

Historical Change is Finally Occurring

Higher education and K12 survived several electronic waves and emerged fairly unscathed from the Dot-Com era and from the wide deployment of education technologies. What this means is that the traditional institutions and the traditional corporations (publishers and platform companies) adopted electronic means, but did so to support the traditional institutional structures and traditional commercial arrangements in education. This means that universities and schools districts on one hand and publishers and technology providers on the other serviced the traditional education setting with more efficient and streamlined tools, but that education was not altered in the process. The textbook has drifted toward digital delivery, but it is still a textbook. Likewise education is trending toward blended learning – part classroom-based and part online – but it is still traditional education.

This trend of electronic support for traditional education is beginning to slip in its promise as institutions falter in their ability to more effectively and efficiently progress and engage students at higher rates of success. Four trends are wreaking havoc with traditional education:

1. Students not staying in school, not advancing to college, nor staying in college at necessary rates
2. Students pursuing multiple learning options which might not include traditional education
3. Institutions becoming more expensive and less able to change with, and for, the times
4. Free and open options beginning to proliferate, symbolic of changes to come, but creating noise

Boundary Conditions are Present

These trends can be seen as a phase transition, starting the emergence of a boundary area forming between “education technology” and “information technology” plus “smart big data” in education:

- A. Traditional Education Technology:** Education technology advances services for traditional education, but does not change traditional education, it simply enhances it. Traditional funders will continue to try to bolster this approach because there are known business models, revenue streams, namely sales of publishers’ goods and the licensing of enterprise technology solutions.
- B. Emerging Open Solutions:** Open content and open source solutions in education do not have a coherent business model or promising value proposition, but represent a social and personal desire to see education opened up and democratized. However, in these cases education technology, not information systems, are being used essentially as a protest against fee-based content and solutions sold to institutions or required by institutions for purchase by students.
- C. Individually Intermediated Learning:** Information systems, those that allow multiple options for students to act as free and informed agents in their own education and learning are just becoming possible. In this case, new systems that use capabilities like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Gmail could start appearing. These would act as social networks and identity-based systems that intermediate between the student (as agents) and the range of education offerings from traditional institutions, open offerings, and training options (or sources) for learners.

Changes in Higher Education

Gordon Freedman

Where Investments Are Going?

From a financial and investment perspective:

- Private equity funds are investing heavily in “A,” the **traditional settings** of the electronically adapted publishing models and the electronically delivered learning solutions and platforms.
- Venture funds are flowing into “B,” fractional point solutions and into freemium **open solutions**.
- However, the deeper growth is to be found in “C” the **intermediation services** in learning between students, traditional institutions and open solutions. These are likely to be represented in savvy venture and personally driven investments that link “big data” approaches, if not strategic partnerships, with new solutions designed to work directly with learners.

Summary

There will tend to be several directions in investment and production. Some of those will be supporting (a) the traditional education setting, some will be offering (b) new untested open models, and some will be pointed toward (c) the actual end-user education market (students) as opposed to the education industry (institutions, corporations). The traditional markets (a) are well covered by private equity, while the new, open and freemium markets (b) are well covered by venture firms. The opportunity is going to emerge in the consumer markets (c) where the end user and the large-scale public funds and private philanthropy will need to invest to see actual transformation in education quality and quantity.

What Are the Central Pieces for Consumer Education & Learning Change?

Student Learning Accounts – The learner has no voice in education nor an ability to consume directly products and services to gain credit because there is no social and identity system for them to do so.

Social Support Systems – Students need options outside of education institutions and outside of general social networks (Facebook, Twitter) that allow for social support of learning in very specific terms.

Open Syllabus Menus – Institutions control syllabi while open content floats freely on the Web with no sense of organization. What is needed is a universal open syllabus function that becomes the heart of what is available to be learned in institutions, open offerings and from a range of learning services.

Open Access Assessments – With the proliferation of open content, courses and other services, qualifying learners for what they know becomes essential. What is needed now are very specific and valid assessments that measure learning in full course or in multiple modules separate from institutions.

Conclusion

The future will be built with systems that mediate between learners and providers (traditional and open) and allow pathways to certification of knowledge from traditional and new certification providers that may work in concert or independently from established institutions and providers.