

# *Changing Expectations of Global Education: Charting a new course*

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*Changing Expectations of Global Education: Charting a new course, Keynote presentation at the: 15th annual IDP Education Australia conference, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 25 - 28 September 2001*

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## Transcript

Full text follows below, but first is an news account of speech

Developing global capacity through international education was the theme of the annual IDP Education Australia conference last week that drew 810 delegates from 35 countries. Jacqui Elson-Green reports in the 03 October 2001 issue of Campus Review, courtesy of Campus Review, "Australia's Higher Education and Training Newspaper", with factual corrections inserted in italics by COL:

With delivery of educational products now worth around US\$27 billion in pure international trade terms (from the WTO), it is not difficult to see why predatory entrepreneurs and cash-strapped vice-chancellors find this service an attractive option, Dr Raj Dhanarajan told the conference. ("Educational products" includes international students attending campus-based programs, distance education offerings and online learning.)

Dhanarajan, president and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning, delivered the keynote address at the conference providing insights into global education and its future direction.

He said that since the end of World War II, the growth of world trade, the emergence of internationalised knowledge systems, changing patterns of communication, penetration of technology into the social fabric of communities and the promotion of internationalism as a cultural value was driven more by social than economic concerns.

The last decade, however, has seen an acceleration of the process in another direction with the baton moving away from the developmentalists to the marketers of global goods and services - forces which increasingly influence the way economies behave and impact on national cultures.

Just as the purpose, function and values of universities have been changing so too has the nature of learners, Dhanarajan said, with some 82 million people, mainly between the ages of 18 and 25, now studying on campuses throughout the world. This figure is just a small proportion of the age cohort which globally may number as many as 560 million.

Discussing the importance of providing education to students who cannot study full-time on campus, Dhanarajan said that despite criticisms, the desire to meet a social good and serve a diverse clientele was very much the driving force behind the growth of distance and open education over the last three decades.

But he said that with educational delivery now generating around \$7 billion of international service trade for the US (from the WTO), and education ranking fifth in its earning capacity, only the naïve would believe this trade was meant to be for just social good, despite exhortations from many that this is the case.

Dhanarajan quoted Michael Gafney, CEO of one of Canada's newest virtual universities, Landsbridge who recently commented that "we are not here for charity or for the public good ... our investors are looking for a return and we have to deliver high-quality programs that meet their demands".

He said the emergence of a global economy based on knowledge industries, free trade and open markets has created opportunities for businesses to profit from standardised products and services and many in higher education believed the same could be done for that sector.

Standardised curriculum using English as the medium of instruction could be developed especially in science, technology, mathematics, languages and business studies at a few centres and be distributed globally.

"Online provision is the opportunity they cherish," Dhanarajan said, adding "this is further reinforced by fears of competition from offshore brand name providers."

Getting online has therefore become the "buzz" of the higher education sector concerned first with keeping out or up with the competition on the one hand and exploiting new opportunities on the other. Dhanarajan said that developing knowledge products at a few places to support the trade in education has a few people worried, with some players fearing that private companies might simply hire well-known staff from the most prestigious campuses and offer an "all-star" degree over the internet.

Many would have us believe that virtual education in a globalised world will replace all that is held sacred as good practice in teaching and learning, he said, noting "they will be wrong".

In concluding his remarks, Dhanarajan cited Dr. Glen Farrell in his introduction to a recent COL study, "The Changing Faces of Virtual Education" (Glen Farrell, ed., 2001, [www.col.org/virtualed](http://www.col.org/virtualed)): "What virtual education does is to provide citizens with a greater diversity of educational models that will, in one way or another, address individual needs. At the same time it will also enable millions of others who currently have no access to learning to have that access - after all it is their right."

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Full text: Changing Expectations of Global Education: Charting a new course - by Gajaraj Dhanarajan.

1. I feel privileged to be invited once again to your conference and to share some thoughts with you on matters that are of mutual interest to you and I. My relationship with IDP goes back to its very early days and it has been an enjoyable association. IDP and its subscribers have done much to promote the cause of global education and in the process, you have changed the way this part of the world looks at learning, teaching, trading in education and education in development. When you invited me in 1996 to address your annual gathering, I had just assumed responsibility for The Commonwealth of Learning. You treated me gently by suggesting that I speak on something very ordinary like quality assurance as it applies to off shore education [a field I used to have some knowledge of]. This time, perhaps for my many sins during these past few years, the organisers have suggested that I "provide insights into global education and where it is headed, in particular, exploring how international education is building global capacity on a national, institutional and personal basis and, as a related theme, how the internet and new communication technologies are contributing to the global development of global capacity in education". This is a very tall order - very few people these days want to speak about expletives like globalisation [fearing personal safety] and far too many speak about virtual education. I have to do all this in 15 minutes while sharing this platform with some of your great academics and academic administrators. Therefore, if you notice some nervousness on my part, you will understand that this is because of the daunting challenge of sharing thoughts with an audience such as yourselves, who know so much about globalisation and its impact on education and new forms of educational delivery.

2. Globalisation is not new; its history is long. There are many who would say that even before the start of the First World War, aspects of economic globalisation were already happening through cross border movement of goods, capital and people. Between that history and today's situation there was also another kind of globalisation - a kinder one, which enabled the establishment and growth of agencies such as the United Nations and its many sister organisations that are development centred rather than market driven. Since the end of the Second World War, the growth of world trade, the emergence of internationalised knowledge systems, the changing patterns of communication, the penetration of technology into the social fabric of communities, production, consumption and the promotion of internationalism as a cultural value, have all become part and parcel of this socio-economic evolution of the planet. The concern, at least until the late seventies, was more social than economic. But as you all well know, the last decade has seen an acceleration of the process in another direction. The baton during this acceleration seemed to have moved away from the developmentalists to the marketers of global goods and services. These forces increasingly influence the way economies behave and have begun to impact on national cultures. ". . . (They) Increasingly shape economies and national cultures. They present a political challenge and while (they) enable a certain universalisation of power they also concentrate such powers in the hands of a few

multinationals. The new structures and protagonists of world power are relatively anonymous; they lack public accountability and often operate without controls." (Caring For the Future - a Report of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life.) The technologies of electronics, computing and information that you and I are learning to cope with and use seem, in many ways, to be at the heart of this acceleration.

3. While most of us will admit that globalisation has brought about fundamental changes in the way we do things (the movement of capital and information, the conduct of trade and finance, the consultations on science and technology, the delivery of mass media and education as well as the movement of drugs, diseases, environmental pollutants), the jury is still out on whether we are better or worse off for it. Many of those who own and run mega, multinational corporations would say that it is an unmixed blessing. It has the potential to boost productivity and raise living standards everywhere, it will enable businesses to exploit bigger economies of scale and thereby reduce the cost of goods, and capital can be shifted to the most competitive of environments for greater return. On the other hand, critics of globalisation will claim that increased competition can destroy jobs (in high wage environments), push wages down in the rich economies; and in the developing ones, it will encourage a "race to the bottom" as governments reduce wages, taxes, welfare benefits and environmental controls to make themselves more competitive. Pressure to compete will reduce the ability of governments to set their own economic policies. Support for social services such as education will suffer.

4. Depending on your politics, globalisation is either the best thing that has happened to human kind or it is the most selfish and self-serving manifestation of our greed. Consider three things on the global agenda, which in one way or another, will have an impact on our mission as educators:

i) Deregulation in the first instance is at the heart of economic globalisation and more lately information globalisation. In both these areas, especially with the arrival of the new technologies, national governments have seen a very visible reduction in their powers. A good example as most Malaysians found out during the Asian market crisis of 1997, was the movement in the value of their currency. That movement of the Malaysian currency had an unsettling impact on national economic policies. When the Malaysian Prime Minister declared that his country was poorer by 20%, only the naïve could believe that loss of wealth did not have an impact on the provisions for education. Governments today are less able than before to choose policies in their own national interest. Even worse could happen.

ii) Labour - globalisation in this sector is basically a (global) competition among work forces. Labour does not and is not allowed to migrate freely, but capital flows freely to where competent labour is cheapest and least subject to regulation. This, some would claim, has an upsetting effect on the balance between employers and employees. Globalisation has made it easier for firms to shift production overseas and substitute foreign workers for local ones. The result is reflected in the greater vocationalisation of our education systems and, more importantly, puts pressure on the systems to provide retraining for those whose jobs are lost and to develop training programmes in communities where jobs move into.

iii) Universalisation of culture and knowledge. There is a fear that globalisation is bringing about the dominance of knowledge by a few countries/actors and their power. These actually do replace the traditional ways of internationalising knowledge systems. Intellectual property conventions are firmly in

the hands of a few. The twenty-first century is expected to be a knowledge-based one - livelihoods will be dependent on the control of airwaves, hard and software. One important strategy to develop, maintain and frequently restore competitiveness is through more and continuous education. Our political leaders have certainly discovered this.

5. Just as our ideas on the purpose, functions and values of universities have been changing over the last few years, so too the nature of learners. Some 82 million young people, mainly between the ages of 18 and 25, populate our campuses today. Except for a small proportion, most are full-time students. Their lifestyles allow them to adjust to the demands of the institutions they study in and to the call of faculty as to when and where learning is to occur. The lucky ones amongst them are able to express a limited choice in the courses that they can enrol during the three- or four-year period they spend on campuses. The not so lucky, mostly found in the developing world, may not even have that choice; their studies and the time-frame are strictly prescribed for them. They are expected to subject themselves to a set of assessment sessions whether or not they are ready for them, and if they do not meet some unstated requirements they are considered failures. This tradition is long-standing' say about a few centuries old. The 82 million or so young people, who subject themselves to this process was a small proportion of the age cohort, which globally may number as many as 560 million.

6. Further, in the new knowledge based global village, at least in economically well-developed nations, learning can no longer be the monopoly of the 18-25 age group nor can it be limited to full-time study. An increasing number of students can be expected to be part-time, employed, above 25 and making a late entry into higher education. In addition to these, many who are today's non-participants in education will need to be brought into the fold if we are at all serious about offering all people equal opportunity. Such a diversity of learners will require courses to be organised so that they are flexible, can be studied off-campus and credits received to be portable. These students arrive at study with skills (to learn by themselves), knowledge (of themselves and what they want) and experience (to enrich curriculum and the learning environment). In other words, they are as much contributors to the learning as they are receivers of knowledge. In this (knowledge) society, everyone will participate in education or training (formal or informal) throughout life. It would be a society characterised by high standards but with low failures. Such a society will offer a seamless canvass for individuals to start their learning anywhere on the canvass and exit at any point. To switch metaphors, they will be on a ladder of continuing attainment.

7. Despite criticisms, by and large, the desire to meet a social good and serve a very diverse clientele was very much the driving force behind the growth of distance and open education throughout the last three decades. The Commonwealth of Learning was very much a part of this movement. Moving knowledge to suite the needs of the learner rather than moving bodies to suite the convenience of institutions seemed to respond to all of the requirements for learning and training in a knowledge based society. It [distance and open learning] resulted in, at least in the tertiary sector, providing access to over two million individuals who would have otherwise been denied that access to learning. It is a social good. Its rediscovery again, through the digital environment, by a vast majority of tertiary institutions while welcome does beg the question what forces are driving the interest in distributed, virtual and on-line learning? Is it for reasons of social good that the academic world is embracing this innovation or are there less socially compelling

reasons? To get a sense of this, I browsed the Internet, where during the last two years there has been a lot of traffic on the subject. Even casual observers of the discussion could not fail to notice that both the enthusiasts and detractors of this innovation identify a number of conflicting forces at play. Among these, the three that caught my eye, in their order of importance are:

i) The Market: More than any other force, the Market seems to be amongst the most compelling of reasons for many providers of education to get on-line. This is not surprising. Depending on whose statistics you accept, the total global expenditure on education can range from US\$1 trillion (WTO, 2000) to about US\$2.1 trillion (Smith, 2000). The second figure seems to include all of the money spent by corporations and others on training as well. If the WTO has its way, then it is very likely that within my lifetime, trade in education will be open to global competition and is expected to surpass all other trade in the services sector (Chambers, 2000). Many observers of the WTO expect this trade to be part of the negotiations in the next round of talks. It is therefore not too difficult to see why predatory entrepreneurs and cash strapped vice-chancellors find on-line delivery an attractive opportunity. In pure international trade terms, the service is worth around US\$27 billion and major suppliers of the trade are nations of the G8 community, with the USA and France leading the pack. Generating around \$7 billion worth of service trade for the US, education exports rank fifth in their earning capacity. Only the naïve will believe that this trade is meant to be a social good despite exhortations from many that this is indeed the case. As Mr. Michael Gafney, CEO of one of Canada's newest Virtual Universities, Landsbridge, recently said, "We are not here for charity or for the public good . . . our investors are looking for a return and we have to deliver high-quality programs that meet their demands".

ii) Globalisation and Competition: The emergence of a global economy based on knowledge industries, free trade and open markets have all created opportunities for businesses to profit from standardised products and services internationally. There are many in higher education who believe that the same could be done with education. Standardised curriculum using English as the medium of instruction could be developed especially in fields such as science, technology, mathematics, languages and business studies at a few centres, and distributed globally. On-line provision is the opportunity that they cherish. This is further reinforced by fears of competition from offshore brand named providers. Getting on-line has therefore become the buzz of the higher education sector concerned first with keeping out or up with the competition on the one hand and exploiting new opportunities on the other. Developing knowledge products at a few places to support the trade in education certainly has a few people worried. For example: Levine (as quoted by Seeman, 2000) who fears that ". . . in the next few years we're going to see some firm begin to hire well-known faculty (from) our most prestigious campuses and offer an all-star degree over the Internet. So they will take the best faculty from Columbia, Oxford and Tokyo Universities and offer a programme at a lower cost than we can" and, Noble (as quoted by Young, 2000) who, despising current developments, says that ". . . the current mania for distance education. . . (bears a) striking resemblance to a past today's enthusiasts barely know about or care to acknowledge, an earlier episode in the commodification of higher education known as correspondence instruction . . ."

iii) Technology: itself has become a central force in driving the on-line agenda. The belief that technology as an empowering tool is all that is required to develop on-line courses is fairly widespread. The potential of the technology to support the development and delivery of learning and training is truly amazing. Innovations in the WWW and structured information tools can assist in personalising content and

improve customer relationship management systems. As David Porter (Porter, 2000) recently commented, there is now "the opportunity to implement learning systems based on knowledge management principles that will require us to design the 'units of learning' in a more granular fashion than we have done in the past." The new technology environment will enable governments and their institutions to respond to growing demand, flexibility, response time, cost, etc. [at least that is the theory].

8. To find out if the theory actually manifests itself, not too long ago we at COL commissioned a second study on Virtual Education entitled: *The Changing Faces of Virtual Education*. The purpose of the study was to consider what has been happening in the field of virtual education globally and what kinds of lessons are there to be learnt. The study team, led by my colleagues had this to say about two months ago:

i) An emerging vision which will make past aspirations such as making learning to be centred around the use, catering to the needs of new learners, enabling communities to learn together, generating their own knowledge and distributing it, unbundling the many functions of centrally orchestrated arrangements, the opportunity to use large databases of knowledge in the creation of courses and programmes at a much lower cost are all real. All of these are doable without eroding the authority of existing institutions. This is a vision that is gaining considerable ground at all levels of governments [international, national and provincial] as well as some parts of the academic environment.

ii) A few myths: like any other innovations, 'virtuality' has given birth to a few myths about it. For instance: (a) going virtual is not a purely technical issue, which it is not, on the contrary, technology decisions are only a very small part of it; (b) virtual education is no more than an add-on to regular business when it is more than that [virtual education requires some fundamental shifts in the way institutions behave]; (c) it is cheaper, which is unlikely, unless some economies of scale are derived; and (d) virtual education will replace campuses and teachers, which is unlikely.

iii) A few risks: the real risk in going totally virtual is the danger of marginalizing large parts of our population from easy access; this is not just between countries but also within countries; marginalizing portions of the academic community is another risk; the danger of downloading learning costs to an already financial overburdened student community; certainly in many developing

iv) A few opportunities: Perhaps the greatest opportunity of all is that of enhancing or improving access. In the process, there is also the opportunity to use the power of the technology to 'add value' by improving the quality of the learning environment; developing healthy and mutually beneficial partnerships; sharing, utilising and preserving global diversity of knowledge and making some modest money.

10. Colleagues, let me once again thank you for your patience in hearing me through this one. I am neither an expert on globalisation nor virtual education; however, in between the two is a real every day world in which all of us have to live and work; it is a world full of contrasts and contradictions. It is a world where the rich is getting even richer, the poor poorer; the information 'haves' getting even more and speedier information, those who do not, getting less and slower. The gap between those who have and those who do not, widens. Given these contradictions, many would have us believe that virtual education in a globalised world will replace all that we hold sacred as good practice in teaching and learning. They

will be wrong. What virtual education does is to provide citizens with a greater diversity of educational models that will, in one way or another, address individual needs. At the same time, It will also enable millions of others who currently have no access to learning to have that access. After all, it is their right.