

Hi everyone,

I would like to start the discussion around the financial potential and consequences of digital education with a brief introduction of Rumble's paper: 'Social Justice, economics and distance education'. Below this summary, I wrote some ideas for our discussion.

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In this article, Rumble argues that our society should not be moving from the 'era of the nation-state, where the State took responsibility for the well-being of groups' towards the market-state where 'the State is responsible for maximizing the choices available to individuals' (Bobbitt, 2003, p. 230). Rather, the state should ensure that there is a redistributive tax system where all people have a chance to live a fully human life; and that part of this would use cost-efficient distance education means to ensure that education is provided cheaply and flexibly to meet the lifelong needs of some 9.4 million people in 2050.

Providing education costs money and in the 1960s and 1970s distance education was seen as a way of increasing access to education (a government duty) and, at the same time a cheaper option of meeting demand (a government need).

In the 1980s and 1990s the consensus that the state had an obligation to educate its citizens was challenged by the belief that investment in education (at least beyond a basic level) is a matter for the individual rather than the state. The shift in emphasis from public to private funding was fully congruent with the notion of distance education. This libertarian (or neo liberalist) thinking to reduce government expenditure while simultaneously increasing consumer choice have led to a gradual transfer of costs from government to students.

In opposition to libertarianism and liberalism, Honderich thus proposes a morality of humanity that has just one fundamental principle: 'to try to save people from bad lives —this is the stuff of our moral obligations and rights' (2002, p. 53). Education, along with other things that define a 'good life' (2002), characterised by 'a decent length of life, a certain material quality of life, freedom, and respect, and knowledge in place of ignorance' (2002, p. 52), is a fundamental human right. Furthermore, access to education in its broadest sense is a lifelong need.

Education is set to become an even bigger business than it is already. Not only will there be more children and young adults in need of schooling, but also demand for both higher education and lifelong education will expand.

At the end, Rumble says that 'in a world where millions of lives are 'bad lives', and where education is a means to economic betterment, better health awareness and power through knowledge, there is a moral case for ensuring that education is given to everyone, irrespective of their economic circumstances. Making appropriate use of distance education will almost certainly be the least costly and most efficient way of doing this. In this context the issue of who pays for it, and how much, are key concerns'.

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This paper reinforces my perceptions that distance education is not an option anymore; rather, it is already an economic need that will redefine the education

landscape. Aligned with this idea, I would like to share some thoughts that could be nice (and hopefully useful) for our discussion:

1. From a national perspective, teacher placement has been an old problem especially in large countries like USA and Brazil. Due to the lack of financial and other resources, rural and small/not attractive districts are hampered in their ability to offer higher salaries or better working conditions to attract the most highly qualified teachers. In the paper, Rumble uses what is happening in USA as an example of the huge disparities in the resources put into education, 'where there is a high concentration of poor families, average school achievement is lower than in countries where there is a more equal class system'(Rumble, 2007). BTW, an interesting movie showing this situation in USA is "Waiting for Superman" (<http://vimeo.com/20095459>).

The bureaucracy that is involved in our national education system is perplexing. ((

2. From an international perspective, e-learning could narrow the rich and poor gap. 'Distance education has been seen as a way of making more education available to more people, often to those who are socially disadvantaged'(Rumble, 2007). In the knowledge society, we should not accept living in silos. We already approached a point where all this 'silo' demarcation is totally irrelevant, especially in the field of knowledge. Students raised on the Internet recognise this to be true. It is harder for the current leaders, which are adults educated in the traditional schools, to grasp this new perspective.

3. The new landscape for education: The 'itunisation' of the education, either using iTunes as a model for selling digital education or invent an iTunes dedicated for that. It is always important to remember what happened with the music market from the moment Steve Jobs Apple started selling a portion of records for \$.99. As Rumble affirms that, 'education is set to become an even bigger business than it is already. Not only will there be more children and young adults in need of schooling, but also demand for both higher education and lifelong education will expand' (Rumble, 2007).

4. Benefits and disadvantages for the Universities for being early adopters of Digital Education. Despite the fact that early adopters usually face high prices to develop their e-learning programmes, there are many reasons to become one, for example the possibility to see something to evolve, improve and have substantial influence over the development of a standard. In the other hand, the risk of neglect the importance of distance education is perhaps to witness the slow death of the traditional education from the wrong side, as what happened with some companies in the newspaper business.

That's it. I welcome everyone to join in this brainstorm exercise ☺

For future comments:

Technology is the driver and because of its omnipotence it creating some interesting side-effects.

*Voluntary charity is never **likely to be as efficient or fair as a national welfare system.***