

Rapporteur

Fernando Albuquerque Costa

Introduction

The most outstanding event in Portugal in the area of Education and Training ended with a rap. A creative rap on eLearning and the challenges this new concept brings to society and to education and training in particular. A challenge primarily to the school as we know it today - anachronistic, dull and where learning, in the students point of view, lays far behind "the place we meet friends" - (Wim Veen, Session on New Digital Literacy) -, because in spite of everything, there lays hope in a better future.

eLearning is central in the European agenda and has become one of the strategic guidelines after the Lisbon Summit (2000): to make Europe the most technologically developed region in the world by 2010 (make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".).

Therefore it is only natural that it has come to assume particular relevance in the last years, transversal to all areas and in spite of different understandings and practices, seeking to prepare the citizens for an ever changing society with outlines which are difficult to predict.

How can we prepare for something we do not know? And how can eLearning contribute? This was the motto given by the conference chief rapporteur. Ulf Ehlers presented the conference preliminary conclusions and faced the panel with four challenges. For him three key ideas emerged from the conference:

1st. The need to accept the "change at the concepts' level" and to understand what this change implicates (from the focus on teaching to the focus on learning and on the individuals' active participation on the learning process; from eLearning as knowledge distribution to eLearning as interaction, collaboration, re-

flexion and as innovation strategy and reinforcement of individual and organisational development);

2nd. The need to understand the true extension of what the "the citizens new skills" are and what they implicate from both individual (entrepreneurial skill development, learn how to learn...) and social (learning as a result and a strategy for individual and social development) points of view. Furthermore the need to valorise new perspectives on what learning means as well as new learning types (valorise informal learning investments of individuals, recognise prior learning);

3rd. The need to coordinate and integrate vertically and horizontally: vertically "bring together all stakeholders in a new dialogue on innovation through (e)Learning" and horizontally "bring together digital and social inclusion, individual and societal transformation and competitiveness".

In order to set the scene for the discussion Ulf Ehlers presented four challenges:

- How can Europe be better aware of what the future needs?
- How can the old fashioned (educational) organisations turn into revolutionary innovators?
- How can we equip people to be better managers of their own human capital assets?
- How can we promote access for all, improve usage skills, promote quality of usage?

These four issues will structure this report on the relevant subjects debated. In view of the the quality of the interventions and the recognized merit of the panel speakers, we will refer the ideas that due to their pertinence, innovation or vision may add value to those who decide on these matters.

Forward Looking

On this issue and regarding the preparation of the next generations Wim Veen proposes to try to anticipate the future society, imagining scenarios, being creative and disruptive.

By inventing new business and jobs that not yet exist we can teach young students and adults to deal with uncertainty. Marc Rosenberg agrees that the preparation for the uncertainty of the future is a key issue in an information and knowledge based society. People need to learn how to find, verify, use and share information.

The idea is to build a society where people are “good knowledge seekers and content judges”. Yves Punie outlines the importance of learning not only in the context of the skills required to live and work in a knowledge-based society but also in what it means to learn in the actual and future environments and how those skills should be developed.

About the educational organisations as innovation agents

Wim Veen defends that change must happen not only at a conceptual level but also at a more practical level where the processes that are normally used to equate the educational problems and their solutions. Wim even questions “what the school teaches and how it is organised” based on the logic of offering “the same to all” when it is now clear that this model is totally inadequate for the present days’ demands and opportunities.

Why don't classrooms make more use of the information available on the internet?

This is one of the questions asked by Marc Rosenberg and it is very revealing of the school's strong inability to keep up with the overall technological progress but especially in taking advantage of its huge pedagogical potential in the teaching and learning areas. In other words and as Marc Rosenberg emphasized it is

about understanding “how knowledge can empower schools”.

Endorsing the idea that schools are obsolete Rosenberg argues that by questioning our traditional way of seeing things (“above all it is a cultural matter”) eLearning must be used to lever the desired and “absolutely indispensable” institutional changes. In Yves Punie's opinion these changes can be made by valuing the intuitive and informal ways of acquiring knowledge that the new tools allow (these tools are known as Web 2.0: tools for individual production on the web as weblogs, wikis, discussion forums, resource sharing systems).

About empowering individuals, each individual...

All the participants in the panel agreed with Roberto Carneiro, the panel moderator's idea that intersubjectivity and the development of social competences based on communication and sharing between individuals are the most powerful tools of individual empowerment.

Roberto Carneiro also stresses the importance of metacognitive competences as intellectual tools of critical and decisive importance in preparing the citizen to handle unthinkable quantities of information and the uncertainty of the future (Rosenberg mentions the “good consumers of information”). However it remained clear that it is not enough to make schools accountable for the acquisition of these key-competences. The panel of participants also consider of great importance each individual's actions towards their own development going much beyond the formal learning contexts in a context of promoting the decision capacities and creativity of each citizen.

About inclusion and quality in technologies

Wim Ween defended the idea that technologies alone cannot be the purpose of school. Above all they must represent a means to enhance each one's learning capacity. However it is not very clear how we can promote quality using technologies when – as everyone recognized – one of the main barriers is the user-friendliness of the technologies available today.

The question the panel encountered more difficulty in related with how to prepare elderly people and other less technologically skilled groups of people and provide them with key-competences for a satisfactory integration in today's world. Concerning this issue the panel didn't go beyond wishful thinking working on the idea of a more inclusive Europe, reducing the dispari-

ties in accessing and working with new technologies", "more competent e people", "self-directed learners", people who will have at their availability "more intuitive technologies"...

To conclude

The opinions of a group of young European students on school and technologies were an interesting opportunity to discuss and reaffirm the main ideas put forward by the panel on the role of technologies concerning learning and the contribution of school for more active and creative citizens in order to build a better future.