Internet, Education and Culture: Should We Care?

Working Group 3.5

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Abstract: Internet, with its easy to use access to multimedia resources and linking tool has great impact on education and cultures. It is the way we use it that changes can be brought about and Webbing can be provided from small age, for minorities, disadvantaged, disabled, and different societies. Therefore one of the first steps in changes has to be made in teacher education itself.

1. EDUCATION

Internet provides the strings of togetherness; education is substantial in providing a meaningful life; culture with individual diversities colours our globe of life space. Why should we care? This report investigates issues in relation to the use of the Internet in education by proposing further questions.

To encompass a whole new way of learning with this new technology, we have to be aware that radical changes in our approaches to learning, classroom management, the role of the teacher and adequate change in teacher training is necessary.

1.1 What is the impact of Internet on education?

Concerns about Internet use show overuse or misuse might amplify problems, while actually radical changes are needed in pedagogy in order to benefit from use. Rather than just gathering information, the Internet should be used to construct knowledge, learning to learn, developing problem-solving skills, opening eyes to the realisation of other cultures and enrich lives.

Personal growth: The personal growth is a development of personality and soul. It can be an enhancement of knowledge, the ability to communicate or development of any competence found useful in life.

Education: Without doubt, the Internet today is widely recognised as a great tool for lifelong learning. For many, it is a tutor who helps increase the level of education. Many users appreciate the features the Internet offers – the availability of various teaching materials, the ability to be educated by top experts without necessity to travel or capability to time the education process to their busy schedule.

Opportunity to develop critical thinking: Internet is an endless source of information, which is easy to find and easy to produce. There is too much information on the Internet, so users need to develop skills to critically evaluate information and sources.

Development of social competencies: Internet helps to mature social competencies. Everyone can use the Internet to find friends and build relationships with people from all around the world.

1.2 In which way does Internet change education?

The Internet is a very powerful tool that removes the tyranny of distance between educational institutions within one nation and other nations. It is a useful tool, which allows easy access to a wide variety of educational information and resources. The Internet changes the way students conduct their research with the availability of combined text, voice, image, simulations and virtual reality and software tutorials enable students to play an interactive role in situations which otherwise require considerable exercise of imagination and discipline. However, the relationship between Internet accesses at home is distinctive to its use at school in its types and time of use.

The regular use of the Internet has implications on what the education systems aim to achieve. The Internet is a force for social and educational transformation, which implies changes to traditional learning.

The Internet is a great source of entertainment, especially for children. With proper supervision children can learn much by downloading desirable material.

In electronic communication, the printed text can often become 'ad-speak' and therefore unconventionally spelt. To what extent is cyber language changing the way we write? The Internet influences children's language and social outcomes. Because they are growing up with technology they can easily adapt, become self-educated and create their own digital communities.

1.3 From what age does Internet prove to be sensibly used and for what reasons?

Often it is believed that young children, particularly before age 6, should not and cannot use computers for any other activity than play.

Young children possess a fabulous mental potential, a great need to learn, and that mental development depends on the stimulation of the learning environment and the learning opportunities encountered by the learner. Recent research proves that young children can and enjoy use of the Internet, particularly activities based on collaborative work carried out with pals around the world.

These activities:

- Give the children a clear idea of what reading and writing is about: communicating with people who are not present
- Allow the children to get acquainted with children speaking a different language, having different habits of life but who have the same needs as themselves, which is an important beginning of education for international understanding
- Help the children and teachers to use technology in meaningful activities from the start
- Encourage children to express themselves, combining different means
- Allow the integration of children belonging to minorities and who are not fluent in the language taught in the class
- Enhance collaborative and interactive activities
- Help immensely the professional growth of the teachers.

In conclusion using Internet with young children for communication and collaborative activities shared with children from all over the world will create an international community of young children, oriented towards understanding and co-operation.

2. SOCIETY

2.1 Is filtering a solution for unwanted access?

If we structure the ethical aspects of the Internet, we might come up with the following:

- What is unwanted access?
- When and how is it possible?
- What might be its consequences? What are we afraid of?
- How can we eliminate, restrict or control it?
- What are possible solutions?
- What is a constructive and positive approach?

Unwanted access is the use of Internet resources which propagate or display violence, pornography, racial discrimination, terrorism etc., which we as educators find inappropriate for children. The situation may be, restricted or controlled by either software, hardware or educational means.

Internet is freedom and freedom is responsibility. It is real life and real society with all its good and bad, mixed and controversial influences. Education means preparing for real life. We have to talk to our students about the whole spectrum of possible gains and losses when working with the Internet. We have to make it clear to children that there are sources of information, which are appropriate or inappropriate, within the boundaries of culture. We have to help children live in the real life, not in the artificial greenhouse.

2.2 What is the impact of Internet on different societies?

The world in which we live is a rapidly changing one with many challenges for cultures and society as we have known it for many years. The challenge to educators today is to find ways of helping students to bridge the gaps between the cultures whilst at the same time enabling them to develop an awareness and pride in their own culture. By using the internet to bring students together, we can provide them with the facilities to celebrate cultures and the society in which they live, through the use of collaborative projects. The views expressed by students or reflected in the responses they give should come from their social experiences and the cultures that enrich this environment.

Although English is widely used on the Internet, it is imperative to provide the students with opportunities to work at their own level of learning in their native language. Collaborative projects done by students via the

Internet could be produced and published in their native language and also in other languages.

The Internet could enable students to discuss issues, to respond to questions and to provide a publishing space for work produced. It is a tool to enhance learning and to provide a means of fast, effective communication around the globe, developing an awareness, understanding and acceptance of the rich differences of cultures, without the constraints of borders and distance. It is also the first opportunity for many small, isolated communities to be present on a global scale.

2.3 How can minorities be involved and at the same time keep their own identities?

All countries have minority groups with distinct ethnic and cultural diversities. It is important for these groups to maintain their individuality. Some minority groups choose not to embrace technology because they are afraid of the changes which will be forced upon their culture.

For example, gypsies prefer to live an isolated life style to preserve their culture and traditions. They have their own history and are noted for their musical abilities such as singing. They have shared some of their music and history with people outside their community. How can technology be introduced in non-threatening ways to encourage these people to use it? The suggestion is that the gypsies could use technology to share their history and music with others.

A group of gypsy representatives could test new technologies, its value and find their own way of introducing it such that is relevant to their community. Whilst being trained, they would develop content about some aspect of their culture and spread the message amongst their society. Working with familiar content would help develop a comfort level while learning the new skills. Their own technology centres could be created to facilitate the learning of the new technologies to use in their everyday lives.

2.4 How should the disadvantaged be able to access resources?

Individual persons, minorities, remote communities, as well as whole countries could be in disadvantaged situation, not possessing the necessary infrastructure, knowledge, circumstance, or possibilities to access technology, tools and content. These individuals or communities are cast out from the privilege of knowledge, communication and global insight, which

prohibits personal growth and job possibilities. In the long run this situation might well invite unlawful activities or the wish to leave the community.

Many countries, realising the burdens of disadvantaged, have shown good practices by establishing tele-huts, tele-houses to provide high technology and resources for all, bringing about changes in several ways:

- The ability to access infrastructure, tools, and resources gives an innovative aspect in viewing the future and provides self confidence through mastering technology
- Accessing the Internet provides a global view on the world, with freely available information sources, which demands selection and decision making
- The insight to differences and cultures around the world encourages the sense of self-respect and individual values to help preserve and inspire the willingness to express and publish self-identity, views, and culture – stepping forward from being just a consumer to a provider of information
- E-mailing facilities provide links and means for communication channels, where differences and circumstances diminish and only the ties become meaningful
- The bridging, through virtual strings, establishes bonds that form communities on different levels
- Distance, local and individual possibilities are over-ruled through the access to different telelearning and telementoring facilities, providing the chance for all to learn the most
- Personal growth opens new possibilities for jobs in virtual and real territories through teleworking channels.

These webbing possibilities, no matter how minute they might be, could make great differences to individuals and communities with respect to their view of the future and their role in society. Knowledge, respect and identity deletes internal need to override social rules or to flee from community.

2.5 What does Internet mean to the disabled?

A gateway to the world: Through virtual travel experiences of many kinds are facilitated. Also if travel is to be undertaken in reality the Internet can be used to research places and facilities to ensure easier mobility.

An educational tool: Learning packages can be devised for more formal learning and broken down into manageable sections suitable in length, frequency and intensity and presented at intervals suitable to the learner. Personal interests can be followed and a portfolio of skills acquired with consideration given to and adaptations made for special needs.

A means of conducting business: E-commerce, financial services, and shopping online all offer opportunities to those who would ordinarily have

difficulty in going out to work or shop. A degree of independence can therefore be achieved.

An entertainment provider: Music, digital films, virtual art galleries and exhibitions on line can be visited and enjoyed regardless of disability.

A means of communication: For those who have speech, hearing or communication difficulties the computer and the Internet can offer the means to communicate with others through e-mail, or sending pictures, photographs or sound recordings. Opportunities to join in communities on the web, offer opinions, and most importantly, make a contribution to the world are available through forums, chat rooms etc.

Thus, the Internet offers the disabled equalities opportunities and empowerment.

2.6 How could we fight infrastructure constraints?

The fact that only a small minority of the Internet users is living in developing countries is mainly based on hardware constraints in these countries. For example Africa with 17% of the worlds population has less than 1% of the Internet users. This means that a majority of the people living on the earth is excluded from modern communication and information means.

What can be done to cope with infrastructure constraints? Even though financial support is a basic requirement to build-up a network infrastructure, there are some aspects to be taken into consideration to make support as effective as possible:

- In many cases it is the network infrastructure which is the most difficult part to be implemented. Large distances and the absence of any communication infrastructure, like telephone, makes it very difficult to provide internet access with the communication technology used in developed areas. It is necessary to use technologies that do not require cables to be laid. One can see satellite technology as a solution. It now offers the possibility to cover large areas with Internet access in a relatively inexpensive way, although mobile communication technology could also be a solution.
- There are successful projects undertaken in developing countries which combine the provision of different technologies like electricity and internet connection.
- When it is not possible to bring Internet access to every home, it should be offered in public areas. 'Telehouses' are a suitable and in many countries very successful concept to give the whole population access to electronic information and communication means. Giving this function to schools can be a very efficient solution.

Why should we care to broaden our circles? Internet allows all to join in; education assures the establishment of meaningful relations; the added colours of culture enrich the palette of wonders. Is it not worth caring?