]. I believe that the millennial learners need more than just the dispatching of an old pedagogy. The connection is a new appropriate pedagogy after listening to millennial learners.

Marc Prency detects the rejection, the resistance of educational institutions to the disruptive invocation of millennial learners. When academic institutions maintain learning in the classroom as proceeding de more, as in the previous times, the millennial learners creatively develop a new learning 'afterschool'. The term 'afterschool' refers to informal learning through peer partners and digital technology-based learning resources after schooling hours. Peer partners and new learning resources play a major role in their learning. No one can now dictate to them in the learning process. Digital learners follow their 'passion' and transform it into a specialization that gives necessary competencies to live in the 21st century [5].

The awareness of problematics in science education, especially physics, for example, encourages changes in learning pedagogy [6]. The learner's lack of 'pedagogy' now drives a radical change, a process parallel to the 'paradigm shift' in science. The acceptance of a new paradigm depends on the level of intelligibility, plausibility, and fruitfulness in addressing the problematic learning of physics education. Old and new paradigms compete in getting acceptance from learners based on these three considerations [7]. Furthering the discussions of Heywood and Parker, the proposal for a new pedagogy often starts from the 'cognitive conflict that nests in the old pedagogy [8].

In extreme cases, lack of success, even failure to overcome the problems of educational institutions results in the rejection of the existence of school as a 'site for learning'. In fact, the embracing spirit of digital technology deadens the school. Educational institutions fail to adapt sufficiently in the face of the challenges, even disruptions of digital technology [9]. In support for paradigm shifts in learning, educators who embrace digital technology see the potential of the technology to renew the school. Re-schooling is centered on learners, including their digital self-formation. The necessity to work on revolutionary change is felt in relation to the curriculum and pedagogy [10].

This research involved 74 university students who were born between 1997 – 2000. The amount of time spent daily to connect online ranges from 5 to 20 hours. The average time allocated to connect online is about 13.5 hours/day. Respondents spend the usage of online connection with 72.9% from data packages and 17.1% from free services. WhatsApp, Instagram, Line, Facebook, and YouTube rank at the top among others. Wattpad, Webtoon, Joox, and Games, such as Mobile Legend, Ludo, and Heroes Arena, follow them as



favourite sites. The encounters with the millennial learners give me considerable insights in articulating connection pedagogy.

III. RESULTS

Since the beginning of this writing, I have used the term "millennial learner" without clarifying and elaborating it. This preferred term captures the phenomenon of the connective relationship between the millennial generation with digital technology. Don Tapscott preferred the term 'net generation' to capture the phenomenon of 'a generation bathed in bits', Marc Prensky chose the term 'digital natives' to capture the phenomenon of 'native speakers of digital language' and later 'homo sapiens digital', and William H. Dutton and Brian D. Loader used the term 'digital academe'. I adopted the contribution of their ideas to enrich the content of "millennial learner".

Connecting online becomes an activity that shapes the lives of millennials. Without exaggerating it, connection means life for millennials. On the contrary, their lives become a void when they experience a bad connection. Connection helps them exist. On the contrary, the lack of connection causes millennials to suffer from loneliness, even emptiness. Suffering from disconnection, millennials share their worries of missing what is important in their lives. Losing connection causes them to become less updated with the latest information. Interrupted connections even turn them into outdated humans. More than just being less updated with information, they become less human when they suffer from disconnection.

Millennial learners encourage educators to shift from old pedagogy into connection pedagogy. The conservatism of educators disconnects them from millennial learners. Connection pedagogy requires educators to embrace the disruptive spirit of digital world. Although having a predigital accent, these progressive educators express willingness to encounter millennials as a generation of connection. Educators can design learning that has relevance to millennial learners. Problem-based learning, for instance, excites millennials because it connects them with real-life issues. It transforms learning into a fun activity. Educators should clarify the goal of learning that aims at transforming their digital selfhood and the world.

Articulating a new pedagogy as his approach "turns from educator to learner [9] Don Tapscott focuses on "changes in pedagogy, not technology [10] Instead of focusing on the teacher, the education system should focus on the student. Instead of lecturing, teachers should interact with students and help them discover for themselves. Instead of delivering a one-size-fits-all form of education, schools should customize the education to fit each child's individual way of learning. Instead of isolating students, the schools should encourage them to collaborate [11].

In conjunction with Tapscott, Francesc Pedró saw the renewal of technology-based academic institutions as an urgent need. This renewal can encourage customization of the learning process. Academic institutions are required to provide the necessary competencies for learners to live in the 21st century. In a knowledge economy driven by technology, the

solution for the digital divide is necessary [12] They have not addressed the relationship between pedagogical practice involving technology and its effects on learning (knowledge base), providing 'showcasing' of this pedagogical practice and the direction of its teacher training, and providing adequate incentives to educator investments in embracing practices new pedagogical (incentives) [13].

Tapscott and Pedró led me to see the transformation of learners' paradigm from predigital to digital selfhood. Instead of obsessing with the digital-era threat to learning, interdisciplinary colloquiums shift to an open opportunity born of 'a sense of disquietude [14] owing to the irruption of the millennial learner. Starting from the electronic mail phenomenon, Cate Thomas witnessed digital inscriptions shaping the people's electronic self. Digital inscriptions affect the everyday activities of humans in this new era and define their personality as a new digital selfhood. Predigital imaginations about the human personality whose characteristics are certainty and stability are replaced by the digital self that has the distinctive character of uncertainty and instability [13].

'Ngenophobia' is an irrational fear of young people, especially their use of the Internet. We indict net generations as suffering from narcissistic pathologists, intellectual shallowness, attention deficit disorder, or peer violence. However, we rarely direct our forefinger at persons with NGenophobic pathology. Unless we are open to radical transformation, academic institutions will lose their future in the very near time. The millennial generation will push their influence by changing the trends from hierarchical to connection, from command to collaboration, from arbitrary rule to negotiation, from control to empowerment. They push radical change in our academic institutions [14].

The separation of the term 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants', according to Marc Prensky, has the intention of metaphorizing the differences that many people observe between the attitude of younger people who are more advanced to digital technology by the 21st century. The metaphor is useful for naming the ongoing phenomenon. Despite its limitations, the metaphor contains a number of truths. The differentiating terms are related more to the growth in the digital culture and the comfort of digital native living in it. Digital natives believe in the ease, usefulness, and virtues of technology. They view digital technology as an exciting partner that they can master effortlessly.

Beyond the relationship at the level of the surface between learners and technology that puts people as sophisticated techsavvy users, I detect a deeper relationship between them. I detect the relationship between millennial learners and digital technology getting closer to being "symbiotic". Learners accept digital technology as part of their existence as human beings. They praise the artificial intelligence of digital technology and seek to incorporate it into human intelligence. They involve artificial intelligence increasingly in everyday activities, including learning. Observing the behavior of millennial learners, digital technology becomes a pillar, even the infrastructure of their digital selfhood.



Prensky coins a new metaphor of 'homo sapiens digital' to name a digitally advanced person. Homo sapiens digital, then, differs from today's human in two key aspects: He or she accepts digital enhancement as an integral fact of human existence, and he or she is digitally wise, both in the considered way he or she accesses the power of digital enhancements to complement innate abilities and in the way in which he or she uses enhancements to facilitate wiser decision making. Digital wisdom transcends the generational divide defined by the immigrant/native distinction. Many digital immigrants exhibit digital wisdom [15].

Homo sapiens digital is surely not the last metaphor coming from the encounters between educators and millennial learners in the digital age. New metaphors are likely to spring up in shorter periods. As we explore new metaphors to capture more fully the irruption of millennial learners, we need to recognize their characteristics as well as views of learning, academic institutions, and career life. The systematization of the millennial learners is far from making these characteristics as new stereotypes. Discussions about them need to include learners who suffer from the digital divide because they live in the forefront, back front, and underdeveloped regions of Indonesia.

IV. DISCUSSION

The idea to sketch a connection pedagogy started when I taught a religion class, which was my academic expertise, for about five years ago. Despite updating library references and maximizing the use of teaching resources close to the digital learners, I felt that the connection gap with them in the classroom is increasing year by year. After returning to my school office, I reflected on the dynamics of delivering the course material to find the cause of the disconnection with them. The class dynamics fit with my lesson plan but I suffered disconnection with them. 'A sense of disquietude' when I encountered net generations in the classroom has pushed me to admit my relative conservatism against digital technology and millennial learners.

The academic conservatism reveals the stuttering of educators living in the 21st century which becomes the living habitat of millennial learners. The main characteristics of this era, borrowing the vocabulary of psychotherapist David E. Engle, are "variability, uncertainty, chaos, & ambiguity" (VUCA). Variability refers to diversity and spread. We need to distance ourselves from the rush to identify it as a deviant behavior toward central authority. Instead of certainty, uncertainty characterizes this era. Instead of order, this era has a chaotic character even though we need to distance ourselves from the haste to attach it to anarchy. Rather than having only a single, even absolute, ambiguous characteristics overcome any dichotomous tendency [15].

I adopted the basic vocabulary of 'new pedagogy' to show the ongoing quakes in academic institutions with the irruption of millennials learners and the transitional period from 'old pedagogy'. Referring to a similar phenomenon, other scholars have the vocabulary more specifically 'digital pedagogy' instead of 'analog pedagogy'. Derek E. Baird and Mercedes Fisher put forth the term 'pedagogical mashup' to designate a combination of old pedagogy and new media by educators to create new pedagogy in the 21st century for digital learners. In addition to increasing competence in embracing digital technology for learning, Baird and Fisher see the need for educators to understand the 'sociological shift' in the way learners learn [16].

Intensive encounters with the digital learners provide educators insights to articulate better new pedagogies in the digital age. First, the students are millennial learners. Starting from freedom as the first characteristic of the millennial generation, they take academic responsibility as a digital learner. As Tapscott's study of the digital generation combines work and play, the millennial generation treats classrooms similarly. Far from merely becoming a user, further a consumer of digital technology, digital learners struggle to form a personality in a digital academic community (digital academe). As Prency's research, they struggled to move from intelligent digital humans to homo sapiens digital.

Second, there is open learning. Instead of positioning them as the sole designer, educators involve millennials in designing learning. They come to the classroom with a semester learning plan and share it with the millennial learners. Instead of treating a semester learning plan as a closed text, it is open to the possibility of revisions after listening to the feedbacks from the millennial learners. Openness by the educators at the beginning of semester opens the possibility of further receptiveness throughout the learning period. Open learning places the millennial learners as 'informal educators' who enrich learning and positions educators as 'informal learners.

Third, clarity of goals in learning by educators becomes a necessity for the digital learners. Without clear goals, millennials lose a sense of direction in learning. They challenge educators to express their competence, at least great efforts, in connecting the content of learning with the context of life. The lack of relevance, further the irrelevance of learning materials to the context of life, discourages millennials in the classroom. Problem-based learning (PBL), action-based learning (ABL) and research-based learning (RBL) are initiatives by educators in connecting learning texts and the life context that excite digital learners in the classroom.

The above first three characteristics need further explorations to sketch the connection pedagogy. In addition to the lines drawn on the canvas, educators as artists need to continue their drawings. The complete sketch of the new pedagogy in the millennial era is still considered a scarcity from the Indonesian context. It meets the urgent need by educators who are willing to embrace the connection pedagogy but are finding the difficulty to systematize it by themselves. Academic institutions require a kind of showcasing to educators in embracing connection pedagogy. This great interest encourages educators to move from featuring soft showcasing to a grand showcasing of new connection pedagogy to fellow educators.

Reassessment may even take place since the adoption of 'pedagogy' vocabulary. It is a derivative of the Greek word



'paidagogos' which literally means 'slave who escorted the child to school', the traditional meaning of this vocabulary is far from adequate in the context of the digital age that emphasizes the independence of the learner. The traditional understanding of pedagogy as 'art or science' also needs to be re-examined in a new ecology of education centered on the learner. The use of the word 'pedagogy' vocabulary in the digital age that invigorates the world of education needs to embrace a new dialogue between teaching and learning. This dialogue is especially significant in the midst of academic debates that places teaching and learning in the poles of tension, even opposition [17].

Connection pedagogy repositions learning as an activity that centers on millennials. It shifts the old pedagogy that puts the teacher as the protagonist, even the dominant one in learning. Shifting from the old learning model that places educators as ones who dictate knowledge, connection pedagogy positions the digital learners as subjects who actively explore knowledge. Learning becomes a collaborative activity between learners, and between learners and educators. Each learner contributes to the exploration of knowledge. Learners push relationships with educators by shifting from hierarchical to collaborative. "One-size-fits-all" characterizes old pedagogy. Meanwhile, "one-size-fits-one" characterizes connection pedagogy.

Connection pedagogy imagines learning newly as a means for learners to shape digital selfhood. This new imagination corrects the old pedagogy that confuses learning as an end in itself rather than as a means of self-formation for learners. Connection pedagogy views learning as an 'enabling skill' for them to overcome real-life problems. Correcting the old pedagogy that narrows learning as excelling academic thinking, new pedagogy implies learning as an activity that combines academic excellence and achievement in the face of real-life issues. Instead of bringing home report cards containing test scores, they celebrate graduation with a resume of achievements in transforming the world [18].

Millennial learners assess the method of learning that takes place step by step as slowness. Living a learning method that has a rhythm of "fast track", they are easily discouraged, even suffering from boredom during learning in the classroom. They line up to informal learning institutions that offer a quick way, even shortcuts, in solving curricular problems. Recognizing academic excellence, digital learners choose schools that have acceleration programs. Going to a higher education institution at a younger age than fellow classmate is a pride. Prency articulately characterizes the digital age learning method as "faster, less step-by-step, more in parallel, with more random access [19].

The connection pedagogy reimagines the classrooms, school offices, and academic institutions. Millennial learners view the classroom as both a learning and a playing room. The possibility of playing in the classroom creates relaxation, further motivation, in learning [20]. Playing releases, the tension that often overwhelms the millennial learner. Meanwhile, motivation makes millennial learners become more involved in learning without compulsion. Educators can

transform school offices that were formerly a space of less connection, even disconnection, into a space of connections. Digital learners view academic institutions as one, not the only, source of exploring knowledge.

Throughout my writing, I have tried to provide a grand showcasing of connection pedagogy and the direction of implementing this new pedagogy and show its usefulness. The inclusion of new pedagogy for future schools assumes that educators at least understand, trust, and see the usefulness of connection pedagogy. It also presupposes academic institutions to facilitate understanding, training, and incentives for educators in embracing connection pedagogy. Real conditions in the field often require wise consideration for academic institutions in determining the timing of embracing the connection pedagogy. The transition period hopefully makes the pedagogical shift cause only a minor quake.

There is still a lot of blank space on the canvas that has not been sketched until the end of this writing. Nevertheless, the available sketch on connection pedagogy is more than sufficient to build the school of the future. In looking at the time, educators have much to learn from millennial learners. The future is near for them. It is very close as in the vocabulary "tomorrow". The future is next to the present. If we hope that higher education institutions still appeal to millennial learners, we should not delay in embracing connection pedagogy. The slowness, further postponement in embracing digital pedagogies in the Teacher Training and Education Faculty, signals a conservative attitude in the higher education institutions.

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