

Chapter 12

Global Education Greenhouse: Constructing and Organizing Online Global Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge iTrust (KIT), a non-profit organization, through the co-operation of educational institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, launched the Peace Diaries¹ following September 11, 2001 to establish a forum where educators, students and their families of diverse cultural backgrounds and discourse groups could gather and submit multi-modal literary works (e.g. text, artwork, audio recordings, etc.) that address issues of personal, local and global significance. While this project was a successful demonstration model of what is possible in the way of global learning in collaboration with many stakeholders and actors, there is enormous potential to extend and transform this initiative into a more synthesized and sustainable online global education portal. This learning will be incorporated into Global Education Greenhouse, a corporation in formation, that will create a new class of products and services for students in primary and secondary schools/grades k-12 that address a void in the current educational system.

SETTING THE STAGE

Education, and the knowledge it generates, is seen as a means to effective participation in societies and economies that are affected by globalization (UNESCO). The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2015) was declared by a Resolution of the General Assembly, in December 2002, with a goal to re-focus on educa-

tion and learning as central to the common pursuit and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations General Assembly has stated that education for all is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality, and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy². Education is viewed as key to participation in the global economy as well as critical to local prosperity.

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What marks this debate as unique to the 21st century is its deep relationship to information technology. Intrinsicly combining education and information technology is viewed as endemic in preparing the global youth to face the challenges of the knowledge economy (Monahan, 2005; Arora, 2005). The Internet promises a novel and cost effective means of transmitting knowledge, allowing for the rhetoric of global learning to become a genuine possibility. The hope is that education leverages on the current phenomena of transnational connectivity and cross-cultural sociality, leading to the birthing of new knowledge. In fact, much of this effort is structured to move away from the chronic center-periphery flow of information of prior decades, focusing on a more global diffusion model (Haywood, 1995).

In 2004 alone, governments of the world invested 1.97 trillion U.S. dollars or 4.4% of global GDP in PPP (purchasing power parities) on education (UNESCO). Further, the Information Technology in Education Study³ revealed that developed countries had succeeded in establishing connectivity across its schools in the 70-90 percent range in 1999 with full connectivity by 2001. Amongst developing countries, there has been a strong financial and political commitment to bridge the digital divide in education with a goal to achieve 100% e-literacy (Norris, 2001).

Yet, despite the trillions of dollars spent on education and technological connectivity for global education, a 2005 article in ScienceDirect reports a rapid decline in worldwide innovation. Recent studies by bi-partisan panels have concluded that we cannot achieve change by “patching the system,” but only “by changing the system itself.” (National Center on Education and Economy, 2008). In other words, access to technologies and people alone does not shape global education. Much effort is needed to pioneer an international model of knowledge formation and sharing that does full justice to transnational social and technological participation amongst youth, teachers, administrators, curriculum ex-

perts, policy makers and other actors in pursuit of a new global education.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Need for a New Approach

We live in an ever-changing society where world-wide issues affect our local communities (e.g. global climate change, energy and food production and consumption, monetary system upheavals, crime, war, poverty, etc.). The need for global understanding is not a luxury but a profound necessity; “we predict that global awareness will become the first new basic skill of the twenty-first century, as computer literacy has so rapidly become a basic skill in the final decades of the twentieth century” (Tye, 1992, p.7). The crisis in contemporary education persists as it struggles to transform its institutional, curricula and technical realms (Lewis, 2000).

In 1992, the Earth Summit at Rio brought together 172 countries, 108 heads of state, 2,400 representatives of non-governmental organizations and 17,000 people attending the parallel NGO forum to discuss the impact of economic development on the planet. The adoption of Agenda 21 placed emphasis on education for environmental concerns. Today, the vision has broadened to encompass socio-cultural and socio-political aspects of development, including “issues of equity, poverty, democracy, and quality of life” (UNESCO, 2005). The world has also witnessed an explosion in the development of new technological innovations in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which, as noted by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his opening address to the third meeting of the UN Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (2002), is a “powerful instrument for speeding up the realization” of the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, we are behooved to create innovative education curriculum, tools

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