

# New Learning Opportunities

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It goes without saying that constantly developing technologies are simplifying our life as well as studying process. However, there also are some negative aspects of such a rapid know-how development for it's limiting students from achieving their full potential. While students and faculty work to achieve new skills, new communication interactions, new relationships, new teaching styles and new learning opportunities many are wondering how they, as an individual, fit into the grand scheme of education. Quite obviously, the use of information technology and the skills that which accompany it are in high demand within all levels of our world that is now centered on interconnectedness and the fast-paced changes now taking place in the post-industrialization era. But this in no way indicates that today's use of information technology can only be seen as beneficial. As the disadvantages become lost in the incredible list of advantages, it has become increasingly important to focus on what technology is giving students and faculty, at all levels of education in Canada and the United States, but more specifically at the post-secondary level, and more importantly it has become essential to examine what is being taken away, and potentially lost, from the original or ideal view of education.

Perhaps in this debate it is necessary to clarify the meaning of "education" to further a logical debate. Education is the knowledge or skill obtained or developed by a learning process or also an instructive or enlightening experience. This idea of education through enlightenment and instruction seems somewhat ideal by today's standards but this ideal did once exist long before our arrival, in the time of the Athenian School of Thought. It was here that ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Socrates and Pythagorus gathered under ideal classical architecture to discuss and debate. These men were, and still are, considered great thinkers, and although time has elapsed and so many things have changed, students continue to study their ideas and theories. This alone speaks volumes on the importance of setting and their style of expanding the mind: some how it was accomplished without the use of technology. Learning and developing was simply done for the sake of knowing and the sake of broadening a knowledge base, but today the reasons behind developing knowledge are quite different and this "ideal" definition of education doesn't seem to exist in our educational system.

In today's educational system many university students are finding themselves feeling empty and confused with their current post-secondary experience, and also previous schooling experiences. In a recent survey, it has been found that thirty-four per cent of first year university students' drop out. Perhaps the process of memorization, regurgitation and remaining yet another nameless student seems somewhat unappealing to those trying to discover what it is that they want to do with their lives. A saddening majority of students will walk away with degrees that hold no real meaning or value. Students experience pressure to attend university, in hopes that graduation will present them with a job that will make their parents proud. In a survey done within elementary and secondary levels of education by MetLife "only 15 percent of students surveyed said they believe their school is preparing students extremely well to go to college" and "less than half (42%) of students report that teachers very much encourage them to do their best". It all seems to come down to a scramble to keep a grade point average at a comparable high with other students or to pass a test or paper that will certainly be forgotten once the year is over. Emphasis is being pressed in all the wrong places: students are trying to put forth results when what we really need is guidance and someone to help develop our own personal knowledge base. We are seen more or less as numbers, rather than people who are rarely asked what they think or who they are. The process of true discovery and development, what schools (and more specifically universities) want from their students can only come forth from people who know themselves, who know their strengths and know the meaning of putting in all you have. But, if students aren't even given the opportunity to discover all that they are, how could they possibly give it in a post-secondary setting.

With IT taking such a major role within our societies, importance is being placed upon skills, expertise and basic knowledge of computer technology, so in order to remain desirable in a competitive work force students are looking to develop these needed skills. Where technology has essentially become a necessity in education and the workforce, it has become a priority for schools at all levels, especially at the post-secondary level, to integrate technology into the curriculum. But, the problems seem to truly arise at the post-secondary setting where universities rely on funding through the government and students' tuition payments which accounts for nineteen per cent of universities total annual revenue in 1999/2000. Basically the rest of the necessary money for Canadian universities come from sponsored research funding from governments, the private sector and other non-government organizations which added up to \$2.8 billion in 1999/2000. Universities and colleges all over Canada and the United States are looking to remain desirable to students by being comparable or advantageous over other higher education institutes. This need results in a campaign for profits and results, over the ideal view of education where development and the students' needs are the priority.

With this said, it seems that computer and information technology within the university setting can be quite damaging to students and their opportunities to receive the education and instruction they want. Placed upon an already unstable system of education which relies heavily on student payments and corporate sponsors and donations, it seems unlikely that positive results would prevail. But the truth is that information technology can be used positively within the educational system, especially in higher education. With this in mind, IT is quite comparable to the use of globalization. Globalization is quite tricky to define, but one basic definition would sound something like this: increased mobility of goods, services, labor, technology and capital throughout the world. Used properly, globalization can have incredible benefits for many. For example, an unemployed Inuit woman living in Nunavut can make a living for herself by selling

her artwork online without having to suffer the price of a middle man, or retailer, taking her hard earned money. This is an example of globalization working for the people of the world, but this same concept can be misused and that is how we are finding children working in sweatshops in India. Applying this same theory upon information technology and its effect on education one would see that both negative and positive effects can occur depending on the strength of the educational system at hand.

Focusing first on the advantages of information technology within the educational system, many find that this new concept of a global classroom, where technology is integrated into all levels of the class, is the means of advancing students to a level of educational learning that has ceased to ever exist. In a survey done by Campus Computing Project's nearly 600 U.S. colleges and universities it's estimated that half their students used the Internet daily for their studies and with a statistic this high, it's obvious that information technology will integrate itself into the education system, changing the traditional classroom setting into a global one. This era of educational change is considered an extremely exciting time where the system and structure of learning will be pushed as far as our imaginations will take us, which essentially has no boundaries. Just imagine, we are only limited by our own creativity and if we think up something that doesn't exist yet, it can almost be guaranteed that technological advances will bring it to us in only a short matter of time. Essentially, our opportunities as students, as educators and as life-long learners are breaking past the walls that once held back our ideas.

Technology is also providing opportunities to develop knowledge in general with the use of university courses and programs online. If you have access to the resources you can better your education and therefore your status in the workforce by partaking in distance learning, or online courses. And, for those who simply want to broaden their knowledge without the degrees and programs, the Internet is an educator all on its own, with endless information available at the click of a button. Students can interact online with other students, professors, friends, political figures, government and organizations around the globe; become involved and aware of politics on a national and international scale; develop interests that otherwise may not have been available; be aware of news and events occurring within their world and the greater world around them and also, information on nations, governments, companies and people is much easier to assess by the average web surfer, so things become more transparent and truths can no longer be hidden.

Ideally, these advantages are what the educational system wants within their classrooms. Technology is basically becoming a necessity at all levels of education; it is a skill that is being brought into the elementary, secondary and even more so, the university classrooms. One day, technology will most likely be necessary within the realms of our careers so it is necessary to master the skills now. But as mentioned above, the advantages are somewhat ideal and don't look quite how we all want them to in our current system of education. It seems that they look the worst at the university level because it is here that universities are no longer public, like most elementary and secondary schools are.

As public support decreased and societal demand increased, the government pulled back university funding in the 1980's, so these institutions in Canada and the United States had to raise tuition to meet the demands of higher education, especially in light of the desperately needed advancements that technology has brought about. Many of these institutions have had to turn to corporations for funding or receive "gifts" from alumni families, much like Acadia University did with the undisclosed sum of money that alumni, J.D. Irving, gave to Acadia to build a botanical garden, and campus meeting place. Elaine Benoit, spokesperson for Acadia's office of public affairs, insists this will have no bearing on the research conducted. "We will continue to conduct the same kind of research we have in the past. It's not a buy-out; we're not selling ourselves to the family." Excepting an undisclosed sum of money does at least attach an institution to a particular family no matter what the spokespeople say. This is another way that technology can lead education from its ideal version to a version based on gain and profits.

With technology emerging as such a key player, institutions have used it to their profitable advantage. "Many educational institutions seem driven to use newly found access to global data communication that will increase enrollments and will award a vast range of degrees through massive investments in distance education programs." But, unfortunately these steps to be adaptive and remain competitive with "fast track diplomas" have created programs, that "...when compared in-depth to the curricula of bona fide academic institutions... ..these ventures appeared to be little more than money-making plots managed by capitalistic-minded individuals who held verily the slightest regard for academic values." This simple act of taking advantage of students need for technology and fast paced education seems to have made education into a commodity, or means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Students are now finding themselves referred to as "clients" in most universities and are feeling even less appreciated and less motivated to truly put themselves into their studies. Now, how is it that students become "clients"? The universities are realizing their cost cutting potential through the use of technology. Wired campuses, distance learning and online classes and discussions won't require lecture halls, full faculty, libraries and laboratories. The idea of students becoming clients simply goes hand in hand with the idea of commodifying education. Universities are taking roles of businesses where transactions are conducted. Clients pay for their education, or their degree, and it is given to them by the institution. As Michael Margolis stated in his article entitled Brave New Universities, "...Institutions of higher education in United States are considered superior because they have delivered a lucrative educational product for a competitive price..."

Also, in a university setting where information technology plays a major role, both professors and students may sense a lack of belonging and a lack of relations that might otherwise exist without the technology. For example, within a wired campus students use email to contact or ask a professor a question, rather than taking the time to visit them in

their offices. Potentially, a student could go through an entire year of classes without ever having to talk to their professor, and in all certainty this has happened. It seems that this approach undermines all that education is about. By definition, education is intertwined with enlightening experiences and instruction. Certainly in this technology based class and campus setting the student is receiving instruction, but how could a student ever be enlightened when enlightenment comes from a sense of self-discovery. Many Canadian and American universities and colleges support extremely large classes to cover the institutions annual operating cost and an example of these classes can be seen at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The universities introduction to Psychology enrolls approximately 1000 students and it becomes unrealistic to say that students are engaged, challenged or asked to develop their thoughts or mind. These sorts of advances in personal knowledge can only properly expand under certain conditions and many of these conditions are neglected in just about all North American classrooms. By the time university comes for many students, or "clients" as they will soon be referred to, they have mastered the skills of remaining unknown, cramming and writing last minute papers and assignments. The technology only makes the latter even easier to get away with.

Another disadvantage comes forth in the idea of men and women, and their different ways of learning and accessibility. Women are underrepresented on the World Wide Web, just as they are in the high-tech occupations and therefore some underlying discrimination may prevail at a university setting. In a survey done by Nielson/Net Ratings men log on more than women (an average of 54 sessions compared to 50 sessions), spend more time on average (31 hours versus 27 hours), and view more pages (1900 versus 1700). Women, compared to men, are much less likely to use or even attempt to access the Internet for a variety of reasons. Many women are intimidated by pornography, prevalent sexist attitudes and the basic idea that technology is more directed towards men. Perhaps, in a university classrooms, where laptops are used women are finding they are even more isolated than an average student might feel. Not only are they neglected by their professors, but many do not feel comfortable with the replacement offered: the Internet.

Fortunately, when looking at the list of disadvantages it seems that they can all be reversed and used to the advantage of students, teachers, professors, women and anyone else who might feel that they are losing out because of technology. For example, women are under represented in all aspects of information technology but it is that very technology that is bringing women together and bringing technology into their lives. Women, for example, are emerging as the dominant users of the Internet. Following in Nielson/Net Rating survey, "...women at work logged onto the Internet 23 percent more this August than they did in August 2001... ... while men still outpace women in Internet usage at work, Internet usage by men at work grew only 12 percent year-to-date."

Also with online courses, information, training and advertisement for conferences the Internet is basically a meeting place for people to come together and strengthen their role within the world of IT. When it comes to students, technology can play a major role in bringing students and professors together through online discussions and also online communication can make it easier for students to ask questions or set up a time to meet in person with other students or professors. This is where information can be misused, and where it tends to be in today's classrooms as students are finding they are merely a number in the grand scheme of things but if students are encouraged early on in the education system to interact, discuss, debate and share with their peers and teachers then it seems that the technology will be better used, rather than misused.

Traditional Aboriginal life seems fitting here, under the topic of technology and ideal teaching styles. In Aboriginal life, the elders of the community are highly respected and listened to by other members of the community. Wisdom is carried from one elder to a listener, not through notes or typing information into our laptops, but is learned only through listening. You must listen to understand, and perhaps that is where technology in the post-secondary system, and basically all educational systems, is lacking. Technology doesn't hear and it definitely doesn't listen. For the general public, there is nothing more real and more engaging than the company of another human being. Technology simply cannot deliver in all areas of human growth and development, but if teachers and professors fill in the needs of students and add technology on top of what they have already developed, the results would be more incredible than anything the education system has seen yet.

It seems to come down to the fact that technology can only add to education, it cannot make it which seems to be the mistake being made by so many educational institutions today. Therefore, it is becoming more and more apparent that a mix of both worlds needs to be offered to the students from the very beginning of the education system, so that once students reach the post-secondary level they will have both social and technological skills. If students are raised simply relying on the technology of the time, they will lack social skills that are mandatory in most occupations and, more importantly, in life. Besides, as Aristotle clearly stated human beings are social creatures and why would we want to alter who we naturally are for something as impersonal and unnatural as technology?

If the post-secondary education system (students, faculty and administration) continue to abuse information technology in the manner it is being misused now, then when you add education to the equation you only add to the severity of the abuse. Education will continue to move farther and farther from what is an ideal education and students will move farther from personal growth and development, to simply being the results of a bigger corporate campus agenda. Isolation, through the use of technology, will continue to hold students back from their full potential because they are never engaged, they are never challenged and from where they stand no one really cares about whom they are and what they're capable of. It's often said that children are our future, but ironically they are being treated much less than that. After focusing on the many advantages and disadvantages of education, on all levels, but mainly the post-secondary level it can be stated that if we continue to promote education in the direction it has been going, we will eventually find ourselves in an irreversible predicament. Education will be further moved from its original, ideal definition and students will become frustrated with the unproductive, yet socially accepted method of obtaining a

degree, yet no knowledge. It is the natural desire of students to feel welcomed and celebrated within the educational system, and quite simply, the only way of doing that will be to make them feel that way. An answer that seems simple enough in theory, but practice has proven that it isn't so simple after all. Universities are finding themselves blinded by the global recognition, competitiveness and profits that information technology is bringing them and are allowing the bad in information technology to overtake all the good that it can produce. In an article written by Mohammad Hamza and Bassem Alhalabi, they stated that "...If we value thinking, if we treasure the creative potential necessary to withstand future information challenges then we, as passionate educators, must rededicate ourselves to our profession. Only then can wisdom, the capstone of human thinking and the forbearer of all human knowledge, intervene to save a decaying educational system." The need to repair our current education systems, to allow for the positive flourishing of information technology is one that needs to be addressed before the collapse of the educational system falls upon us. The article was produced by the member of masterpapers.com. Sharon White is a 5-years experienced freelance writer and a senior manager of dissertation writing services support team. Contact her to get custom term paper tips and buy dissertations.