Chapter I

Dimensions of Diversity in the IT Classroom Onground and Online

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the dimensions of diversity in a cultural context with special reference to IT education. The authors justify that globalization of education in a true sense cannot be achieved only by establishing accessibility and developing cost effective technologies. The debate concerning the influence of IT on the diversity and global culture issues will be colored by how technology is being used. The authors argue that the ideal is not possible within present IT usage unless the underpinning culture of the IT curriculum is acknowledged, openly discussed and adjusted for. They develop a model in phases to discuss the difficulties in engaging the technology and thus finding ways to increase its usage, particularly in the education sector.

Setting the Scene

In this chapter we will try to answer the following questions: What is the relationship between globalization and diversity in the Internet age? Why do we need to know about diversity? What are these diversities? How may learning be enhanced with the knowledge about dimensions of diversity?

With the introduction of the World Wide Web, there is no doubt that mankind is moving towards globalization. We frequently come across the terms such as *distributed learning, virtual communities, learning objects, metadata, adaptive learning systems, texting, blogging,* etc. We need to understand these words in terms of globalization and to recognize diversities in terms of individual needs and interests.

Caine et al. (2004) writes that uniqueness is a fact of life. Race, color, creed and culture all are aspects of individuality, but even within a culture in which all people are overtly similar, immense differences exist. Nature is diverse and, in fact, thrives on diversity.

According to Caine et al. (2004), we are biologically programmed to make sense of our experience. In other words, we are innately motivated to search for meaning. Therefore, with the advent of IT and the creation of the Internet, teachers are no longer required to just transmit information. They are also required to address many other areas, such as helping students to create meaning from newly found information so that it becomes knowledge and learning.

If technology provides metadata, will children ever learn? Is there a risk of technology doing too much for students? Transformative pedagogy is needed to encourage the development of skills such as research, evaluation and analysis skills. This is not possible by just teaching HTML. Sometimes it may be better not to use the computer at all.

Let us compare spelling with critical thinking. Some basic level of spelling is needed. Technology can, however, take care of basic levels of spelling requirements, leaving the opportunity to concentrate on "higher" level cognitive skills such as critical thinking and analysis. In that light technology as such is neither harmful nor useful. It depends on the way we use it.

While teaching either in a traditional classroom (i.e., face-to-face teaching-learning environment) or in an e-learning environment, we need to consider the different type of learners we have. In traditional classrooms we do not consciously think about that, but in fact teachers adapt their lessons to the

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