

Chapter 7

Higher Education and Globalization

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors examine the forces influencing higher education in a digitally globalized, plurilingual, and intercultural world, and how they have already begun to change some traditional notions of what higher education is for, and how it should be adapted to fit new emergent social needs, which are currently under debate in the educational field (Mehaffy, 2012). They go on to propose a connectivist vision for the future of globalized higher education and provide three case studies that illustrate ways of achieving that vision. Each case study has a different orientation: resource orientation, process orientation, transformation orientation. All three of them have the same objective: innovation and adaptation to the new globalized paradigms that have placed higher education in an increasingly complex context.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of higher education in a global context is not only evolving, it is becoming ever more complex. All over the world, higher education is expanding the original instructional target to include research, industrial collaboration, or ecological activism, among other functions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002). When we speak of higher education, we can no longer limit ourselves to traditional notions of academically oriented education - a third and final level of formal learning after secondary studies. This

traditional model has often focused on transmitting commonly accepted theoretical knowledge that may (or may not) qualify the learner for a professional field (Harrison & Hopkins, 1967). It is taught at a level that also includes advanced research activity in an environment that facilitates thought and reflection.

The advance of globalized, interconnected exchanges on economic, social, cultural, and academic levels has given rise to new platforms and opportunities for informal and non-formal lifelong learning and economic production (European Commission, 2008). Institutions have responded

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to demands for transferability of qualifications by attempting to establish a common, global framework for higher education.

The European Bologna Accords of 1999-2010 (European Union, 1999) are a clear example of organizational globalization strategy that tries to converge stages, contents, processes and aims to define a European Higher Education Area (European Higher Education Area, 2010).

In this chapter, we look at the changing context created by physical and digital mobility, and the challenges of interculturalism and plurilingualism that it brings. We'll look at how higher education is dealing with these challenges today, and look ahead to a desired future.

In this context, interculturalism refers to “the conditions, or the ‘enabling factors’ that characterize a true, meaningful intercultural dialogue,” which has been defined by the Council of Europe as “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception” (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 17).” It has been further defined as:

a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research website, 2011).

In this chapter, plurilinguism should be understood as:

the intrinsic capacity of all speakers to use and learn, alone or through teaching, more than one language. The ability to use several languages to varying degrees and for distinct purposes is defined in the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (p.168) as the ability ‘to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural action, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures’. This ability is concretised in a repertoire of languages a speaker can use (Council of Europe, 2003, p. 15; Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168).

It is important to distinguish plurilingualism from multilingualism, which is “the presence of several languages in a given space, independently of those who use them: for example, the fact that two languages are present on a territory does not indicate whether inhabitants know both languages or one only” (Council of Europe, 2003, p. 16).

To conclude, we present three case studies that demonstrate innovative learning environments that are emerging and might provide examples for future higher education projects.

Changing Context: Accessibility and Democratization through Virtuality

In highly developed countries, the generalization of high-bandwidth, always-on Internet connections has meant that computer assisted communication has moved, in 30 years, from a hobby of technically oriented “geeks and nerds” to a fundamental right of all citizens: in 2009, Finland became the first country to pass a law declaring Internet access to be a legal right (Cavaliere, 2011).

Governments are forcing operators to provide high-speed service in rural areas where it is not profitable, as part of their strategies to reinvest poor, deserted areas with new, affluent, and economically productive populations: in 2010, France committed two billion euros toward providing high-bandwidth access throughout the country by 2025 (Jambes, 2011). Although economic improvement is the primary motivation, environmental benefits are also expected (reduction of greenhouse gasses as teleworking increases), and

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