



The social classroom: What you need to know about the future of learning.

The concept of 'social' is everywhere. It's very much a reflection of how society and business have evolved. We look at how social learning has evolved and what it means for today—and tomorrow's—classrooms.

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What is the Social Classroom?

THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM—WHERE STUDENTS ALL FACING A TEACHER WHO STOOD IN FRONT OF THE CLASS AND ‘TAUGHT’—IS A CONCEPT CONFINED TO THE PAST. LEARNING CAN NO LONGER BE CONSIDERED A ONE-WAY STREET—IT HAS TO BE FAR MORE INTERACTIVE. WHY? BECAUSE WE NOW KNOW THAT STUDENTS LEARN BEST BY WATCHING AND COLLABORATING WITH OTHERS. IN EDUCATION, THIS IS REFERRED TO AS SOCIAL LEARNING.

Everything about the social classroom—from the way it is designed to the content of each lesson—is all about interaction and engagement. Rather than all facing in one direction, desks are now placed in horseshoe shapes or even face each other. That’s because students watching and interacting with their peers is an essential component of social learning. To learn effectively, students need to be able to act on the knowledge they have seen or heard and co-create with their colleagues; social learning is about feeding off each other’s ideas.¹

In today’s classroom, it’s common for students to break out into groups—small or large, depending on the task—and move to different areas of the room.

As such, the classroom layout needs to be flexible and support collaborative learning. More and more schools have understood this and have refurbished or even built new learning spaces to unlock the benefits of collaboration. And technology has a huge role to play in enabling this. The right technology in the classroom can make it a far more engaging space for teachers and students—one in which groups can share their work, and the teacher is not chained to the whiteboard. Crucially, technology can also enable simultaneous streaming of those classes and activities online. We know this as hybrid learning.

HOW DID THE SOCIAL CLASSROOM EVOLVE?

In many respects, the social classroom is a natural evolution. We’ve seen the same transformation across multiple industries—media, fitness, commerce, for example—as each has found ways to move away from traditional, distant approaches and towards far more up-close-and-personal experiences.

The key has been digitization. It has paved the way for greater personalisation and, as businesses have innovated, more engaging and interactive solutions have evolved.

Where we once consumed the written press as our sole source of news, we now look to hybrid models like social media, where interactions are two-way and can be shared by anyone. Where we once exercised exclusively in gyms, gamification now allows us to challenge our friends to a spin class from the living room. And where we once sought our friends’ recommendations on products and services, we can now leverage the advice of consumers across the entire world before we make any purchasing decision.

Digitization has shown us what is possible. It and greater knowledge about how students learn have guided education down a different path. And the rise of the social classroom now promises a learning environment that gives our children the maximum possible chance of success.

What is the theory behind social learning?

UNTIL 1977, WHEN ALBERT BANDURA PROPOSED SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY, IT WAS BELIEVED THAT WITH THE RIGHT CONDITIONING ANY PERSON COULD BE TRAINED TO PERFORM A TASK THAT WAS WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THEIR PHYSICAL ABILITIES. WHEN BANDURA PUBLISHED THE DETAILS OF HIS NOW FAMOUS 'BOBO DOLL' EXPERIMENTS, WHICH SHOWED THAT CHILDREN ARE ABLE TO LEARN SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS, LIKE AGGRESSION, THROUGH WATCHING OTHERS, IT REVERSED SOME PREVIOUS THINKING. FOR EXAMPLE, IT HAD BEEN BELIEVED THAT WATCHING VIOLENCE ON THE TELEVISION WAS A GOOD WAY TO PURGE CHILDREN OF ANY THOUGHTS OF AGGRESSION.³ BANDURA SHOWED THAT, IF ANYTHING, IT COULD BE ENCOURAGING IT.

According to Bandura, there are four elements to social learning: whatever is being learned needs to hold the student's attention; the students need to be able to retain and reproduce the information they have learned; and they need the motivation to use—or ignore—the learned behaviour.

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WHAT DOES THE CLASSROOM OF THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

Our classrooms are in the midst of fundamental change. On the one hand, the constant advancement of technology and the demand for students to develop the skills for jobs that don't exist yet has fundamentally shifted the curriculum. On the other, a greater understanding of how to give students the best possible chance of learning these skills has radically altered the way classrooms are designed.

Couple both together, and the classroom of today is barely recognisable to most of the current adult population. As for the classroom of the future, as new technologies are developed and make their way to the education environment, the classroom is likely to be less science and more science fiction.

We can already predict some of the technologies and approaches that will filter into the classroom in the next decade:

"The future of the world is in this classroom today."

[Source unknown, must be partly written in cursive text]

What is the theory behind social learning?

Virtual reality

15% of schools in the US already have a virtual reality 'kit' in their classroom. Right now, these students can learn skills and subjects through an immersive experience. But as VR applications evolve and their use becomes more widespread, the opportunities will increase exponentially. Rather than studying astrophysics through books and videos, students will be able to journey through the stars. There will be opportunities to inspect the design and construction of some of the world's most extraordinary engineering feats—all without travelling anywhere. In short, the possibilities are enormous.

Augmented reality.

In our homes, we know it as the smart speaker. In the classroom, it will be the interactive assistant. In parts of New Zealand, human avatars have already made their teaching debut, and there's more to come. Plans exist for classroom assistants that can monitor the roll and check attendance.

Artificial intelligence and predictive learning have already shown their benefits in the business world. Quite simply, these computer-driven processes are far more efficient and effective at performing routine tasks than humans. With the right application, there is a clear opportunity for them to help teachers with their not-insignificant administrative burden. Find the right mix in the classroom, and the teacher could be free to spend more time collaborating and interacting with students.

Robotics.

Classroom robots already exist. Manufacturers claim they can produce robots that can speak more than 20 languages and are capable of teaching anything from mathematics to design technology. With the focus of today's curriculums very much on STEM, could there be a better way to inspire a future generation to learn?

Classroom design.

Learning is set to become more and more adaptable and tailored to individual learning needs. Some schools are already implementing student-led learning, and this will likely become more widespread. The impact this will have on the classroom and the enabling technology should not be underestimated. If students of the future are able to learn at their own pace, the layout of classrooms will need to be highly flexible.

Increased collaboration and hybrid learning.

Early experiments in hybrid learning have produced astonishing results: in US intrinsic schools, test results in maths and reading have been in the 90th percentile.⁵ Indeed, some schools have already bet big on components of hybrid learning—Clintondale High School near Detroit, for example, has literally reversed the classwork-homework dynamic by videoing lessons and having students watch them as homework.



**"If the world changed,
and you are not doing
anything to prepare
the kids, you are doing
a disservice to them"**

Tom Driscoll

What could the classroom look like in 10 years?

OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS, SCHOOLS WILL RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING NEW APPROACHES TO LEARNING AND INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY. BOTH WILL RADICALLY ALTER THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT.

To support such a revolution in the classroom, two things will be essential. Teachers will need to be given continuous professional development to maximise the use of such technology as it enters the classroom. And, just as importantly, the foundation technology in the classroom will need to support collaboration, hybrid learning, advanced devices, displays, and robots.

All of this will happen with social learning at the core. As the traditional classroom transforms into the social classroom, it will maximise the opportunities for our children to learn the skills they will need for work—and life—in the future.

In August 1971, David Bowie recorded his iconic track, *Life on Mars*. 50 years on, NASA's Curiosity Rover set out to explore whether there ever had been. By 2031, there's a high chance our children will be walking the surface of the red planet from their classrooms.

VIRTUAL REALITY

If ever there was a way to capture students' imagination, it has to be the use of VR in the classroom. As well as walking in the shoes of astronauts, students will be able to get up-close and personal with erupting volcanoes and immerse themselves right at the heart of historical events. Although it may sound like a pipedream, it most certainly isn't. A 2018 article in *EdWeek* forecast that 15% of US schools would have a VR class kit by 2021. Whether that has materialised or not, we can't be sure. But we know there's certainly demand for it: 48% of teachers in Germany report a willingness to try VR out in the classroom.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.

In the business world, it's becoming the norm to use tools like Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to perform repetitive and predictable tasks. These augmented reality tools are likely to make it into the classroom in the next decade. Indeed, the market for AI in education is expected to be worth \$6 billion by 2024. Some applications have already arrived: a digital human avatar that can recognise emotion is teaching some of New Zealand's school children about renewable energy; and Penn State University has proposed a voice-enabled AI classroom assistant to take attendance and track class participation.

These tools are far more efficient and effective at carrying out routine tasks than humans. And, with the focus of teachers very firmly on collaboration and social learning, there's a very high chance of AI being adopted in the classroom. Anything that reduces the administrative burden on teachers is likely to be welcomed with open arms.

What could the classroom look like in 10 years?

STUDENT-LED LEARNING.

Across the globe, schools are trying to find ways to offer students agency over their education and educational environments. By allowing students to choose their own activities and learn from experiences rather than traditional classroom settings, Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts—where the term ‘Sudbury school’ originated—is reimagining formal education. And, at the Nishinomiya Sudbury School in Japan, students are not given timetables; instead, they dictate what they will learn each day.

HYBRID LEARNING

The concept of hybrid learning is relatively new for many teachers, and schools around the world are still working on the best ways to deliver it effectively. The pandemic has shown that being able to learn in a different environment has real benefits for some students. Over the next ten years, schools will combine content and learning strategies with the right technology to enable seamless, simultaneous delivery of online and on-site classes.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration and engagement are key components of social learning. They form part of the strategies of schools throughout the world. The American Psychological Association has stated that students who experience supportive and positive relationships with their teachers will achieve better outcomes at school. The University of New South Wales published a study in 2019 that drew the same conclusion. As such, there is every likelihood we will see more and more collaboration in the future.

ROBOTICS

Softbank Robotics claims there are already 13,000 humanoid robots in colleges and universities that are just as capable of helping teach languages, arts, mechanics, and physics as they are at holding quizzes and conducting lessons. Their presence in the classroom is likely to lead to just the kind of unique approaches that foster observational learning, and they are likely to play an important role in freeing teachers to provide individual support to their students where required.

From physical to digital to social: The evolution of the classroom

AS RECENTLY AS 1990, THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY EMPLOYED MORE THAN 450,000 PEOPLE IN THE US. BY EARLY 2017, THAT NUMBER HAD MORE THAN HALVED. WHY? BECAUSE THE INDUSTRY CHANGED. IT HAD TO; THE WORLD HAD CHANGED.

In the summer of 1994, a large pepperoni, mushroom and extra cheese pizza was ordered from Pizza Hut. It is believed to have been the first transaction that took place on the web. Just 17 years later, online advertising had surpassed newspaper advertising for the first time.

In order to survive, industries had to embrace digitization. In the case of the media, that meant moving content onto the internet and making it more personal. This allowed them to monetise news through subscriptions and advertising. In the world of commerce, it meant allowing customers to buy anything, at any time, with minimal need for human interaction. For the classroom, it opened up the feasibility of distance learning to a much wider audience.

Such is the pace of change that, in 2004—only 3 years after advertising had moved predominately online—the era of Facebook began. And with it, for the first time, came real two-way interaction. It introduced the concept of ‘social’ to media, commerce, and even fitness. Innovations like gamification captured the imagination and brought the social and competitive aspects of sporting activities right into the living room.

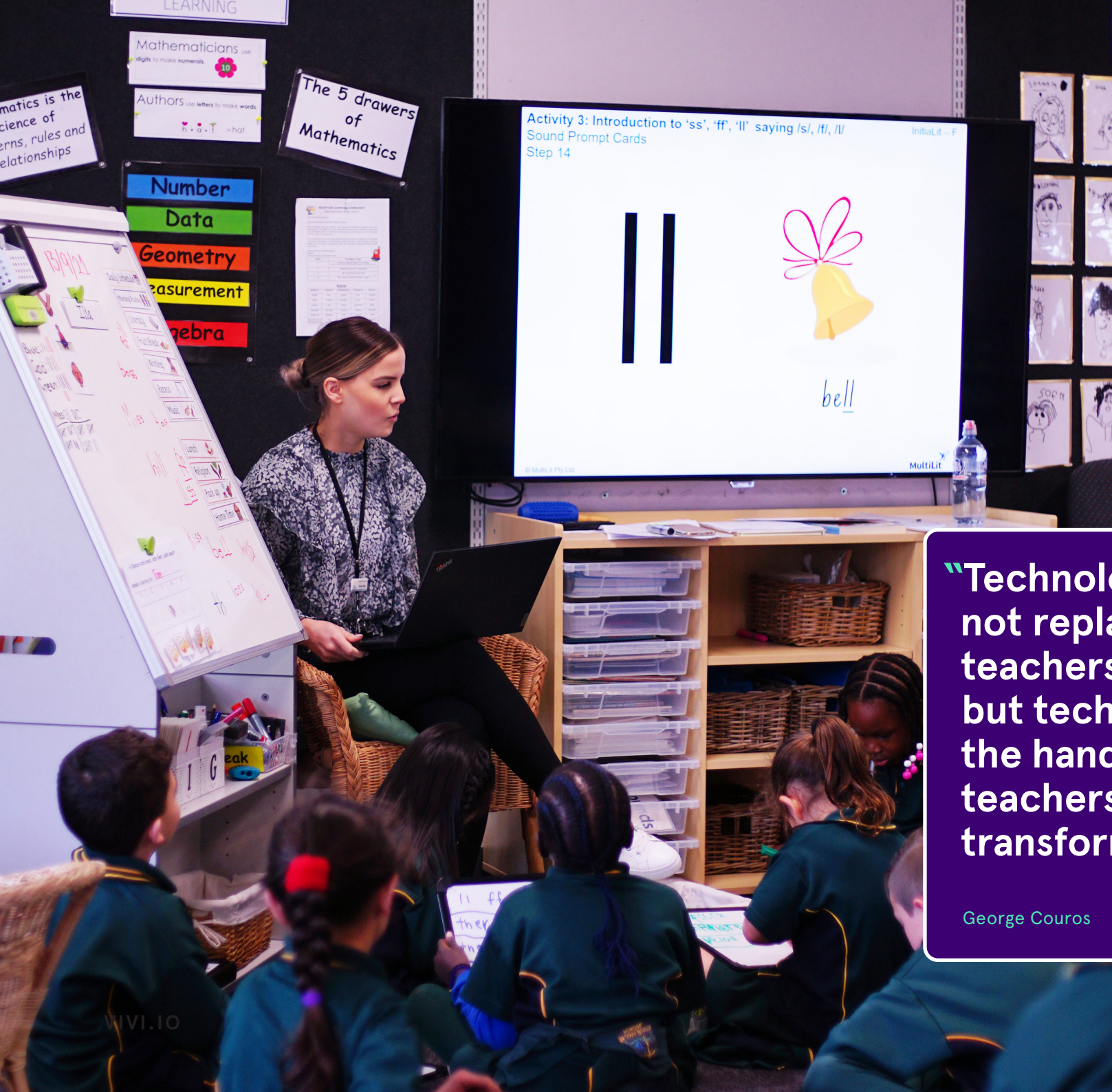
What all of these industries had in common is that they implemented models that combined the physical and the digital. Even social media—which you might think of as totally online—is used to enhance and promote physical events.

Such drastic changes in society were always going to make their way to the classroom. The groundwork had already been set by Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, which posited for the first time—in 1977—that people could learn through observation. It is the reason today’s classrooms are very different from those of 1990.

Engagement and interaction now underpin the way our children are taught. Everything, from the environment to the content to the technology that enables it, is designed to support social learning.

The next step will be hybrid learning. Over the last two years, a period of enforced online learning has proved that home learning is possible. And for some students—particularly those with learning difficulties or those who have faced social challenges—it has already been shown to be effective. Over the next decade, schools will find the optimal way to integrate virtual and on-site learning so that the two can operate simultaneously. This will enable different students to take different approaches to learning. In effect, it is the personalisation of education.

One thing we know about change, of course, is that it is constant. The next decade is likely to bring advanced technology to the classroom [link to What could the classroom look like in 10 years?], which will free teachers from administration and allow them to place even more focus on the individual learner.



“Technology will not replace great teachers [or trainers] but technology in the hands of great teachers can be transformational.”

George Couros

Applying the social learning theory in the classroom

IN 1977, ALBERT BANDURA—SAID BY SOME TO BE THE FOURTH MOST INFLUENTIAL PSYCHOLOGIST OF THE 20TH CENTURY — PROPOSED SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY. HIS FINDINGS WERE BASED ON EXPERIMENTS THAT SHOWED CHILDREN COPIED BEHAVIOURS THEY HAD SEEN. IF CHILDREN SAW SOMEONE BEING VIOLENT, THEY TENDED TO IMITATE THEM.

In the classroom, social learning theory is the idea that children learn from imitating others. They may not always choose to act—after all, students have their own agency—but that doesn't mean they are not learning.

There are four elements to social learning:

ATTENTION.

Students need to be focused on the task. The more interesting or unique that task is, the more likely they will focus and, therefore, learn.

RETENTION.

In order to learn from what they have seen, students have to retain the information.

REPRODUCTION.

When required, students produce the information they have learned and can practice responses in their heads to improve the success of their actions.

MOTIVATION.

This is required to do most things. In learning, motivation usually comes from seeing someone else rewarded or punished for what they have done. It can influence a student's choices.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of social learning is that children do not need to directly experience an activity for observational learning to occur. This means they can gain equally as much from watching fictional characters behave in certain ways as they can through role play.

From a teaching perspective, social learning theory encourages teachers to find new and innovative ways to impart learning. For example, it's critical to ensure a student is engaged in a subject to fully hold their attention. It's also important to reinforce the right behaviours in the classroom.

A typical manifestation of social learning can be seen in online training or education, where reading and work are pre-assigned, and the actual 'classroom' session is used to talk about the content that has been studied.

We already see aspects of social learning in the classroom through:

Applying the social learning theory in the classroom

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Social learning theory has also influenced the way classrooms are structured. Schools have changed the design of rooms in order to create spaces that facilitate collaborative learning. Of course, in these situations, technology is needed to enable the right level of student collaboration. It's one thing to have individual students involved in engaging content on an iPad or laptop; it's another to create a platform to enable them to share their work and what they have learned with other students, or to allow them to approach a task as a group.

HYBRID LEARNING

Hybrid learning is about delivering accessible and engaging learning to all, no matter whether they are on-site or online. While the education sector is still searching for the most effective way to deliver hybrid learning, there are already some interesting use cases. One secondary school in Detroit has 'flipped' its classrooms: the students listen to lessons online and in their own time, and the assignments are completed during what would otherwise have been class time, when the teacher is available to provide help and support.

The social classroom will be an environment in which students are able to learn from engaging with other students and co-creating ideas and solutions. Having the right technology to enable this kind of collaboration in the classroom will be an essential part of transforming the way our children learn.

“Blended learning is not just a trend, and we’re starting to see technology integrated in really intentional ways”

Katie Linder

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