

Chapter 13

Building Global Citizens: Empathy, the Limits of Human Nature, and First Steps towards Social Equality through E-Learning Assignments

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ABSTRACT

With the popularization of global e-learning, built on unprecedented information technology (IT) connectivity and content distribution via the WWW and Internet, instructors have a responsibility to use these resources to build savvy learners who are also responsible global citizens. The Web acclimates and acculturates individuals into a global culture haphazardly. A more purposive learning approach may more constructively promote the long-held goal of liberation-based learning. A more pro-social state-of-being may be realized with designed e-learning assignments that promote learner empathy, reveal the limits of human nature, and provide supports for initial steps towards social equality. This then provides a model for online learning assignment design with an eye towards transformation and liberation. Given the broad diversity of cultural approaches to the concepts of liberation, this chapter will take a non-model-specific approach to this concept.

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web (WWW) and Internet have been harnessed to provide electronic government (e-government) services for local citizenry around the world. The perceived benefits of these technologies involve widespread access to relevant information (for knowledge and decision-making); low-cost information dissemination to promote

free speech, and communication facilitation; the maintenance of human social relations unconstrained by space-time; community formation and social organization; production and commerce; leisure and entertainment; identity formation and psychological development; learning and cognitive development, and cultural understandings (Brey, 2005, n.p.). On the other hand, research has found a range of negative implications of this mass medium on society.

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Brey has reviewed the literature and found 11 countervailing negatives: “information overload, false information, harmful information, harmful communication, harmful effects on social relations, harmful effects on community and social organization, harmful effects on production and commerce, harmful effects on identity formation and psychological development, harmful effects on learning and cognitive development, cultural fragmentation, and loss of privacy and private-public boundaries” (Brey, 2005, n.p.). More specifically, there are concerns about the loss of privacy protections, fraud, false identities, moral pollutants, hacking, anonymous postings, libelous information, support for negative addictive behaviors, and anti-social behaviors. The greater Net-enabled connectivity may be interpreted to enhance behaviors that are considered illegal and immoral as well (Caplan, 2009). Chopra and Dexter argue that software has philosophical implications that are social, political, and metaphysical:

Code may both advance and counteract political imperatives: in this context, free software is not just a question of managing technology but of determining the contours of our selves (sic) and the politics we choose. Technology and politics become inseparable when technologized entities are political actors and objects of political philosophy. A new political philosophy for this technological age must reflect the blurring of boundaries, and the new obscurities, that technology induces. The liberatory potential of free software lies in its potential to address both these effects (2007, p. 41).

Others, however, have argued that incorrect inferences have been made about the Internet promoting democracy or anything other than an anarchic environment. “There is little evidence that the Internet will create new communities to make up for the decline in civic engagement over the past four decades in the U.S.,” observes Uslander (2000, p. 64). Millions turn to the Internet as a

regular part of their daily lives (Iriberry & Leroy, 2009, p. 11:1), and the WWW is the backdrop for many forms of e-learning.

Understanding how those services and have been shaped and delivered will be important in first understanding the information and communication technology (ICT) affordances. Then, once the provincial applications have been discussed, this chapter will examine how the WWW supports the global citizen identity. If the Internet is a singularity—a point in space-time where gravitational forces are so infinitely dense and voluminous that space-time becomes distorted—then it should be harnessed instead of resulting in chaos. The collective creation and pooling of knowledge may result in increased “individual and aggregate capabilities,” optimally in a “virtuous cycle” (Flake, 2006, p. 2). These synergies cut across national boundaries and cultures, including developing countries (Alam, Ahmed, & Islam, 2008).

The concept of a global citizenry is not to supplant nation-states or to suggest disloyalty but to enhance individual roles in global endeavors that require cross-border collaborations: environmental protectionism and sustainability (Goodman, 2009), human health protections (as in situations of pandemics), recovery from natural disasters, respect for human rights and international laws, economic exchanges, support for the poor citizens, peaceable co-existence, and other broad-based goals without any party affiliation or political movement as sponsors. Various simulations show the closeness of the world and the various chains of production, international trade, global travel, international politics, environmentalism, human group migrations, weather systems, and other elements that bring people together globally. This global identity is highly mediated—with global branding, international stars, and globalist messaging. This concept of a global citizen deals with identity politics, with a global affiliation as a loose-fitting label over that of prior and continuing loyalties. Figure 1 “Expansion of Identity to Global Citizen” addresses this conceptualization

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