

Chapter 3.24

How Technology Can Support Culture and Learning

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ABSTRACT

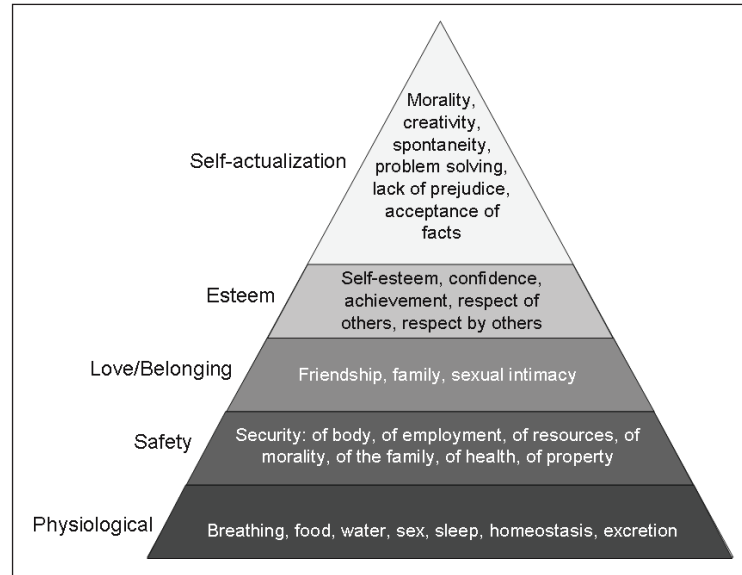
From the authors' perspective, technology is both a tool and a developing factor that can foster culture and learning development. This chapter focuses on the interrelations that interleave education, technology, content accessibility, and intercultural issues. With an introduction and related background, language learning is used as an example further to explain these issues. This chapter then discusses authoring and content development for e-learning applications (including authoring tools, virtual communities, and forums), and examines technology and accessibility issues in this context. The current state of e-learning is introduced along with a description of different tools and approaches. The chapter concludes with an overview of e-learning and the marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

Major developments in culture and civilisation are based on a combination of factors including personal abilities, societal, and economical environment, and so on. According to Maslow (Abraham, 1943), subsistence needs have to be met before other and “*higher*” aims are reached for (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the search for a solution to a problem (even a very practical one) may provide the core of our evolution in technology, science, culture, art, or education.

From the authors' perspective, the issue regarding the relation interleaving technology, culture, and education is twofold. On one side, technology has often been a major cause of disruptive advances in the evolution of science, culture, art, and education. On the other side, scientific

Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Adapted from Abraham Maslow, 1943)



and cultural progress necessarily rests upon a learning process, either formal or informal. For this very reason, the authors have focused their attention on how technology can support culture and learning.

For example, the present development of western culture has been reached thanks, in large part, to the technical innovation introduced by Gutenberg, which made possible the diffusion of culture through print, making learning affordable for everyone and therefore, also accessible. Yet were it not for Braille, all the culture and knowledge available in printed form would be totally inaccessible to visually impaired people unless they could afford to have a personal reader. This technical support is therefore a clear example of how technology can support culture and learning in the wider sense.

It is worth taking into account historical notes related to the impact of technology on the learning process and therefore, also on the evolution of society.

SOME HISTORY NOTES

The art of teaching and learning has a long history. Initially it was a matter of subsistence and therefore, the elders in a community would act as tutors, trainers, and mentors for the younger members. This process then evolved from mere subsistence to something that became much valued by the learner and rewarding for the teacher.

Due to the very nature of this process (based on knowledge acquired through personal practical experience), teachers were numerically very

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