

Transcript:

“This short podcast will, I hope, help you understand some of my thoughts on this subject matter. What I would like to pick up on is basically about the hype and the implications for a term that is continuously being used, maybe abused, and hopefully not misused, is eLearning.

eLearning now is and has been for some time on the tongues of everybody, definitions, tools, technologies, all the stuff you can think of are out there.... on the Web, are increasingly moving on into the Web2.0 direction, speculations on Web 3.0 and yet when we stop and think about it – what does it all mean? And I will come back to that question shortly... And in fact when we come to discuss eLearning, many people simply choose to see the ‘E’ in the eLearning term and forget all about the learning. But we’re all here today because we all firmly believe in education and not just the digital tools and the luxury of the technology which has pervaded silently into our lives.

So if I was seeing you at this particular moment, and you were right in front of me, and I would ask you to give me a show of hands of how many of you use Facebook or YouTube or Twitter or any other social network, I am persuaded that many, if not all would raise their hands. I am also persuaded that if I were to ask each of you individually, some would say that they wouldn’t even remember their life before Facebook.

In reality, you see this is fantastic... Technology is something which we cannot do without... I mean we may not understand it fully, and we may not even exploit it fully, some of us may not even like it – but we USE it, and it’s there and we have learnt to be dependent on it.

But really and truly this is not just about it... I mean this is not the end... it has to be viewed as the means...the means to achieving education, the means to help learning – and what exactly does the term “help learning” mean? What does it all mean to live in this famous or infamous Web2.0, hopefully be part of Web3.0 and take learning to the next level?

Ah well, before I actually attempt to answer that the very complex “help learning?” question, I would like to take a small turn around and take some time to analyse what people out there are saying about education, about learners and about what it means to be a teacher today.

I was recently listening to a talk by Ian Gilbert – for those of you who are not familiar with Ian Gilbert, he is a rather charismatic inspirational speaker, who has published quite some literature on thinking, learning, creativity and motivation. And for those of you who have no idea what the likes of Ian Gilbert and Ken Robinson as well as Daniel Pink, and Sugata Mitra, have to say about learning I have prepared a small clip of some of the highlights from speeches of these people, and I would like to take some time to reflect on some of their thoughts before we actually delve deeper into the subject. (audio file)

You see so all these people were in reality speaking about their ideas and thoughts for learning. We see Ken Robinson who I am sure some of you are familiar with, and Ian Gilbert speak about the empowerment of the individuals through the removal of the linearity issue – the one size fits all, fast food kind of concept. Sir Ken Robinson, is quite a known personality in the field of schooling, creativity, and learning. I have been following Sir Ken Robinson’s talks with interest for some

time now and what he says is quite “Revolutionary” – as he speaks if I may quote him about Evolution of the Education system, rather than a revolution in the system. So when we speak of the 21st century learner, as Ian Gilbert goes on to add, we cannot speak of the individual we once were 10 or 20 or 30 years ago. The people now, the young people we are entrusted with to help nurture their knowledge, aren't the people we once were. There is a shift, the shift is happening and whether we want it or not the shift is indeed towards the “e”. The “e” is pervasive, it's everywhere around us, it's there – we make use of it, the students make use of it, the society makes use of it. So when we speak about eLearning, in reality we're speaking about the learning which reflects the world today. It sounds easy isn't it?

The complex part in reality is ironically in adapting the teaching to reflect the learning. Whether we want it or not, people learn – people learn everyday, anywhere, anytime but most frequently people learn from each other.

That in reality is the whole concept for Web2.0 – people learn from each other... give power to the people so that they can teach and learn from each other. That is what Web2.0 is all about, creating a Web which is made up by the people for the people... remove the idea of a guru who is in charge of making the knowledge available on the Web. That was the Web1.0. Now it is the social – the community which drives the Web and which in turn drives the Web. Web 3.0 is all about Intelligence, or rather having machines apply the knowledge in a format which suits your personal self. So knowledge... created by people and presented by the machine for me, in a way which I can understand and relate to, all based on my own personal preferences and the patterns which I leave behind every time I visit the Web.

But back to where we are now, let's talk, let's get people talking, let's get people to teach people with the knowledge they have. So the Web is this nice tool, with many other small tools, which can help people talk, not just with words but giving them something to talk WITH using every form of communicative device or resource they can think of..

So to come back to our original question of “Where's the “E” in the learning (R)evolution?” – my answer to that is that it is everywhere... it's happening within the evolution of learning – it's communication – it's people learning from people – it's sharing, it's collaboration, it's Web2.0... and so where do we as Teachers fit into this equation... we are the intermediaries, who harness the knowledge, we help filter, we help direct – we help motivate.

In this Web2.0 which is overloaded with information, with useless data, which can be quite meaningless unless we give meaning to it, we are the ones who actually direct our learners. We guide them and we ask them to filter the information they find and present it to their peers in a coherent form.

Ian Gilbert, has just published a book, with the title: “Why do I need a teacher when I have Google?” ahh pardon... maybe we should cut that off and speak in terms of Facebook now...

Don't you think that the title just captures the essence of the problems we are facing as teachers. I think it's a title which can disturb... but which is also meant to stimulate discussion. But Ian Gilbert makes the point that in reality teachers are needed – not to teach but to guide, to educate, to stimulate.

However I do believe that this is easier said than done in many ways. It is easy to say... ok let's guide and let's mentor, but the one thing is that people like nature favour stability, not chaos – no risk taking... it takes a lot of discipline for teachers

not to teach the way they were taught, or the way they perceived they were taught... a couple of years ago, I attended a conference and I was present for a very good keynote address by Professor Tara Brabazon – she was giving a talk at a conference. The conference theme was about “Engaging the Digital Generation in Academic Literacy”, and she also mentioned Google, because this is indeed a post-Google era – but when she described the problems she faced with her own students, and the hurdles they come across when using some of these “digital tools” is that they don’t know what to really look for... they know there is knowledge, it’s somewhere out there, but they don’t know how to find it. And we might get students, who actually think they’re finding the right knowledge when in fact it may be simply the “cheaper” thinking, allowing the Google algorithm to search, filter or sift the information for us and for our young people, when in fact the words we are feeding that algorithm may not lead to the knowledge we aspire to gain.

So in reality when we speak of eLearning, we are not speaking of us having to learn new digital tools, we are certainly not speaking of merely making use of a virtual learning environment or a fantastic learning management system to upload our presentations on... we are not even talking about powerpoint, blogs, podcasts, screencasts, animations, avatars, virtual worlds, simulations, games, social networking – you name it, cause the list is never ending... they’re great tools, most of them easy to use, all digital, all containing the “E” if you want it, but they’re just means...

When we talk about eLearning, we’re talking about learning, about democratising knowledge – we’re talking about teaching how to find knowledge with the tools our learners already have and know how to use. Tara Brabazon also mentioned one point which really struck me during her talk, and I quote “the point in Education, is to move us from what we don’t know, to what we do know”– and that causes a stirring within us ... it causes agitation... and that is the precise moment when learning happens.

So how do we do this? How do we achieve this? A couple of years ago, I attended a course – it was a completely online course, delivered by one of the persons who came up with this new concept within eLearning and I am speaking about George Siemens. The course was about Connectivism and this new form of teaching which shows, just as Tara Brabazon, mentioned, the ways which teachers can use to teach knowledge finding rather than knowledge... using these e-tools, which many students have ready access to...that’s where the “E” lies... and this is all about the – and I quote Sir Ken Robinson here – “Evolution” of Learning.

So connectivism is a new way of expressing knowledge – as Ian Gilbert says.. intelligence is what you do with the knowledge you have...

Another professor I have been following for these last couple of years now is Sugata Mitra, an exceptional man who is a researcher and also what I call an “Educator by Passion” – he has spent quite a few years, carrying out Educational experiments in a number of different countries. Some countries were in fact quite poor, India being one of them and South Africa as well and he also managed to do other experiments in the UK and Italy but the nature of the experiments was fantastic, and well so were the results. So much so, that when he published the results, the evaluators said “These were too good to be true” ☺.

Basically he called the first of these experiments, the “hole in the wall”, because they were just that. He dug 4 or 5 holes in the wall in a number of villages in India, where children roamed the streets, where there was no real formal schooling, and he placed computers in these holes – similar to ATMs. Just like that, computers in

the holes, secured, and with a broadband connection. And he left them like this... in a place where people had never seen a computer – he came back after 2 months... and children – kids - were actually using them – the children, those same children who had never seen a computer were playing games and browsing the Web... without any adult intervention. And the experiments went on – so there was a time when he was working in India and once again, he dug out holes in a wall – you can see he leaves his mark wherever he goes... digging out holes, and placed a computer with speech recognition application. He told the students that they needed to speak to the machine for it to be able to do what they wanted. However the problem was that this was in India, in a rural village where people spoke with a thick Indian accent, and on the other hand, the computer in the hole could only understand English. So they asked him, “What can we do?” and he said “I don’t know” and he left... just like that.... 2 months later, back he was – and his children were speaking to the hole in the wall and they were being understood... somehow they managed to teach themselves to speak in a way the computer could understand. And in yet another experiment, which this time he also performed in the UK and which he called the Granny Experiment, he got a young girl, who used to play football with them in her free time, and who taught some Accounts every now and then and asked her to help teach them BioTechnology ... and in English ... so well she asked: How on earth am I supposed to teach them that?” and he just replied “Well, you do like the grannies do, you just sit behind them and admire them all the time. Just say to them, that’s cool, that’s fantastic – what is that? Can you do that again? Can you SHOW me?” - when these children were tested after 2 months, they got the same pass grades as children being taught biotechnology at a posh school with good teachers teaching them.

So what does all of this mean? All this ties up nicely with what all the people out there are talking about – let’s stop talking about the tools and start talking about people. Ian Gilbert said, you can’t be older than your brain – you can’t give children a one-size fits all education – because there is no ONE SIZE. Ken Robinson said “Stop giving fast food kind of Education... because knowledge does not come in standardised forms...” Daniel Pink talks about motivation: he says “Stop the carrot and stick mechanism – because in the 21st century if we want to target creativity, then this mechanistic approach often doesn’t work and often does harm”. Einstein said “We certainly cannot solve problems in the same frame of mind as they were created.” – we need to change... we cannot be linear, we cannot be narrow in our outlooks – we have to provide the means to look at learning as a problem with many possible solutions... and basically that is all about eLearning – help learning? Remember my previous question? Help learning is all about helping the learners – helping the learners applying what they know, helping learners achieve some intelligence – formal boundary walls, as are sometimes seen within the classroom, kill that... so the solution is : take learning beyond the classroom... That in my opinion is the END... e-Learning, those tools, are the MEANS to achieve that END... we have them, they have them, so let’s move them towards harnessing this knowledge, this is the Revolution I am speaking about, one that will lead to the Evolution... with a capital “E” – Thank you for your time”.