

is, will we be ready for them.

The Rise of information technologies

Currently, 26% of American college classes are conducted over, or are supported by the Web. As broadband technologies improve, we can expect that number to near 100%. Of even greater impact, though, will be the rapid rise of online distance education. Industry is already going for web-based training in a big way, and universities in English-speaking countries are not far behind. As of this year, for example, students with internet access at your school could decide to drop out of your class and get the credits from Harvard University instead.

The impact on higher education will be tremendous,... and catastrophic. Better college education will be available more cheaply elsewhere, with no limits on enrollment. Famous, big schools, with online programs, especially those in urban areas, will experience untold growth, many of whom will be business rather than government affiliated; while small non-urban schools will go out of business or be amalgamated into larger schools. I predict that in the next 50 years, 60-80% of our colleges will disappear.

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Trends in Higher Education in Asia

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Since my field is education rather than just ESL, and since I have been a teacher in Asia for the last 20 years, I have been doing research in trends in higher education. I believe that there are three trends in particular that will change our lives as educators. The first is the coming boom in adult education; the second is the rise of information technologies, and the third is the way new theories of learning and motivation are changing our classrooms.

Changes in Pedagogy

Our view of motivation and learning has altered drastically in the last twenty years, partly due to research and partly due to social change. Classroom-based education is changing in accordance. The traditional view of the student being an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge by the sage teacher, is ancient. In the West, at least, this pedagogy dates back to the 11th century, where it was developed to train young boys to be monks. Fortunately, however it is becoming extinct, albeit slowly. Why? Because the needs of our students are changing.

Whereas once, knowing information was the main objective of education, information has become cheap. It is available everywhere, at an instant's notice, and the person who has memorized these details is of little value. Instead of people who know information, our society needs people who know how to do things, and the key to gaining that knowledge comes through experience. The use of praxis in teaching, or experiential education, is becoming more and more necessary. As a result, schools are providing simulations, internship, and field trips; discussion and projects have become common class activities; and students and teachers have become learners and facilitators.

Pat yourself on the back. We English teachers have been using experiential education far longer than most other fields of education. We encourage our learners speak, read, write, do role plays, and go abroad on home stays. As Chuck Sandy pointed out in an excellent article on this site, it is no longer a question of choosing the "communicative approach" over a "traditional approach." That discussion is over. No "sensible" teacher can afford not to have learners communicating in the target language.

In fact, in so many ways, control of learning is going from the teachers to the learners. That is all right. It is a little scary for us to lose that control, but let it happen, and find classroom approaches that facilitate this transfer. The days of dependent learners are disappearing, so work on building learner autonomy as well as language skills.

The Adult Education Boom

Population demographics indicate that we should expect an adult education boom to occur in Asia. Twenty years ago, in many English-speaking countries, when a population bulge (the baby boomers) hit the workplace, millions of adults began seeking higher education. As a result, in America for example, the current average age of a college student is 29. Our Asian colleges are still generally filled with 20 year-olds, but since our population curve is twenty years out of sync with that in the West, and since we are facing the economic recession many Western countries faced twenty years ago, we can expect more and more adults to return to school. They will be ready for us. The question