Education in the digital era

Conference Italian Presidency, Brussels, 11 December 2014

The programme and presentations are available at the conference website: <http://openeducationeuropa.eu/en/edu-in-digital-era>.

Opening session

* S. Gianni, Italian Minister of Education, Universities and Research
* T. Navracsics, Commissioner Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
* S. Costa, Chair of the European Parliament Committee Culture and Edcuation
* Lord David Puttnam, Chair of Atticus Education

Lord David Puttnam

Very inspired talk, with film and video. Lord Puttnam insists on the unlimited possibilities offered by the digital era (nice example: virtual choir). He pleads in favour of the concept of flipped classroom (discussed during the EUNEC seminar in Athens, May 2014).

The most important role of teachers is to trigger students, make them believe in what they can. Education has to want to be a moral force, an ethical force. In order to be able to do that, education needs to change dramatically.

Film advice: Ivory Tower (film about higher education).

Panel 1 Increasing the quality and relevance of learning

Impulse statement by Bruce Dixon, President of the Anytime Anywhere Learning Foundation

Impatience: the rate of change is increasing; it is time to come out of the malaise and the inertia of education. We are overwhelmed by the opportunities, it is now time to take them. Education has to stay relevant, if not people will look for learning opportunies elsewhere.

The talk starts from three questions:

*How well do existing pedagogies serve the needs of our young learners?*

Traditional pedagogies are more about telling than about asking. Othodoxe pedagogies deal with certainty and predictibility, which makes it impossible to connect with the world of the learners, characterised by uncertainty, chaos, ..? When we look through the lenze of the young modern learner, we see that they have access to digital resources, and the world is their sounding board thanks to social media offering learning networks. Teachers need to adapt their pedagogies to pedagogies of discovery, of deepening ideas that are truly relevant in the learners’ lifes.

*Why such low expectations to what the digital revolution makes possible?*

* The access myth!
* More focus in the discussion on technology than on pedagogy.

*What are prerequisites for learning environments in order to allow change?*

There is too little flexibility in education. It is time to rethink structures. Is grouping pupils on the basis of their birth date the only/best way? Why not let go the security blanket of traditional curriculum? We are locking young people’s potential up. Discovery and excitement have to be key in education.

Comments by

* Anka Mulder, vice-president of Delft Technical University. Intensive use of online courses enhanced quality: bigger impact thanks to enhanced number of students, more competition in education thanks to enhanced visibility of the courses (peer pressure).
* Giovanna Carnevali, Director of Fundacio Mies van der Rohe. The most important change brought by technology to education is the enormous amount of data available. The question now is to use the data to stimulate creativity.
* Roberto Viola, European Commission Deputy DG for Communication Networks, Content & Technology. More realistic approach: innovation has to be related to inclusion. Inclusion is only possible if every classroom is connected to internet (this is by far not the case), and if teachers are trained to use digital technologies.

Panel 2 Increasing the impact of educators

Impulse statement by Pasi Sahlberg. Sahlberg puts three issues at the agenda:

* Unemployment
* GERM, Global Education Reform Movement (already presented at EUNEC conference in December 2010). Symptoms of this GERM that go against creativity: competition (leads to less cooperation) standardisation, (international) testing.
* The declining status of teachers (and the dropout of teachers)

What could be the way forward?

* Re-professionalization of teachers
* Educating ‘changemakers’; Sahlberg states that it’s no use to focus on labour market skills in education, because there will be no jobs for all. ‘If you want a job, invent a job!’. That’s why young people have to be changemakers.
* New purpose of schooling: to understand the world around them and the talents within them.

Comments by:

* Graham Brown-Martin, founder of Learning Without Frontiers. Education is a structure designed to maintain the status quo (such as mass media, such as religion). The digital revolution (Google, Facebook, ..) did not change capitalism, for instance, it confirmed it. Actually, technology is being used to confirm traditional pedagogies and structures. Teachers have to be liberated, and if technology can help, that’s fine.
* John Higgins, DG of Digital Europe. His advice: don’t impose change; give people the tools and change will happen.

Awards Ceremony ‘Open Education Challenge’

Lord Puttnam and Xavier Prats Monné hand over the awards for seven projects that were selected from over 600 candidates from 74 countries ([www.openeducationchallenge.eu](http://www.openeducationchallenge.eu)).

Panel 3 Addressing inequalities through bettre access and lower cost

Impulse statement by Carolina Jeux, CEO of Telefonica Learning Services.

Ms Jeux presents a number of projects developed by Telefonica related to e-learning, digital learning, MOOCs. She is a true believer in digital education; the devices have become cheap, connectivity is becoming a reality, so now is the time for change. She demonstrates the extremely low cost of MOOCs, which makes education more accessible for all.

Comments by:

* Mandia Makhanya, principal of the University of South Africa. Insists on the fact that the quality of the MOOCs depends on the quality of the professors; and on the fact that developing high quality MOOCs is an extra cost for the institutions and thus alsof or the students.
* Lord Jim Knight, Shadow Employment & Welfare Minister in the House of Lords. Mr Knight insists on the importance of cocreative learning between teachers and learners. It is potentially cheaper, might enhance quality (thanks to learner feedback). Allowing for cocreative learning calls for trust in teachers and in learners. He also remarks that, until now, MOOCs are not really a tool for democratization of education, as research shows that those who use MOOCs are the ones that are already highly educated.
* Alek Tarkowski, Director of Centrum Cyfrowe Projekt Polska. Digital does not always mean ‘open’. Mr Tarkowski pleads for openness: free access to content, and free use of content, allowing cocreation and innovation. Resources that are publicly funded have to be publicly available.

Ministerial pannel: The impact on national policy agendas

Panel of ministers was foreseen with participation of the ministers of Education from Italy (Stefania Giannini), Letvia, Luxembourg (Claude Meisch) and Croatia (Vedran Mornar).

Only the ministers of Education from Luxemburg, from Italy and from Lithuania were present.

The content of the discussion was broader than the digital learning focus. It was also about the role and the task of the ministry in education, the autonomy and responsibility of schools; about the importance of language learning; about the need to build bridges between education and labour market.