

EDUCATION IN AN ELECTRONIC ERA

Richness, Reach, and the
Emergence of New
Learning Communities

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'Richness'

The overall quality of information.

'Reach'

The overall number of people involved in the exchange of information.

Previously 'richness' or 'reach'

Now 'richness' and 'reach' and
more opportunities for
real-life projects in the real world

New 'learning communities' are
emerging

A New Paradigm

Lave (1988) redefined learning in terms of relationships among persons-acting, activities, and contexts.

Examples ...

- Evergreen State College (in Washington State) and Seattle Central Community College have a team-taught, year-long, interdisciplinary coordinated studies programme.
- The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education is an associated development.

More examples ...

- The 'Associated Colleges of the South' collaborate electronically and physically to offer a classics programme.
- Academics in a particular discipline attend conferences, present papers physically and electronically, and share emails with colleagues around the world.

Yet more examples ...

- Members of an applied management course at the Open Polytechnic carry out real-life projects at their workplaces for organisational benefits and academic credit.
- Internships are part of further or higher education programmes.
- Electronic portfolios are placed on shared sites for dialogue and ongoing development.

A 'learning community' is:

"A purposeful restructuring of the curriculum by linking courses together so that students enrol in a more coherent curriculum with opportunities for active learning and greater interaction between students and faculty members."

(Gabelnick, Matthews, MacGregor, & Smith, 1990)

A 'learning community' is a group of people in an educational context who share common values and beliefs.

(Wikipedia, 2007)

Examples ...

- 'Knowledge rooms' are developed as collaborative, virtual spaces where students gather for research projects, skill development, seminar discussions, formal debates, and creative expression.
- The West-Eastern Divan Workshop of Edward Saïd and Daniel Barenboïm features an orchestra of young Arab and Israeli musicians.

More examples ...

- Wikipedia as a structure and process where multiple perspectives and meanings are constructed collectively, collaboratively, and in an often conflicting environment.
- Amazon.com is not just an e-megastore. It greets customers by name and makes 'purchase circles' and readers' reviews available.

Further examples ...

- A home handyperson company offers courses over the Internet. This involves live instructors dealing with how-to topics such as remodelling a kitchen. Customers are given the opportunity to purchase packages of associated items.
- Partnerships between businesses and voluntary organisations involve not only financial support but also expert advice and volunteering labour.

Activity 1

For a tertiary education institute, what are 'learning communities' of relevance within both its internal and external environments?

Activity 2

Now focus on three of the 'learning communities' you have named.

For each, suggest how an institution (or the sector as a whole) can encourage the members to willingly contribute to the learning opportunity.

Note electronic implications.

Opportunities

- International distributed campuses
- 'Downstream' services
- 'Upstream' possibilities

Challenges

- Infrastructure requirements – the crowding-out effect, formative evaluation, working with virtual teams, developing weaving skills, understanding copyright law
- ‘Last mile’ connections
- Residential broadband

A consequential
need for new
models of
education ...

Necessary shifts in focus ...

- Individually shallow or deep learning
- Individually narrow or wide learning
- Community-based shallow or deep learning
- Community-based narrow or wide learning
- Communities-based deep and wide learning