Peer selection and influence: Students’ interest-driven socio-digital participation and friendship networks

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# Abstract

Digital technologies have been increasingly embedded in students’ everyday lives. Interest-driven socio-digital participation (ISDP) involves students’ pursuit of interests mediated by computers, social media, the internet, and mobile devices’ integrated systems. ISDP is likely to intertwine closely with young people’s social networks that has been scarcely studied quantitatively. To close this gap, the present paper investigated students’ peer selection and influence effects of the intensity of their ISDP and friendship networks. We collected two-wave data by administering a peer nomination to trace students’ friendship networks with peers and a self-reported questionnaire to examine students’ ISDP. Participants were 100 students in Finland (female: 53%; mean age = 13.48, in grade 7 in the first wave). Through stochastic actor-oriented modelling, the results showed that the students’ friendship ties with peers influenced the intensity of their ISDP practices to become more similar. Yet, students did not select peers as friends based on similar intensity levels of ISDP. Utilizing influence effect found in students’ ISDP and their peer networks, we suggest that connected learning (Ito et al., 2013) should be promoted to integrate students’ informal and formal learning in order to bridge the gap between students’ informal interest-related digital practices and formal educational practices.

# Outcome

"Students’ friendship ties influenced their intensity of interest-driven socio-digital participation to become similar as that of peers’.
Students did not select peers as friends based on similar intensity levels of interest-driven socio- digital participation.
Young people with a higher intensity of interest-driven socio-digital participation were likely to nominate more peers as their friends.
Intensity of interest-driven socio-digital participation did not affect the number of receiving friendship nominations from peers.
Connected learning should be promoted to integrate informal and formal learning."