

# Technology for Learning and Changing

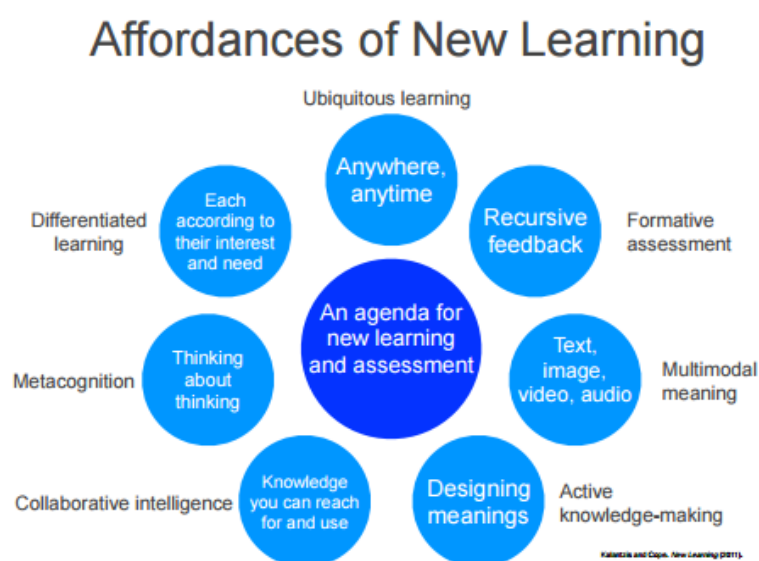
Summary of the session led by Reda Sadki – Trigonos – January 2017

In this session we delved into the reality that partnerships often become remote because those involved can no longer afford to meet together physically. Increasingly, collaboration, dialogue, and feedback are simply assumed to take place from a distance. What do we lose – and is there anything to gain – when:

1. Sharing physical space is no longer a necessary condition to partnering?
2. Sharing physical space is increasingly a medium in which we can no longer afford to develop partnerships?
3. The value of shared physical space is mostly cultural and related to the social capital that underpins social relations?
4. What we are enabled to do from a distance using technology is changing rapidly – more rapidly than what we can do in a shared physical space – leaving us confused, and perhaps even fearful, of what this change means for the quality or even the future of our partnerships?

In addressing the use of technology at the Remote Partnering Project Design Lab, the irony did not escape us that sixteen or so of us were sitting face-to-face. The plan had been to bring some participants in from other continents on a remote basis to input as and when possible, but several factors prevented this from happening<sup>1</sup>. Experience and advice has suggested in the past that combining remote and face-to-face can often cause more problems than opting for one or the other and this experience seemed to confirm that advice.

Reda Sadki, who leads a partnership that is tackling such questions to improve digital learning, was invited to facilitate a session to explore the current challenges being experienced by those working remotely and uncover some of the emerging solutions. The idea that working remotely is a ‘second cousin’ to and ‘second best’ option to face-to-face had already been challenged and (somewhat) deflated in previous sessions and therefore this session focussed on how to leverage the new economy of effort that technology allows for working remotely as outlined in the following affordances (literally and figuratively what we can ‘afford’ to do):



<sup>1</sup> A special 360 degree microphone was purchased and successfully tested in order for remote participants to hear everyone in the room but alas, changes to session timings from our end affected our participant from India attending and we had trouble connecting with our Middle East participant who was lined up to join us but unexpectedly had to fly to work in another country.

So, rather than addressing technology from the perspective of trying to replicate what partners produce when face-to-face and addressing the shortfalls of these, Reda proposed that participants think through how their partnering work is already being transformed by digital technologies. Could partners – who mostly seem to experience remote working as a constraint – leverage this transformation to resolve dilemmas inherent in such common partnership challenges as:

- Moving from strategy to implementation
- Putting reporting practice to use
- Documenting experience (e.g. case studies)
- Fostering collaboration across silos
- Bringing static knowledge to life (e.g. making global guidelines relevant and useful to communities)

In fact, Reda provided practical examples of an emerging approach (known as the “Scholar Approach”) that aims to connect partners, from centre to periphery, to strengthen networks through peer-to-peer collaboration:

- The Norwegian Red Cross mobilized a global community of action, convening over 800 pre-hospital emergency workers from 70 countries to co-develop over 70 case studies of violence and risk in four weeks.
- The World Health Organization connected public health officers from 30 countries to develop country-specific action plans based on a new global guideline.
- The Geneva Learning Foundation mobilized over 900 participants from over 100 countries to jointly develop 94 digital learning initiatives – effectively showing how this approach could be replicated and democratized.

In the Reda's words: *This collaborative, flexible, motivating, participatory and supportive approach is not simply a nicer, kinder and gentler form of learning: Its pedagogical patterns closely emulate the core competencies of 21st century humanitarian workers, who are expected to be able to manage complex, overlapping knowledge flows, to work in networked configurations (rather than command-and-control structures) and to use participatory methodologies to partner with affected populations.*<sup>2</sup>

See below for an excerpt of Reda’s full presentation with voice-over.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AYX8Oqd63A>

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<sup>2</sup> Sadki, R., 2013. The significance of technology for humanitarian education, in: World Disasters Report 2013: Technology and the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva.