Does traditional e-learning still fit the knowledge society? Quality issues

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UNESCO Conference, Den Haag, July 3, 2009
Overview

- Quality
- Quality in e-learning
- Challenges
- Theses
Quality
some assumptions
Quality assurance

- ... it is about transactions between learners and educational institutions, social contract
- ... it is about allowing learners and public bodies to **understand** and **assess** the quality of educational offerings
- ... twist in the present context, across nations, cultures, educational systems, etc.
Limits to what can be achieved

- Understanding is context-bound
  - incommensurability (Kuhn)
  - metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson)

- Standardisation (uniformity) doesn’t help
  - We don’t (and shouldn’t) want it
  - irreducible role of cultural differences
What can be done

• Do not aim for interoperability of the objects of quality assurance (EQF?)

• Aim for quality assurance at meta-level, of the processes and procedures involved (cf. UNESCO Guidelines, Paris 2005).

• Even here limits apply, but less severely so.
Quality and e-learning
Two views of e-learning as an innovation

- Instrumentalist: technology is ‘just a tool’ you can use it or ignore it, nothing substantial changes

- Transformative: technology is a cultural driver, it has effects beyond the intended ones (Bijker: interpretative flexibility of artefacts)
Instrumentalist view of e-learning

- Sticks to formal learning paradigm
- Leads to substitution of or addition to existing technologies and practices
- Does not affect organisation structures, teachers remain ‘sages on the stage’, even if it is a virtual stage
Examples (1)

- e-mail, fora, bulletin boards as additional communication channels with students
- instant messaging, chat as office hours
- downloadable presentation slides and lecture notes (VLE, iTunesU, MIT)
- virtual classrooms in lieu of real ones (universities build presence in 2nd Life)
Examples (2)

- reflection blogs in teacher training (Wopereis)
- synchronous coaching with earpiece (Hooreman)
- gps-enhanced phones to prompt assignments (Stohr)
Transformative view of e-learning

- Considers other learning paradigms such as informal, non-formal, lifelong learning
- Leads to unintended and unexpected, ‘weird’ uses of existing technologies or fully new ones
Example Learning Network

- NB: R&D project, no instantiations yet
- LN_{DF} online, topic-bound, social network designed to foster non-formal learning
- Meant to address the needs and wants of the knowledge society
- Meant to merge the worlds of learning and working, of learners and professionals
• Upsets traditional university organisation, from one to several service providers, of content (OER), tutoring, assessment (APL, ACL), certification, advice on learning trajectories

• Uses a different business model; pay per service and service level; allow advertisements, allow anonymous use of personal data; etc.
Conclusion

- Quality control takes a different shape in either case

- For instrumental e-learning: use existing as benchmark. Check if substitute is adequate, if addition is useful

- For transformative e-learning: new benchmarks for success are needed
Challenges for quality in e-learning
## Students, professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental view</th>
<th>Transformative view</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Do not differentiate between e-learning and ordinary learning</td>
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<td>• E-tools are part and parcel of learning environment</td>
<td>• To what extent does a LN help students &amp; professionals fulfill their ambitions?</td>
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<td>• Does it help meet the needs and wants of the knowledge society?</td>
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(Networks of) Universities

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<tr>
<th>instrumental view</th>
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<td>• nothing new, existing arrangements suffice</td>
<td>• Anticipate on service provider role of universities in knowledge society</td>
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<td>• join forces</td>
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<td>• quality is a traditional strength of universities, keep it</td>
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### Good practices

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<tr>
<td>cf. existing specifications ISO JTC1 SC36 on Quality Management and Assurance Metrics</td>
<td>none for LNs really somewhat: ISO TC 232 Learning Services for Non-formal Learning and Training</td>
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<td>CEN/ISSS WS LT, IMS Global, IEEE</td>
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Theses
1. Process-oriented quality control is useful for cross-cultural quality assessment, but only to a limited extent (it lacks focus on substance)

2. Substance oriented quality control across cultures is hardly possible (incommensurability etc.)
3. When discussing quality issues in relation to e-learning practices, no additional measures are needed to cope with instrumental e-learning practices other than to differentiate between substitution and addition.

4. When the discussion concerns transformative e-learning practices, like Learning Networks, no frameworks exist yet.
5. In either case, UNESCO should stay on top of quality control, to create a level playing field and to help avert the danger of a digital divide between cultures, regions

6. UNESCO should participate in ISO JTC1 SC 36 and TC 232 (if allowed)
Questions or more info

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