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## Tech Dandy, and the Art of Leisure Learning

### Book Section

How to cite:

de Waard, Inge (2015). Tech Dandy, and the Art of Leisure Learning. In: Hopkins, David ed. The Really Useful #EdTechBook. Warwick: David Hopkins, pp. 187–197.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.dontwasteyourtime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/The-Really-Useful-EdTechBook.pdf#page=187>

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# TECH DANDY, AND THE ART OF LEISURE LEARNING

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As a doctorandus I am affiliated with The Open University of the United Kingdom, working on heutagogy and self-determined learning of online learners. In the past I have been the eLearning coordinator at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Belgium for which I started and coordinated multiple mobile and online projects. In 2013 I finished mobile/MOOC research at Athabasca University, Canada looking at the impact of mobile access on MOOC learner interactions. I am a reviewer for multiple online learning journals, a member of different online learning organizations and I share new insights or experiences through my blog.

In this technology driven world people are often referred to as geeks, nerds, academics, or any type of description pointing towards a dry, rather rational personality. Now it is time to reveal one of EdTech human resource secrets: the Tech Dandy. We - the in-crowd of the worldwide training web - can spot a Tech Dandy from afar. It is only logical, for we are Tech Dandy pioneers. Now it is time to share the Art of Leisure Learning with the world.

This chapter puts the Tech Dandy in the spotlight, and shares how to inspire other learners to become experienced Tech Dandies and learn at the speed of light while always looking cool, collected and calm. The Tech Dandy has a natural charm to him or her, and uses tech in a suave, organic way to satisfy an ever present

learning desire. Leisure learning is a way of life, it is an Art. But becoming a charismatic leisure learner, a real Tech Dandy, demands intelligence, planning, digital skills, gallant communication, and most of all an in-depth understanding of Apps,

Once you are a full-fledged Tech Dandy, it will be easy to put your own Leisure Learning practice into any training or online course design and optimize the world for your learners.

### **TO CURATE IS TO LIVE LEISURELY**

Tech Dandies understand the importance of living in the middle of a personal network, they use Apps for their own merriment, and their knowledge is fed with a constant stream of handpicked, as well as serendipitous information of the highest quality.

### **A DANDY LIVES AMONG THE BEST**

Establishing or maintaining yourself as a Tech Dandy demands a carefully planned effort. First of all you need to build an information web with you at the center. This information stream of high quality news will be the core of your ongoing development, and helps you set up a long-term, well-connected learning network.

First of all roam social media (if you do not know what social media is, close this chapter and please return to your simple life and come back once you hear your true Tech Dandy calling). You can start weaving your network by using selected hashtags in your field of interest (e.g. #lrnchat, #mlearning or #quantifiedself). If someone is talking or writing interestingly on that subject, 'follow' them. Once you feel confident, start a conversation with those experts so you can learn from them and become wiser yourself. Your network will grow, your knowledge will strengthen.

### **NETWORKS CATAPULT YOU TO YOUR GOALS**

We are all Learning for our own leisure and profession, as such it is important to use the intelligence of others to direct us towards what we need to know, but were not (yet) aware of. One of today's options is to engage in a community that works in a similar field, and wants to share resources and learning pathways, and to implement the right tools to enable this type of informal knowledge and learning exchange. (1).

## **CURATION IS CAPITAL**

Once your network is started, and your information stream is fed with relevant online sources, you will have a good starting point for curating your own knowledge channel. Curation demands that you select the best and most inspiring articles, media, and ideas from your news stream and you add a bit of yourself to it. For example: you collect all there is to know about the Flipped classroom approach (2), and you add either your own ideas, or much better: your own experience to those articles while posting them to the broader public.

Second, start to read journals, news sites, wikis, blogs, online magazines... and add anything that makes you tick to your own media channel or content curation tool (e.g. Hootsuite, Pinterest, Storify, Scoop.it).

## **TUNE INTO TECH-POP MAGAZINES, BUT ADD A BIT OF SPICE**

As a Tech Dandy you need to build your post-post renaissance wo/man knowledge. To do so successfully, a nice curation of trendy online, tech magazines can help you stay on top of what is happening in the tech world. Some options are: Wired (3), Mashable (4), The/Intercept (5), and of course Huffington post/education (6) for overall and tech interests. And all of them spiced up with educational goodies that can be found on: Educause (7), the Learning Solutions magazine (8), and of course the inspiring O'Daily (9).

No curated stream is worth anything without a good deal of Twitter news. You can easily enhance your daily information blessings with: @BrainPickings, @TheScienceGuy, @museumnerd, @mental\_floss and of course your own curated

Twitter list of 'keypeople'.

Last but not least there is one superb gathering of all the hottest educational news and that is ... well no, sorry about that. A Tech Dandy does not reveal all of his/her sources, that would take the fun out of serendipitous exploring.

## **DO NOT TAKE 'YOUR LOCATION' BY DEFAULT**

As a Tech Dandy you travel the world, maybe not always in the flesh, but at least virtually. One easy to adjust tech fact is 'location'. It gives a bit of a global feel to your Twitter, Instagram, Google search stream. For example, I often change my Twitter location to another city, e.g. Honolulu, Hawaii (well, Honolulu, US as Twitter location is sometimes tricky). This allows me to see what is tweeting there, and it offers a nice way to connect to my network of peers living in that area.

## **THE MOBILE LIFESTYLE**

As digital nomads we wander about the virtual and global world, trying to find meaning and a balanced way of (professional) living. Being mobile is both living a mobile life (either roaming the globe in search for meaningful conferences, seminars, or EdTech pop-up events; either in person or virtual), and being equipped with mobile devices. This combination makes us in to those technology enhanced learning professionals whose expertise is distributed over time and space.

If technology is like a seventh sense, the ultimate mobile instrument is always within your grasp, or at least it is there when you wish it to be. Leisure learning becomes so much easier with a mobile device in your pocket. You can follow educational discussions (e.g. #lrnchat), share experiences (10), and enroll in online courses to learn-as-you-go (e.g. MOOC). Sharing will result in more connections, more conversations, and a stronger network.

Content production is benevolent for all. As such a Tech Dandy takes pictures, narrates experiences and adventures via blogs, Instagram, and any type of current

preferred mobile and connected tool. Leaving nuggets of wisdom as true breadcrumbs for others to offer them shared learning paths and insights.

## **MOOC-ALICIOUS**

MOOCs are all around us. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) are mostly free and you can choose from a wide variety of platforms (Coursera, Iversity, FutureLearn, EdX, Udacity, Canvas.net...). MOOC learning is true leisure learning. You can screen the courses that are coming up and you can register for those that you think will be either useful professionally or inspiring personally. Once the course starts, you screen the topics of each week and you make a decision: either follow the full course (with or without some sort of certification), or select only those weeks during which a specific subject matter is presented. This modus operandi saves you time and increases the leisure time in your learning journey. At the same time you can leisurely pick up bits and pieces that will make you in to the all-round, renaissance Tech Dandy you want to be.

MOOCs are everywhere, and as such Tech Dandies are often pioneering new learning technologies, including setting up alternative MOOCs, building mash-ups on the outskirts of the web to attract other Tech's of every identity, and of course trying out the latest start-up goodie bags released as closed beta releases. Socrates knew it, we know it, only by actually walking the walk and to boldly go where no wo/man has gone before can we truly feel the benefits, challenges or downsides of any educational technology. As such each Tech Dandy is a conscious part of the whole crowd, an active part of the intelligent swarm. We are connected, our voices are heard, and our network appreciates our ideas and trustworthiness. Charm can only survive in a warm, yet honorable learning ecology build upon trust and openness.

## **COMFORTABLE OFF- AND ONLINE**

No matter how much information floats around us, a Tech Dandy is never stressed. The Tech Dandies leisure learning environment is so well organized, that we can choose between being on- or offline. There is no pressure, thanks to an intelligently

crafted information stream, combined with an open mindset, believing in serendipitous knowledge creation by dipping in and out of the constant stream of information that surrounds each one of us.

Serendipitous learning is a nice companion for any tech professional. While roaming the web, answers are found to new and old questions, each time in a variety of stories. By constantly selecting those answers with the highest quality the Tech Dandy practices her or his critical thinking, sharpening the ever evolving mind. But in order to enable our brain to process all these ideas, suggestions, learning models, and frameworks it is pivotal that disconnected time is planned. Finding a nice balance in life and work is essential to radiate calm, and as such it is just as important to switch between mental and physical work to keep a mind in a sound body (luvenalis: mens sana, in corpore sano) as it is to switch between on- and off-life.

## **A NOSE FOR NEUROSCIENCE**

With the human brain being increasingly dissected and understood, neuroscience has become one of the tools of the training trade. In fact with the concepts of neuroscience at their best, it is a pleasure to see how education can be reshaped in a creative and cognitively stimulating way (*11 and 12*). Education and training no longer exist as a separate identity - it never was - but with the increased speed of research and technology, one cannot ignore the upcoming scientific fields that are increasingly inspiring technology enhanced learning, such as neuroscience.

## **ONLINE EDUCATION IS IN CONTINUAL BETA**

With online education as a main expertise, it is important to acknowledge the continual beta of EdTech. Online education is constantly evolving, and the technological universe is expanding at such an enormous rate that it can take out the best of us, but ... as a Tech Dandy you simply gather a few of top notch, easy to use websites that are curated by others to keep on top of your field.

- A wiki focusing on learning theories (*13*)

- A good page to emerge and find topics or details on instructional design (14)
- Wiki devoted to Blooms digital taxonomy (15)
- Or simply some good old research journals, all open access of course: IRRODL (16)

And of course a bit of <http://scholar.google.com> will do nicely as well. Don't forget that truly understanding a tool saves time and adds radiance to any EdTech professional. To get that bit of extra, I regularly tweak the advanced settings of Google Scholar to find papers in different languages, thus expanding my horizon, and keeping my non-native languages in a fresh, professional condition. It also helps to find local research for those moments where you are asked to provide advice for an international firm or organization. Local, contextualized projects are always more inspiring and will instill more trust in you and your work. Savoir vivre also compliments professional life.

Professional jargon is quintessential to any Tech Dandy.

### **GESTURE BASED LEARNING, META GLASSES ... DAILY VOCABULARY**

Although there is a lot you can do or leave as a Tech Dandy, you cannot ignore upcoming trends and even the most geeky of educational hypes. An easy way to keep on top of what is and where it might go, is a smart (and not too time intensive) idea to read the New Media Consortium publications, featuring the Horizon Report (17). This report is published around the first quarter of the year, and it provides an easy access, example filled overview of the hottest and upcoming educational technologies.

Nice, and easy-peasy-lemon-squeezy.

Just for fun let's look at two nice and serious EdTech options that are on the rise.

- *Gesture based learning* is getting more and more attention. Gesture-based learning uses interfaces where the human body interacts with digital



resources without using the common devices such as a keyboard or mouse. Kinect from xBox brought this invention to a broader market. It is an upgrade to the virtual systems dating back from the nineties, and which are now enabling to move and select virtual objects or content in a 3D setting. A trick already featured in multiple Sci-Fi movies, e.g. The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951 original version: yes, that early), Johnny Mnemonic (1995), Minority Report (2002), Iron Man (2008), Star Trek (2009).

- *Meta glasses (18)* are of course the new high end virtual glasses, positioning themselves as superior Google glasses, and enabling augmented learning, production and design. Pricy though, but as a Tech Dandy, you do not talk about money, only frontier EdTech solutions. Having said that, for approximately 25 USD/EUR you can buy a cardboard virtual set up for your mobile and ... explore the virtual world for its educational values. (19)

## DARING DATA

Big data might cover any subject, for educational purposes it is better to talk about evidence based learning analytics. In this day and age a lot of our movements and actions can be quantified and that is certainly the case for each of our own learning. As such the field of evidence based learning analytics paved the way for a better understanding of each of our own learning path (breadcrumbs we leave on social media, in MOOC platforms, on discussion forums...). Nevertheless, our personal, informal learning is still mostly done outside of the 'formal' learning analytics vision (despite wonderful efforts of xAPI - 20) and learning locker (21). And as real Tech Dandies do, we simply peruse the MOOC platforms to find new big data and data analytic courses, and we hook up through our personal learning network to other, more experienced learning analytic gurus.

Learning analytics are being taken up by Higher Ed as a priority, as access and control of learning data will give insights to a more broader spectrum of learning, teaching, and training. Data are not only limited to the rational data that immediately comes to mind, but also to emotional data that influences all of our motivational and practical drives towards conquering knowledge and wisdom. A

nice starting point to gain insights in learning analytics is the Learning Analytics and Knowledge (LAK) conference, with free conference proceedings to dive into (22), or have a look at the Learning Analytics Community Exchange report on measuring and understanding learner emotions (by Bart Rienties and Bethany Alden Rivers, and online - 23).

## **WEARABLE YOU**

As a Tech Dandy it might be a far stretch to keep a cool pose after a serious physical workout. Instagram might not be the way to go when you are all sweaty; nevertheless wearables are part of every EdTech persona, including us Tech Dandies. If you want to explore the realms of game based learning, the easiest way to boldly go where others have just started to go before is to jump off the deep end, into your own quantified self. The quantified self is the full set of digital data that you can radiate while being on- or offline, in most cases the offline parts involve wearable technology. With these wearables you can adjust your sleeping pattern (thus ensuring a fabulous presence at all times), you can engage in friendly jogging competitions with people that live or work in the same area by comparing each other's jogging patterns and results, or you can simply use it to optimize work patterns.

There are of course a lot of wearable options out there, and the easy to wear options vary from fitness bands to smartwatches. To me the best casual chic can be found in the smartwatch. You simply wear it on your wrist like any other watch, and it tells you when you are tagged in social media tools, or when you get messages, mails, and other communications, and even results on a range of live data streams.

If you are ever asked to instill some extra energy in a corporation, simply introducing wearables as ways to get some friendly competition going on the work floor, will give rise to some healthy office competition. For example: how much exercise during your office hours results in improved mental work? This casual introduction to evidence based analytics and friendly competition will ensure a healthy lifestyle for all. Is not that just dandy?

## IN CONCLUSION

The Art of Leisure Learning is all about obtaining pure knowledge, to disseminate that real knowledge and transmit it to your peers, or embed it in your future learning solutions will ensure high quality returns.

For a Tech Dandy an air of expertise is simply not enough. A Tech Dandy is an expert, but with an aura of cool accompanying evidence-based training knowledge. Knowledge creation is taking educational Art to the point of perfection, and leisure learning is the action accompanying the Art.

## NOTES

1. Pathfinder: <http://www.pathgather.com/>
2. Flipped Learning: <http://flippedlearning.org/>
3. Wired: <http://www.wired.com/>
4. Mashable: <http://mashable.com/>
5. The/Intercept: <https://firstlook.org/theintercept/>
6. Huffington Post / Education: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/education/>
7. Educause: <http://www.educause.edu>
8. Learning Solutions Magazine: <http://www.learningsolutionsmag.com/>
9. Ol'Daily: <http://www.downes.ca/>
10. Instagram: <http://instagram.com/>
11. Learning Brain: <http://www.bioedonline.org/lessons-and-more/resource-collections/the-learning-brain-neuroscience/>
12. Fundamentals of Neuroscience course: <http://www.mcb80x.org/>
13. Wiki focusing on learning theories: <http://learningevolves.wikispaces.com/>
14. Instructional design: [http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Main\\_Page](http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Main_Page)
15. Blooms digital taxonomy; <http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/>
16. IRRODL: <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl>

17. New Media Consortium / Horizon Report: <http://redarchive.nmc.org/publications>
18. Meta glasses: <https://www.spaceglasses.com/>
19. Google cardboard kits: <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2014/08/where-to-buy-google-cardboard/>
20. xAPI: <http://www.adlnet.gov/tla/experience-api/>
21. Learning Locker: <http://learninglocker.net/>
22. <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2567574#>
23. <http://ht.ly/G2ybt>

## CITATION

de Waard, I. (2015). Tech Dandy, or the Art of Leisure Learning. In: Hopkins, D., ed., *The Really Useful #EdTechBook*, 1st ed. David Hopkins, pp.187-197.