

Chapter 1

From e-Learning to e-Education: Goals, Strategic Assessment and Implications

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines the educational (and schooling) processes as related to the overall social, political and economic processes, so as to set the context within which e-Learning has to be explored and discussed and within which a strategy for it can be forged. Such issues as the economic implications of the educational system, the extent to which economic considerations and realities are actually taken into account in curricula building and in the process of teacher training are discussed, along with the notion of acquisition of knowledge and/or information. The chapter portrays the parameters that are required to create a well balanced strategy for the developing of e-Learning as a major vehicle for the implementation of the overall social goals of education, of which one essential seems to be lacking at times: the preparation of the system's customer, the pupil, as a critical observer of reality and a careful and discriminative customer of the ever developing consumption oriented society.

INTRODUCTION

Much, maybe most, of the e-Learning-related literature looks into technological issues.¹ Very few address content, mainly its use or availability. Platforms on which e-Learning should be developed are not, however, overlooked - with experts examine engineering or technological issues of e-Learning systems and structure (e.g., Gilbert, 2008; Lim, *et*

al., 2005). There is discussion related to financial facet of distance learning (Barnble, 2008), to specific sectors (corporate; academia) and to e-training (Tai, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2005; Beach, 2002). The role of instructors, the training they should undergo and methodologies (Clark & Mayer, 2008; Marriott & Torres, 2008; Boon *et al.*, 2005) are discussed as well. Technological gaps, mainly in ICT,² between countries and regions, or segments of the population are examined. And so their influence on the actual potential of e-Learning and the role they

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play in educational institutions and workplace. Still another facet in the discussion looks into the learning process and attempts to relate it to what is known as “Constructivist Learning Theory.” Content, as has been mentioned, receives little, if any, attention. Even Carliner & Shank (2008) present no discussion that even remotely examines educational contents or learning goals.

There are core questions that are evidently absent in much of the body literature on the subject. They concern educational value systems and social and educational goals which are the very *raison d’être* of education as reflected – or should be manifested – in e-Learning. This chapter addresses some of these issues, arranged in a few sub-sections. Starting with examination of educational goals it turns to look at socio-educational aspirations. Exposition and discussion of socio-educational agendas, e.g., conformity, rules, etc. follows. The economic dimension is then presented, as related to the educational process with discussion which is followed by examination of the implications on the student’s economic performance, resulting from the practice within the educational arena. Next the relationship between information and knowledge is looked into, as related to the learning process, which is also examined in the context of the classroom in the following section. While examination of various aspects of e-Learning has been done throughout the previous sections as well, the next section focuses on the relationship between learning and e-Learning, leading to the last section which culminates in the call to redefine educational objectives with the development of information society.

COMMONLY PERCEIVED EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Almost any survey in nearly any society in the world would turn out several cliché responses as to what education is all about. The maxim that education is a social process, aimed at social

cohesion (or balance) is hardly ever challenged. Yet, the educational discourse seems to be almost entirely divorced from key social issues. To point at one example, the crucial economic processes (and implications) that shape society and its members are hardly ever addressed in the educational discourse. Still another anomaly stands at the heart of the general socio-educational debate: if education aims to change social values and concepts that have over time become undesirable or unwanted (e.g., discrimination, segregation and other outdated concepts), how can educators, themselves products of the system that encouraged these archaic ideals, be expected to eradicate or change such values, ideas and practice? Can they be true agents for such a desired change?

The concept of “equal opportunity” and its derivatives, “affirmative action” or “positive discrimination”, exemplifies this inherent problem. It means equating discriminated groups to those considered to represent the mainstream of society (another problem, of course) through yet another form of discrimination – even if positive and based on good intentions.³

Examination of educational systems reveals discrepancy between desired social values and values actually implemented. One reason for this gap is funding. A quick scrutiny of budgets available to education, compared with other items on the national budget, of any country worldwide manifests it.⁴ Restricted funding is reflected in budgetary allocations to physical conditions in educational institutions, to state-of-the-art schooling aides and to preparation and training of teachers, their earnings and social status. Budgetary issues also have an impact the pupil’s future consumer behavioural patterns. This is also absent from teacher training programs.

Gender imbalances⁵ and economic aspects of education occupy a rather modest place in the overall educational debate. It is rather devoted to such questions as whether teaching aims at “what to think?” or “how to think?”⁶ This last point will be further discussed later on.

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