Abstract:

How has the “new culture of learning” begun to transform public spaces, and in what ways might religious education practices be impacted by the shift? This paper draws on recent research funded by the MacArthur Foundation which lays an empirical basis for recognizing shifts in learning brought about by widespread access to digital technologies. In particular I will draw out implications from that work – which has mainly taken place in public school settings – for religious practice, communities, and education for public engagement using the work of adult learning theorists.

Paper:

In 2006 the MacArthur Foundation (a major philanthropic foundation in the US) launched a five-year, $50 million digital media and learning initiative to “help determine how digital technologies are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life.” 1 While that particular initiative has ended, the Foundation’s work has continued in multiple efforts which have included research into diverse topics within digital culture including civic engagement, credibility, media and learning, libraries, media literacy, participatory learning, social media, virtual worlds, among others. Several major books and hundreds of scholarly articles have emerged from this research, spawning an entirely new focus of research – that of digital media and learning. 2 In 2011 Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown published a book entitled A New Culture of Learning which offered a brief, engaging and thoughtful overview of the field, and which contained a focused set of implications from this new area of study for higher education. In the rest of this paper I will draw primarily on their work to suggest ways in which our practices of religious education must transform if we intend to nurture religious identity which supports public engagement in just and constructive ways.

Recent empirical research suggests that there are several dynamics emerging – or at least newly visible - at the heart of digital learning cultures: a move from “teaching-based” to “learning-based” approaches; a shift from the public and private to the personal and collective; and a focus on tacit knowing which grows from inquiry-led approaches. These dynamics at one and the same time offer both new promise for religious education practice in public spaces, as well as extensive contradictions and obstacles to such practice. I will take each in turn, to define and explore them.

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1 Accessed on Sept 10, 2013: http://digitallearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF

2 A primary bibliography of this research is available online. Accessed on Sept 10, 2103: http://dmlcentral.net/bibliography?page=2&sort=year&order=asc
“learning-based in contrast to teaching-based”

There are several ways to describe what it means to move to a “learning-based” – or my preferred term, “learning-centered” – form of education. The distinction was described as far back as 1995 by Robert Barr and John Tagg, who published an essay entitled “From teaching to learning: A new paradigm for undergraduate education.”3 The table they included with the essay has been reprinted multiple times, and notes a shift from what they labeled the “instructional paradigm” to the “learning paradigm.” Among the elements of this shift which they identified are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>providing or delivering instruction</td>
<td>producing learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessing quality of entering students</td>
<td>assessing quality of exiting students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atomistic; parts prior to whole</td>
<td>holistic; whole prior to parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covering materials</td>
<td>specified learning results [outcomes]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faculty as lecturers</td>
<td>faculty as designers of environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge “out there”</td>
<td>knowledge “in each person’s mind and shaped by experience”</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Their table is organized into sections by “mission and purpose,” “criteria for success,” “teaching/learning structures,” “learning theory,” “productivity/funding,” and the “nature of roles,” and contains far more than the brief excerpt I have offered here. The point to note, however, is that nearly 20 years later the paradigm shift they described has still not taken hold across the landscape of higher education. It may well be, however, that this shift is beginning to take hold in new digital learning cultures. Much of what has been observed in the empirical research funded by MacArthur is precisely such a transformation.

Young people observed in the midst of multi-player online gaming, newly emerging social networks, and other digital spaces enter those environments with a keen curiosity about what they can learn, for instance, rather than feeling that they must first be prepared prior to entrance. Even readers of this essay, who might have begun their schooling prior to the advent of digital tools, are probably users of personal computers, and as such, ever less likely to take classes on specific computer software before using that software. Indeed most people draw on their previous experience, that of their friends and colleagues, tutorials created by “amateurs” and posted on the web, and so on when they begin to use new software, or install the latest “updates” to their specific operating systems.

At the same time the quality of hardware available for everyday use has vastly improved, particularly in the areas of digital photograpy and videography. The distinctions that were once so clear between “amateur” and “professional” or “expert” and “novice,” for example, are becoming much more blurred. Multimedia recording equipment is often labeled as “prosumer” – a contraction of “professional” and “consumer” which denotes precisely this kind of blurring of the lines.

3 The essay, with its accompanying table is available online. Accessed Sept. 10, 2013: http://www.athens.edu/visitors/QEP/Barr_and_Tagg_article.pdf
There has been significant concern in the last five years in particular, over the risks perceived by the advent of digital technology as embodied in social networking. Much of that concern with regard to younger people has focused on the relatively open ways in which they regularly share information about themselves in these networks. Many have “viewed with alarm” pictures of young people with alcohol in their hands, or status updates that use problematic language or make offensive statements. The alarm has focused on people “sharing too much” in these environments, and the ways in which “the private” has increasingly been shared in “public.” What these critics miss, however, is that the underlying issue is not so much that young people are sharing things better left private, but rather that the negative edges of their behavior are becoming more visible. That is, the concern in these cases should not so much be that people are “making public” their views, but rather the problematic nature of the views and lack of respect they are making visible. Many scholars have pointed out, for instance, that the incidence of bullying has not so much increased, as it has become more visible.

Digital spaces increasingly are spaces which mitigate against compartmentalization. That is, quite the opposite from the early concern that people would create multiple personas to inhabit digital spaces and lose touch with their “real” selves, in contrast digital spaces are increasingly becoming spaces in which you have to display personal integrity across multiple communities or you lose credibility. Trust may well become one of the most important currencies of this new environment, and trust is most often built through transparency and consistency.

The second element of the concern over the “private and public” marks another element of this challenge with “trust” and has to do with too much sharing of information – such as personal identity markers, consumer tastes, and so on – which might then be available for consumer commodification. The concern would not exist, for instance, if people were not already legitimately worried about the history of ways in which personal information is being collected and used by both commercial enterprises and in some cases even governments to develop desires for consumption, provide a pretext or preparation for violence (as in the case of predators, trafficking, and so on), or support suppression of speech and other forms of political engagement.

There is a difficult paradox here: the dynamics and practices by which trust is developed, by which authenticity is inscribed in digital spaces, often require the sharing of personal information that previously would have been kept private. Consequently researchers are starting to speak of a shift from a “public/private dichotomy” to one of “personal/collective.” Here the decisions about which information to share and in which ways tend to be evaluated in terms of how such information contributes to collective agency, rather than to some abstract notion of “public-ness.” The examples that are most

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5 Find footnote about about trust as the new currency
vivid in Thomas and Seely Brown’s book come from social networking media such as Facebook, or from massively multi-player online games (or mmg’s) like World of Warcraft.

The constant sharing of the ordinary events of one’s days, of the “likes and dislikes” associated with Facebook updates, contribute to a massive database which has at one and the same time the paradox of becoming vastly more attuned to commercial commodification even as it supplants the previous mechanisms of commercialization. In the past, advertising for instance, could only be targeted towards more general demographic groups – perhaps people between the ages of 18 and 45, or people who watched NASCAR. Now it is possible for advertising to identify target groups in ever more specific ways, allowing for every more diverse permutations of “audience.” But at the same time as advertising becomes more targeted, it also becomes less persuasive than word of mouth. Surveys suggest that only 22% of people “believe” in advertising, whereas more than 90% trust recommendations from people in their social networks.6

Thomas and Seely Brown draw from this data yet another implication: that when societies embrace the personal/collective dynamic they often shift from a “learning in order to belong” mode, to a “participate and belong in order to learn” mode, which closely tracks the shift noted in my earlier section from teaching-based to learning-based.

“shift from explicit to tacit forms of knowing”

Participating and belonging in order to learn brings to the fore the final element of the research to which I intend to point: a visible shift in learning from exploring explicit to tacit forms of knowing. When you have a stable body of information which persists over time in the form of specific content many people argue that you can “transfer” that information, or “deliver” it. These are metaphors for teaching and learning that Thomas and Seely Brown identify as being attached to “explicit” forms of knowing. Setting aside for a moment whether “information” is ever the primary goal of teaching/learning – I am ambitious enough to seek knowledge, or even wisdom – the distinction being drawn here is between “explicit” and “tacit” forms of knowing, with “tacit” forms emphasizing the unstable, rapidly changing, and fluid forms of knowledge that accrue from learning through participation (think of Polanyi’s articulation here). Thus the forms of learning which are heavily privileged in many digital environments stress drawing on tacit knowledges and emphasize learning through doing, through feeling.

Thus far three dynamics have been identified for a “new culture of learning”: (1) a shift from teaching-based to learning-based practices, (2) a shift from a “public/private” split to a “personal/collective” distinction, and (3) an emphasis on tacit forms of knowing rather than explicit knowledges. At this point in their argument Thomas and Seely Brown are ready to offer their definition:

The new culture of learning is about the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion that they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries… (81)

6 The most often cited statistics here have been drawn together into compelling “video short” form by Erik Qualman: http://www.socialnomics.net/2013/01/01/social-media-video-2013/
In many ways this new culture of learning may not be all that new. I believe, instead, it makes visible, or retrieves, forms of knowing and learning that have been prevalent in other periods of history and, pertinent to the point of this paper, are particularly evident in religious communities. This is not the place to plunge into historical discussion, but I would like to lift up three paradoxical tensions that religious educators ought to be engaging in the midst of digital environments all around us, tensions that can spark our creativity and energy – or draw us into apathy or even despair.

For instance:

(1) The curiosity and passion of digital culture learners is often piqued by a desire to gain access to esoteric forms of knowing (eg. the more obscure the elements of a video game, the more fascinating for players). So on the one hand, mystery is deeply engaging to this generation of learners, and religious communities tend a variety of mysteries. On the other hand, religious studies scholarship and theological scholarship is often written in very abstract language, demanding years of study even to access the basic questions at the heart of the inquiry. The promise here is one of drawing learners into holistic and integrated forms of religious knowing which appreciate the tension of mystery, whereas the contradiction is one of making the study of religion so difficult as to be inaccessible to those who might find it compelling.

(2) A second paradoxical tension resides in the necessity identified within this new culture of learning for appreciating tacit forms of knowing. Religious studies scholars and theologians are often adept at methodologies that lift up for explicit engagement forms of knowing that reside in implicit, or tacit, learning. Yet at the same time much of the way in which religious practice is engaged and taught in various contexts has emphasized explicitly cognitive and doctrinal aspects of religious practice. Such classroom focus is “teaching-based” rather than “learning-based,” focusing on teaching “about” the world, rather than through “engagement with” the world.

Here the promise is one of making religious understanding accessible to generations of people who are increasingly being formed in digital cultures, while the obstacle is the possibility that at the very moment in which religious understanding is so needed in broader public spaces, religious scholars and educators may be sharing it in ways that isolate it outside of the learning frames most people use.

(3) A third paradoxical tension lives in the elements of digital culture which at the same time as they are deeply relational disrupt our “taken for granted” understanding of embodied presence. How might religious educators draw on the relational elements of digital learning while simultaneously emphasizing embodied presence in ways that invite practices of contemplation, ritual practice, collective action for social justice, and so on?

These paradoxical tensions emerge in part from increasingly accessible participatory tools that offer significant enjoyment and agency to those who use them. I have written elsewhere about three dynamics that I believe are shifting most dramatically in digital environments – authority, authenticity, and agency. Authority and authenticity have been explored at great length and significant depth in other research (see footnote below) but the shifts in “agency” – particularly as understood as the ability to produce something, to “get something done” – are less well understood.7 Clay Shirky and Yochai Benkler are perhaps two of the most articulate proponents of the research which identifies

this increasing agency in contexts well beyond that of education. Shirky writes of the “cognitive surpluses” people are drawing on to explore and create in digital environments, and Benkler writes of the “wealth of social networks” as a way to describe the power of human cooperation. And as I’ve already noted, Thomas and Seely Brown are clear about the participatory focus of learning in digital environments.

Engaging these paradoxical tensions in ways that support human agency as both created by and embedded within divine agency may well be the most challenging element of religious identity formation in the midst of our increasingly “digitally permeated” environments. All around us environments are drawing people into active participation, and at the more utopian end of the spectrum, touting their wide open opportunities for transforming our world. Yet, like most spaces outside of explicit religious cultures, there is no room for transcendent agency. The kind of deep humility that religious practice offers in relationship with transcendence is not often represented or invited in these digital spaces. Further, too much of the “participation” exists at the lower end of the “ladder of engagement.”

What to do?

How might we begin to engage these dynamics, these spaces, in ways that invite broad participation and active agency in religious community? How do we engage the resistance to religious institutions that seems to be growing ever more rapidly? I am convinced that the answers to these questions reside in creating intentional invitations to creative “play” and “making” in religious communities with a deliberate theological overlay which contextualizes and embeds such forms of knowing in a deep recognition of God’s agency.

Why “play” and “making”? Thomas and SeelyBrown explore at some length the related elements of homo sapiens, homo faber, and homo ludens. Their argument is that we have focused too tightly on the “sapiential” elements of our humanity in various schooling environments, and not attended to what it is to “make” and “to play.” Meanwhile, theorists of gaming are pointing to the intensely enjoyable elements of online multi-player games, not to mention other kinds of “maker spaces.” If a new culture of learning really is about “the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion that they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries… (81)” then we have much to learn from the deliberate structuring of environments that occurs within game play. Here the work of Hayse and Detweiler is instructive in religious education, and in the wider philosophical field, that of Huizinga.

I will leave to you, the reader, to the exploration of these points in greater detail as you follow up citations. Here I want to note that there are several elements of creating that creative tension which have been well explicated by the theorizing of Robert Kegan

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8 Using the keyword “ladder of engagement” at google will bring you to numerous graphic illustrations of the idea that participation in digital spaces begins in relatively passive observation, then “following” and “endorsing” before anyone begins to contribute or lead in ways that go beyond purely digital spaces.

9 For more on gaming and making, cf: http://www.slideshare.net/ALATechSource/makerspaces-carnegie-public-library-bibliography
in his work on adult learning, specifically his work on transformation of meaning frames. Kegan’s framework for discussing a shift from third to fourth order meaning-making proposes one way to consider living in the constructive tension of these paradoxes, inviting the promise of transformative learning while avoiding the contradictions that can lead to premature ultimates.

In Kegan’s theorizing “third order” meaning-making is structured around cross-categorical thinking—the ability to relate one durable category to another… As a result, thinking is more abstract, individuals are aware of their feelings and the internal processes associated with them, and they can make commitments to communities of people and ideas (Kegan, 1994). Kegan and his colleagues (2001) noted that in this order of consciousness, "other people are experienced ... as sources of internal validation, orientation, or authority" (p. 5). How the individual is perceived by others is of critical importance since acceptance by others is crucial in this order. Support is found in mutually rewarding relationships and shared experiences, while challenge takes the form of resisting codependence and encouraging individuals to make their own decisions and establish independent lives.10

While “fourth order” meaning-making requires cross-categorical constructing—the ability to generalize across abstractions, which could also be labeled systems thinking—is evident in the fourth order of consciousness (Kegan, 1994). In this order, self-authorship is the focus. Individuals "have the capacity to take responsibility for and ownership of their internal authority" (Kegan & others, 2001, p. 5) and establish their own sets of values and ideologies (Kegan, 1994). Relationships become a part of one's world rather than the reason for one's existence. Support at this stage is evident in acknowledgment of the individual's independence and self-regulation. Individuals are encouraged to develop further when significant others refuse to accept relationships that are not intimate and mutually rewarding.11

Supporting movement from one form to another proceeds along a spiral path which Kegan identifies as being one of “confirmation, contradiction and continuity,” with “confirmation” having to do with seeking deep understanding of the internal logic of a particular way of making sense in a specific social location. He believes that you cannot support transformation in constructive and generative ways without first entering into a form of deep empathy with a person. The next step – contradiction – arises either organically in the course of a person’s journey, or might be introduced through the intervention of a teacher/coach, who draws attention to the contradictions that exist in a particular meaning frame. Kegan points out, however, that simply encountering contradiction is not enough for true transformation. The rupture of meaning that emerges is so unsettling that people find themselves fleeing into relativism or fundamentalism, both of which are essentially refusals to transform meaning-making, to move from cross-categorical thinking to cross-categorical construction. The final element necessary for a transformation to a new order of meaning-making is a process Kegan terms “continuity,” by which he means a form of holding space which allows for the new structures of

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11 Ibid.
meaning-making to consolidate. Such continuity can often be described as a larger community into which someone is invited, in which their previous form of making meaning is acknowledged and valued, while at the same time the new form is cherished.

In my work with theological educators and digital spaces one example that comes to mind of this shift from one frame to the next, is the frequently heard complaint that digital spaces are disembodying and as such cannot be utilized for religious education. Of course, another assumption embedded in that argument is that religious education is by definition embodied. If both of those assumptions are true, by themselves, then the logical conclusion is correct – constructive religious education cannot take place there. But what if there are counter examples? What if there are ways in which digital spaces can be experienced as deeply relational and embodied, while at the same time there are examples of religious education environments which are not relational and embodied? Such examples would contradict the underlying assumptions and invite movement into a space that might truly be constructive of cross-categorical meaning, not simply reflective of it.

The need to provide continuity in such transformation evokes the need for a “holding space,” an environment that exists on both sides of the transformation. On the one side it is a space that supports cross categorical thinking, while on the other side of that transformation is a space that supports construction of cross categorical knowing. When someone exists in a frame of mind which can only think in cross categorical terms, rather than construct cross categorically, and that process of thinking is disrupted, when the underlying assumptions become no longer adequate to the spaces being encountered, when the reality – for instance – is that a digital space is experienced as more deeply embodied and relational than an in-person space, the resulting contradictions are so destabilizing that persons might be tempted to flee either into fundamentalism (“no digital space can hold religious formation”) or into relativism (“digital spaces and in-person spaces are equally problematic”). Scholars are beginning to note, for instance, that the struggle to embrace the deeply contradictory reality of religious institutions is often too much for people, who flee either into fundamentalist religious spaces, or flee religious spaces altogether (the so-called “spiritual but not religious” stance).

Yet when there are bridges built to cross-categorical construction, when there is a wider, deeper, community into which one is invited, then meaning can be transformed and the “holding environment” allows the new frame to become solidified. Here, to keep with my earlier examples, there is a community which welcomes engagement in digital spaces and perceives some of those spaces as being capable of embodied relationality, and others as being distorting or even destructive of such relationality. That same community perceives some “in person” religious spaces as being quite “dis-embodying” and provides theological arguments to support the distinctions.

John Roberto, in his wide attempt to invite religious educators to take seriously a number of inter-related dynamics that are emerging from the sociological literature on religious communities, has developed a form of “scenario-based thinking” which is yet another invitation to a wider “container” for imagining religious education. His framework posits a matrix with two perpendicular axes – one which marks a spectrum from resistance to receptivity with relation to religious institutions, and one which marks a spectrum from low personal hunger for spiritual engagement to high hunger for personal spiritual engagement. This matrix then offers a way to recognize that there
might be at least four scenarios in which people could be found: one in which they experience a high receptivity to religious institutions and a high hunger for spirituality, one in which there is resistance to institution yet high hunger, one of low hunger and high resistance, and one in which there is receptivity to religious institution but low hunger:

I have found this matrix particularly helpful in stretching the imagination of church-based religious educators, who have a tendency to fix their attention on the upper right hand quadrant of “high receptivity, high hunger” and so in the process miss three quarters of the people they could be engaging. There are many other frameworks for creating such environments, the “art of hosting” practices among them, but for the purposes of this essay I will focus on the art of digital storytelling.

*Digital storytelling as a form of faith formation*

How do we design learning that is capable of attending to integrative religious practices within digitally mediated spaces? How do we create spaces that allow for, even support, transformation of meaning from third to fourth order frames? One short answer would be: digital storytelling in the service of faith formation. To unpack that phrase I need to note that when I write of “digital storytelling” I am specifically referring to the form of digital storytelling which has been nurtured by the Center for Digital Storytelling based in California and Colorado. The CDS “family of origin,” if you will, is community theater and improv. From those roots they have grown, with the advent of digital tools – first Quicktime, then iMovie and iPads – into a center which privileges, first, the creation

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12 Reference to Roberto’s work and free online chapter
and sharing of stories, and then from there, digital stories. This form of digital storytelling, then, is not a loose umbrella for any and every story to be found in any digital format. It is not shorthand for film and tv, or even much that can be found on YouTube or Vimeo. It is, rather, a community of practice which focuses on helping people to find their own voices, to hone stories from their own experience, and then to craft and share their stories using digital tools.

Such a process has several immediate advantages when engaged in the service of religious education and faith formation. To begin with, far too many spaces which people inhabit these days are structured by time constraints that privilege short attention spans and invite only superficial reflection. Listening for, honing and then digitally embodying a short story (most CDS stories are on the order of 3-5 minutes) not only creates an opportunity to slow down, it requires attentive, patient and thoughtful reflection. An entirely delightful side effect of this process is that people inevitably become more critical of other digital media they engage – there is something about “seeing what’s in the sausage,” so to speak, which invites critical engagement with other digital media.

Further, as anthropologist and observer of digital cultures Michael Wesch has pointed out, the combination of “anonymity + physical distance + rare and ephemeral discourse” which is increasingly a part of the genre of vlogging (“video blogging” or short, self reflective video pieces) can lend itself “to the freedom to experience humanity without fear or anxiety.”13 He also notes that that same equation, paradoxically, can lead to “hatred as public performance,” although this more dangerous potential is less manifest in the form of digital storytelling described here. What occurs, instead, is a rich opportunity for the development of empathy. I have written about that process elsewhere, so here I simply want to note that there is enormous potential in digital storytelling for supporting people in developing from cross categorical thinking into cross categorical construction (Hess, 2012).

Additionally, work within Christian theological spaces – particularly that of communicative theologians, who build on Jurgen Habermas’ distinction between instrumental and communicative forms of action to define “living learning” as opposed to “dead learning” – offers particularly evocative theological framing for this process. Communicative theologians stress that the source of theological assertions must be identified; that the form, medium and content of communication cannot be separated; that theology is, by definition, a critical reflection upon, understanding of, and contribution to, a communicative event; and that all communicative events are fundamentally participatory.14

Communicative theology proceeds in embodied, relational ways which demand that the “I” and the “group” be interwoven with “the it” (or Logos) all within the context of “the globe.” These terms carry specific definitions and weight within communicative theology. One way to envision the process can be found in this diagram:


14 insert reference from Hinze book
Theologians have expanded upon this diagram, which was first articulated in Ruth Cohen’s description of theme-centered interaction, by annotating the various nodes of the dynamic process as follows:\(^\text{15}\)

Ruth Cohen is the founder of the process of small group learning titled “theme-centered interaction” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme-centered_interaction). A theological introduction to communicative theology is Scharer, Hilberath 2008, from which the second of these two drawings is found (#).
Understanding theology in this way demands that communication be seen as the very heart of the process. God’s self-communication within God’s own self (communicative theology is deeply Trinitarian) is seen as necessitating communication and relationship with all of Creation. This articulation of theology very specifically foregrounds communication, and embeds it in a deliberately pedagogical (or perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it a deliberately “andragogical”) form of engagement. By demanding that the process of doing theology be an intimate element of any theological expression, communicative theologians have returned to and retrieved apologetics, in the deepest sense of that word, grounding such theology experientially in a holistic rather than purely cognitive approach to speaking of and with God.

Digital storytelling offers a lively instance of such a “communicative event” with the bonus of offering a moment which can be returned to, and which can be widely shared. Perhaps the single most useful element of digital stories, as opposed to stories told in physical proximity, is precisely this ability to return to the same story over and over again, in multiple contexts and from multiple perspectives. The danger of “context collapse” is mitigated here by embedding the story in the midst of theological reflection (Hess, 2012). Even when digital faith stories are not engaged within theological frames – as, for example, when someone stumbles upon a story in isolation at YouTube or Vimeo – it usually carries enough power in itself to invite genuine curiosity and click-throughs to lengthier contextualization. A good example of such would be the Episcopal Story Project (http://episcopalstoryproject.org/). You might stumble upon one of the individual stories from that project, but even in that case you are drawn beyond it (for example, https://vimeo.com/47482587).

Each of these frameworks provides one element, or perspective, for seeing why the practice of digital storytelling as a form of faith formation is so fruitful in current contexts. In particular digital storytelling creates a space in which the pleasure of creating with digital tools meets the embodied design of storying faith, and emerges with a public voice which resists the “context collapse” which Wesch identifies. This is digital storytelling of a particular sort, however, not the commercial form which has become so prevalent in commodified media, but rather the intentional practice of storying which demands the relational discernment of story circles, and the contemplative practice of multi-layered digital design, both of which must occur before a digital story is ever published to be shared widely.

Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown have persuasively argued that the new learning culture is “about the kind of tension that develops when students with an interest or passion they want to explore are faced with a set of constraints that allow them to act only within given boundaries.” They argue for homo faber and homo ludens not to be separated from homo sapiens. Digital storytelling offers this kind of playful and yet serious space, and the work of communicative theologians provides a profoundly theological frame for such serious play. In doing so the opportunity to “re-member” and to “re-weave” God’s agency into our storymaking, to lift up the generous creativity which God pulls through us is awakened.

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