

A struggling school receives an “F” that: connecting moral luck and educational technology will build hope

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With the recent publication of *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, Robert Putnam, renowned social scientist, exposed the new class divide as an urgent issue, based upon new quantitative and qualitative data (2015). Research shows that students from struggling backgrounds have little likelihood of graduating from colleges and universities—in fact, the brightest students from families without resources are less likely to graduate than less bright students of privileged backgrounds. In this article, we suggest how technology can be the greatest bridge, as a positive resource, in class divisions. Like Putnam’s argument that people do not see the many obstacles in existence when students face a lack of opportunities and resources, everywhere, our moral luck and educational technology premise are students learn their “place” when educational tools, social media, and netiquette are not available for them in many ways. We suggest the ideology of connections, inclusion, and experiences through technology as ways to counter this alarming divide that exists for many disadvantaged students and the subsequent reflections in their struggling schools.

Why Does This Matter?

Moral luck is a real issue. How can educators be sure that a person acts with universal moral authenticity if he/she behaves in the ways of their normative community? Can these educators guide students to think and to transcend beyond the membership that exists within their moral norms? Often people perceive their experiences as normal, and those attitudes and ethics get passed down to the next generation. Instead of simply giving answers, educators must focus on building virtuous habits, providing meaningful/constructivist experiences, and problem-solving with students, moreover. When a student is not exposed to the process of empowerment by exploring options and developing autonomy, the moral luck is that his/her situation is beyond their control. Or even worse, the situation is a lose-lose, because the student feels every choice is not a good option.

To explain further, moral luck can shape positively and negatively a person’s life. A person can be born with good health, into wealth, and other various sorts of factors. That experience becomes the norm. Nonetheless, according to Aristotle, (Bartlett & Collins, 2011), each man judges well the things he knows well, and of these, he is a good judge. These standards are considered the moral compass of the normative community. Along with that similar notion, the famed “Father of Sociology” Emile Durkheim (2002) wrote that morality consists of a system of rules and action that predetermine conduct (p. 24). Interestingly, educators do not necessarily construct these rules at the moment of action by deducing them from some general principles; they already exist, they are already made, they live and operate around us (p. 26). The schools’ policy and expectations, typically manifested through the educational technology, thus shape children in a communal sense of what is right or wrong in the way which churches cannot do anymore due to the separation of church and state laws.

We, therefore, recommend an ideology consisting of three principles—that is, connections, inclusion, and experiences—to combat moral luck barriers, using educational technology.

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1. *We must understand how educational technology can build connections in which we are working together for students' best interest.*

When speaking with students, educators should stop thinking in terms of “they” and adjust to the language of “we.” As we develop relationships, trust is a key component in learning that involves creating strong and open communities, especially online. Certainly, this is easier said than done, because there is the push and pull of how to give appropriate space to students so that they explore information and seek options. This means that students do not need to be replications of their educators; indeed, great educators understand and facilitate thinking, because students must evaluate and act where they stand amongst diverse ideas. However, that connection, or support, can be developed through educational technology. As the World Wide Web was created in 1990 in order for people to create and to collaborate, educators owe it to their students to provide educational technology that allows students to experiment. Many educational apps, such as Kahoot!, Quizlet, Explain Everything, and others, engage the students to interact and to design their own learning, which means these students feel shared ownership about their learning.

2. *We must develop practices of inclusion so that students build trust and feel invested in the community.*

With cyberbullying and netiquette issues, students' technology usage should be monitored. Similar to children playing on a playground, students should be observed that they include each other and act in kind ways while using digital devices. Because it is a virtual space, many adults forget to monitor as closely. And yet, this is an excellent place for students to develop practices of inclusion, especially since students can feel empowered to be their true selves with the anonymity, not being face-to-face. Emails, text-messaging, social media, Youtube, and Google Suite create situations of sharing, exploring, and dialogue, which are effective practices in order to develop critical thinking skills—that is, learning is a social process. We must learn to appreciate another person's differences or standards in the community, and that learning through dialogue exchange (Kunzman, 2006) can often be facilitated via technology.

3. *We must strengthen and evaluate the school experiences in order to create a sense of personal voice for each student.*

Students are always learning. Now, whether they are learning how to shortcut and get out of something or the joy of discovery for new information, that can be assessed easily. Educators must evaluate how they spend the valuable time in a classroom. Everyone knows when an assignment is busy work, and all students (whom we've ever known) do not want their time wasted. If an activity is not relevant, then the danger of a mis-educative experience becomes real. That being stated, educational technology opens the gate to many, many options since information is not limited for only the privileged, which existed due to the practical limits of writing (as our ancestors for tens of thousands of years wrote on cave walls and etched into rocks) to share ideas—technology allows change and adaptability. Ideas are moving faster than ever before. Students can, therefore, learn across cultures, time periods, and places like we have never seen in history, because people around the world can come together in collaborative, inclusive ways, and, thus, students gain personal voice by diverse experiences.

Final Thoughts of Hope

The educational technology usage of a school system can create a sacred place where students learn by both virtual and face-to-face styles for higher levels of moral development. If connections, inclusion, and experiences are not provided, students will perceive the school as a place where it is a dispassionate application of rules as just rules—boring procedures (Durkheim, 2002). Students most certainly need facilitation of how and why we respect good rules, as well as when a rule is not fair, because that means students must evaluate the purpose of the rule. A school often is a students' most safe and respectful place to shape morality, furthermore.

When we think about present-day, struggling schools, a student's particular moral luck, his/her morality that exists, develops through certain elements: poverty, low-performing schools, low expectations, life devalued, feelings of inferiority, isolation, alienation, and disenfranchisement. The bridge that brings us toward opportunities and hope is educational technology since information is now available for all. Understood in this way, the bridge between moral luck and technology is not about providing the digital devices—rather, it is empowering educators and students in struggling schools how to push rigor, create relevant learning, and dream big for the future. These struggling schools, labeled and condemned as “F” schools, deserve both community support and self-empowerment. If the educational technology guidance and continued support become available for these schools, too, students' goals will become encouraged. We understand these students as “our kids” though, despite their moral luck, and that all people are responsible for us to stay a strong nation. Most importantly, all children deserve the ability to dream, but many are limited before they begin when their situation is that technology tools and connections are unavailable for them—and so a struggling school receives an “F” that not only affects each student, but it symbolizes a failing community. Each and every child deserves an education on how to use accessible resources of their community and, in particular, the practices which lead to future success. Yet this is not always the case. We must stand up and bring these educational technology opportunities to those most in need.

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