

Distance Education - an essay

I have never been interested in distance education before, however I am a person who like learning a new things. It had seem to me that the correspondence teaching must be worse than stationary in school or university. I have always like personal contacts with professors, the hot discussions and brain-storms. The distance education wasn't for me. It would have to border me to reading and writing -- and these activities weren't enough for me. In addition distance learning demand from participants:

- a) the huge inward discipline;
- b) planning time;
- c) restrict execution homework;
- d) be in terms.

Where is the place for intellectual games or digressions which are natural in daily scholars discussions or university lessons. I have had so negative attitude towards this kind of education, that I didn't know how long tradition (XVIII c. Jagiellonian University) this idea have in our polish tradition - Kazimierz Wieczorkowski describe it in article „Conditions of the development of DE”, *Kultura i Edukacja 1996, N 3, pp.109-131.*

But now when the present of world is diametrically opposed to our past, when we have so big communication possibilities and it appear to us a chance to take a part in very hot networks discussions (electronic lists, teleconferences) it could be this form of education will become general and will spread worldwide. And maybe, thanks to itself attractiveness, it gains the big number of followers and more participants (specially in Poland). It will be depends on the quality of proposals, the reliability of computer network and software, the prices and costs, the interesting topics and so on.

If professional distance teaching would be valuable and profitable for institutions or companies, in a sense of permanent trainings and development of staff qualifications, it would be possible that there is a future of DE. I understand that information staff in our library must be educated in the skills of: searching materials, indexing them, handling sophisticated media, creating information infrastructures and another one. And maybe remote teaching is a good solution to do it well, active and incessantly.

I used to be active in this part of professional development, I have always used a new electronic technologies which are accessible in our library so I have seen the big changes which have place since 5 years in Poland. I understand too, that without permanent learning we couldn't score a success. I love this situation when I can take part in our polish librarian discussion lists to ask my colleagues about good solutions for some sort of problems which I have in my job. It seems to be comfortable, but it isn't the same as a personal contact.

But now when the Internet becomes the main medium of DE, when we can use digital technologies I think that for many people it is a chance to have any education. The Internet is more popular and allows educators and students to communicate both synchronous (in real-time). The network is built in those part of the world, where any technologies hadn't a chance to be earlier. So I hope it is an important aspect to provide teaching opportunities to students who were isolated from such kind of possibilities in the past.

In the other hand I see dangerous in this globalization. The world today is becoming more and more homogeneous. Yet it is the diversity of culture that makes our lives interesting. What will be, if everybody — using the same tools, standards, methods and contexts — becomes similar human beings under the influence of computer and network technologies? Can we imagine themselves identical educated people, equal wear, with identical ideas and the same conversations? There are my doubts, my questions?

Nevertheless of my optimism I see people in 100 years rather out of condition. As the communications between us are based on telephoning, faxing, e-mailing and holding of a tele-conferences we will be very lonely and will be given to us a sort of illiteracy grounded on lack ability to keep close relations with another men and nature too.

The distance education can play the most important role in training staff in XXI century, but I hope that the evolving methods will be more humanitarian in the future.

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