Drop Out Prevention using eLearning and Homeschooling
No One Left Behind – Education for All – Well Educated People without Schools

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Abstract

The US promotes their "No One Left Behind" policy, Hamburg in Germany changes its multi-graded-school-system to only ONE school for all and UNESCO discusses an "Education for All". All are good starting points but especially in western cultures an increasing rate of school drop-outs and in Asian cultures an increasing rate of juvenile self murders draw an alarming picture of our future – Our Children!

What causes children which have an educational perspective to drop out or even self murder them?

How can modern educational concepts like e/b-learning help to prevent it?

A student's motivation is much higher when he is able to find himself back in lessons - when he is a vital part of his own daily schooling experiences. eLearning and home schooling as well as learning in small flexible family style groups offer all this. Beyond strict time and place boundaries there is a place for children – an individual educational place for everyone. The Internet and Computers offer us new dimensions and a good perspective for our children, even in rural areas with less or no schooling ability.

Looking back in history shows us that many great discoverers and developers often faced the same problems like modern school drop- outs. First when they were able to live beyond strict school boundaries they developed their real potential (i.e. Albert Einstein).

We don't need sterile school buildings, made to control people instead of giving them their self confidence. We need flexible educational institutions and teachers which are more partners of a student self-determined learning process

This paper will discuss some possibilities to help our children to develop their potentials during their childhood. Some of it might sound futuristic or like a vision but let's give it a try.

1. Drop Out and Self Murdering

'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory.'

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 26. United Nations, 1948.

Dear Teacher,
My son is slow in learning and thus it is impossible to force him to learn. So, I'm taking my son off with me. We live in a rural area and look after other's livestock for a living. It's hard to take my son to the school all the time. Bye.

Quote from a mother's note to the school administration in Bayantumen soum, Dornog aimag, Mongolia

1.1. Facts

In 2003 a survey within the World Bank stated about 3 times as much countries with a constitutional guarantee of education then without[1]. Even then there is an increasing number of students not practicing these rights.

1.2. Causes

Poverty is the main reason for drop-out. A 2004 UNICEF survey estimates about 14 Million children out of 44 Million in former communist countries are living below national poverty lines[2]. The rate in Central Asia is even higher. Especially poorer countries aren't able to keep their under-funded school system free even it's guaranteed by their constitution.

Lack of motivation is a growing factor also in highly developed and well situated industrial states like Germany, Belgium, US, Canada, ... About half of the students measured by the OECD Pisa study were bored by the traditional schools in their countries[3]. School is for them a place where they don't wanna be. It leads to bad academic performance, but also to disruptive behaviours. Teachers mostly react inadequate to these problems with punitive and repressive attitudes which leads even to horror scenaria like happened in Germany and the US where Students kill their teachers and classmates.

Disappearance is a factor in each society regardless of their social status. Even in Great Britain Ofsted reported in 2004 about 10.000 students which were lost by the system. It might be that they are still in an educational surrounding like homeschooling or e learning but nobody kept track about this.

Tokokyohi (like its called in Japan) is a synonym for the existing school phobia or even refusal. Since the 80's its an incredible growing factor especially in far east countries like Korea and Japan. Students get burned out by the extremely demanding and alienating school system[4]. It's followed by an increasing number of juvenile self murders.

In all societies, literacy is an determining factor of drop-out. While reading programs try to form a better literacy among all students, modern media like computers, video and gaming consoles support the passiv consuming habbit of people instead of empowering them actively for the modern society.

1.3. Conclusions

Traditional ways of teaching have failed in our demanding world. Nevertheless education will be the basic key to a successful live beyond poorness also in future. Therefore new ways of teaching have to be found or even better already existing and approved educational methods have to be utilised beyond fixed and traditional school walls and boundaries.

Let's discuss some actually very old and now newly awoken modern ways of education and its benefits for the students and their families.

2. Un-Schooling our kids

> *I remember growing up feeling like I could try school if I wanted to. But I never remember wanting to.*
>
> *Laurie Chancey*

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[1] Katarina Tomaševski, "Globalizing What: Education as a Human Right or as a Traded Service?", in *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Winter 2005, Vol. 12(1), p. 2 fn.

[2] UNICEF-ICDC Social Monitor Report 2004. Florence: ICDC, page 9.

[3] For data, see www.pisa.oecd.org

[4] British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol. 21, No.1, 2000

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2.1. Home Schooling

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that over 1 million children are home schooled and the number is on the rise. Still many countries won't allow officially to home school children like German. Often it is depending on the officers which have to make a courageous decision against traditions.

Reasons for homeschooling[5].

Reasons for homeschooling	Number of homeschooled students	Percent	s.e.
Can give child better education at home	415,000	48.9	3.79
Religious reasons	327,000	38.4	4.44
Poor learning environment at school	218,000	25.6	3.44
Family reasons	143,000	16.8	2.79
To develop character/morality	128,000	15.1	3.39
Object to what school teaches	103,000	12.1	2.11
School does not challenge child	98,000	11.6	2.39
Other problems with available schools	98,000	11.5	2.20
Student behavior problems at school	76,000	9.0	2.40
Child has special needs/disability	69,000	8.2	1.89
Transportation/convenience	23,000	2.7	1.48
Child not old enough to enter school	15,000	1.8	1.13
Want private school but cannot afford it	15,000	1.7	0.77
Parent's career	12,000	1.5	0.80
Could not get into desired school	12,000	1.5	0.99
Other reasons⁴	189,000	22.2	2.90

Table 1$^\perp$: Number and percentage of home schooled students, by reason for homeschooling: 1999

Homeschooling takes in account the individual personality and abilities of each student. Biggest problem in homeschooling was long time the quality in teaching. Rich people were able to hire qualified teachers but poor people – often not been taught by themselves – had big problems to catch up with international standards.

Still qualified home school programs aren't affordable for all but more and more non profitable initiatives take care of under-privileged people and their needs. Especially for families with an internet access these financial boundaries are much more open now.

Homeschooling also empowers complete generations as teachers and students. It is often the start for a lifelong learning process which has been initiated by the student itself.

As most Home Schools doesn't interact in a fixed unchangeable time schedule they are much more flexible to follow students interests without loosing track to required qualifications in our modern society.

2.2. Family Style Mixed Groups

Maria Montessori propagated at the beginning of last century family and mixed aged and even better mixed cultural learning groups. Meanwhile many schools all around the world are following her educational methods with great success. No more time boundaries or fixed curricula for an average student.

It is best for students if they can learn with their own pace and in a prepared surrounding which inspires and motivates learning. The students absorbent mind will help to polarise and normalise them[6].

2.3. eLearning

The availability of internet access even in rural areas changes not only the world of living but also the way and possibilities of learning and teaching. Disabled people who

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[5]   The Education Statistics Quaterly Vol.3 Issue 3:
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_3/3_3/q3-2.asp

[6]   http://www.a-childs-place.com/montessorimethodhistory.html

are often treated like outcasts in different societies have now good chances to show their full potentials. Sick students won't miss anymore lessons if the teachers enable them to follow up via internet by putting and preparing their lessons also for and online presentation. Students in repressive political systems have an open door for unfiltered and uncensored information, to build their own mind.

eLearning provides students with a learning environment without time and locational boundaries. Therefore it is predestined to be utilized for all kind of educational purposes.

3. Educational Visions and Perspectives

What about a Boat, a Bus, an Open Learning Center or even a Network of Open Learning Centers all around the world which educate our children towards a global citizen.

Combining all that in mentioned above will lead us to a new empowering way of learning and teaching.

In Cambodia the eLearning-Bus tours through villages to facilitate wider access to ICTs. It is reaching orphans, street children, out-of-school youth and other disadvantaged people and empowers them by using ICT equipment[7].

3.1. Self-determined Learning

A student who is able to determine his/her own learning path and speed will benefit more as someone who has been forced to do a specific thing. It is like in real life. Things we like to do will be finished more successful then those we don't like.

Drop Out prevention caused by students attitude towards schooling has to start here[8].

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[7]   UNESCO Bangkok Prepares for the World Information Summit, by Ellie Milleisea: http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=3233

[8]   See, for example, *Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation*

Two factors are playing a key role:
1. a sense of belonging within the school community
2. and participation in school life

Also quality of education is very important.

> It appears from the surveys and from international experience that a perceived or actual lack of quality in schooling is a key factor in truancy, irregular attendance, and dropout. (UNESCO, 2005).

Students are very often bored by the school and its "static" personal, which pull out their lesson plans they made after they've finished their universal studies. Most likely only an individual curriculum for each student will reflect their specific needs. This requires active teachers to fulfill this additional workload. Regular school curricula are made for an average student which causes bigger conflicts for those not been average. Also they need to be able to self-determine their complete learning process. To start a lifelong motivation for learning, learning itself must be incarnated by the student itself. It must be him/her who wants to learn and not another authority forcing them to learn.

Drop Out Prevention needs actually to start also in a regular school context giving students better opportunities to self determine and self direct their own learning process.

I.e. In Montessori Schools students are learning in a prepared learning surrounding with no time or knowledge limitations. If you visit Montessori Classes you will realize that the multi aged children in a group work on their individual theme/subject at the same time but within their own pace. The themes/subjects students work are chosen by the student himself. The teacher isn't stand-

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(OECD, 2003); and *Education At A Glance*, (OECD, 2004).

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ing in front of the classroom but helping students individually like a coach.

Classrooms of a Montessori School don't look like sterile empty blue concrete boxes, they are filled with lots of stuf to be discovered by students of all ages. Each material in a classroom exists only once, which encourages students to interact socially with each other and it is developed as a self-learning material where students can check their own results (self-controlled material)

Illustration 1: Illustration 1: LisAndi Home Charter
http://www.lisandi.com

Illustration 2: LisAndi Home Charter
http://www.lisandi.com

3.2 The Role of eLearning

eLearning is predestined to enrich a self-determind learning environment with an open door to the global world of knowledge. It is also an ideal medium to reach people which suffer from illness, disability and even poorness.

Decentralized and mobilised IT-Learning Centers could provide rural areas and underprivileged students with an access to unlimited learning resources and qualified teachers, providing an IT-Infrastructure combined with qualified personal. Of course present lessons (e/b-learning) would help students to build up also better personal relationships to their schoolmates and teachers/coaches.

The initial costs of the IT-Infrastructure seems to be high, compared to a traditional school. Actually most of those costs can be reduces ie by:

1. using 1 Server 20-50 thin clients
2. Open Source Software
3. Linux (Edubuntu[9])
4. ...

Students will be able to learn from home using the internet. Dropouts don't need to be confronted with their "boring" school building or punishing teachers. 100% physical abilities won't be a necessity for participating in lessons. Handicapped students could participate equally with non-handicapped using modern technology to communicate.

eLearning will play a major role in future worlds. One small Example:

LisAndi Home School provides international and thai students with a prepared learning surrounding. Every student has access to internet using his own or a provided laptop. Students are learning in small mixed age groups, helping each other. They are using the biggest schoolbook of the world – the internet. It provides tons of multimedial lessons from all around the world. Students and their families schedule lessons individually. Often there is more intensive learning in House on rainy days, while on sunny dry day the students get scheduled for outdoor learning activities at the beaches, mangrove forest, or even sailboats. As long as students will have the possibility to access the internet or even their small privat intranet of Laptops,

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[9] http://www.edubuntu.org/

they are able to study at any place. Wireless Lan and free hotspots as well as time boundaries aren't blocking the learning process. Several learning groups share teachers, which means the teachers are travelling to the learning places ("schools") instead of students. This is also a big ecological factor and shows respect of natural resources.

Communicational Skills get trained using IRC, Chat, VoIP and Videoconferencing with other students worldwide. Homework Assignments get be finished on time using Computers and TYPO3 as a centralized e learning Intranet.

Each student has its own personal curriculum and he/she learns how to control the learning process and manage assignments by themselves. For several subjects LisAndi Home School is using prepared open source or freeware software solutions. But usually lessons will be designed using the material – video, flash, text, multilingual, audio, ... content provided in the internet itself. It is one of the main tasks of a teacher to teach students ho to use the internet for learning and providing them with qualified links.

Until now, all students were able to switch back to their normal school live in their home countries without any problems. Some even skipped one grade. Often students come to LisAndi Home School because the students had major difficulties in regular school settings.

3.3 Schools on the Go

Do we really need a school building? NO! Do we need teachers? NO! Two questions and an answer lead to another question: Who is educating our children then? Actually our students get mostly educated outside the school, especially in high developed countries with lots of consuming potentials like TV, VSD DVD, Video-Games and other electronically toys. It is an illusion that teachers in western societies are still in control over those students. Actually they lost track. Unfortunately in many Asian systems the process seems towards the same problems like they are already existing in western societies.

Schools on the Go can help to reduce lots of conflicts. A School on the Go is a temporary place of education for a specific periode of time, location and thematic. It can be anywhere. Teachers reside no more in a school building. Their offices can be anywhere, even at home. More important is, that teachers will be available for students – online and also for personal consultations. They need to be highly qualified in alternative educational methods (Montessori, Freinet, Summerhill, Petersen, Wild, ...) and communicational skills. Teachers should coach their students on their educational track.

Lessons and activities and complete lesson plans will be prepared online in a collaborative initiative, where students, parents and teachers work, plan and teach together. Family like integrative groups will lead students to experience cooperation and collaboration throughout generations in an early stage.

Exams and evaluations will take place individually after finishing a specific tasks successfully. The goal is no more the unified student but therefore a unique student with its individual character. Preparing children to live a successful life as global citizen in harmony and respect of natural resources.

Modern Communicational Technology – especially the internet – unlink students from traditional schooling places and link them into a global worldwide learning space. From any place of the blue planet they are able to update their individual records

Like eLearning "Schools on the Go" aren't fixed to a "hard coded" time schedule. Dropouts can easily be reintegrated into the learning process.

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3.4 Project Learning

Instead of structuring learning in subjects, lessons will be categorized in projects. Lessons which will be organised in project units integrating multiple subjects under one theme make it much easier for dropouts to get reintegrated. They are not depending on one subject or teacher. Also those lessons could be scheduled more individually.

In project-based learning, students work in teams to explore real-world problems and create presentations to share what they have learned. Dropouts can easier be reintegrated as their specific abilities can be taken in account. This learning approach has a bigger effect on students then traditional methods. They increase the self-direction and motivation of students. Deeper knowledge of the subject results improves research and problem solving skills. Students conduct research using a variety of sources, from the Internet to interviews with experts.

> Ask Seymour Papert, renowned expert on children and computing, why students are turned off by school, and he quickly offers an example:
> "We teach numbers, then algebra, then calculus, then physics. Wrong!" exclaims the Massachusetts Institute of Technology mathematician and pioneer in Artificial Intelligence. "Start with engineering, and from that abstract out physics, and from that abstract out ideas

of calculus, and eventually separate off pure mathematics. So much better to have the first-grade kid or kindergarten kid doing engineering and leave it to the older ones to do pure mathematics than to do it the other way around."

In Start with the Pyramid: Real-World Problems Motivate Students by Diane Curtis, http://www.edutopia.org

Project-based learning prevents dropout and especially school absenteeism. Students who get actively involved in a learning process rather skip lessons or feel bored. It improves positively test scores and reduces disciplinary problems.

> "In real life, we don't spend several hours at a time listening to authorities who know more than we do and who tell us exactly what to do and how to do it," she says. "We need to be able to ask questions of a person we're learning from. We need to be able to link what the person is telling us with what we already know. And we need to be able to bring what we already know and experiences we've had that are relevant to the topic to the front of our minds and say something about them."
> In Start with the Pyramid: Real-World Problems Motivate Students by Diane Curtis, http://www.edutopia.org

Computer Technology and eLearning combined with homeschooling and project-based learning help to prevent dropout and help to reintegrate students into a lifelong learning and knowledge-based society.

Mobility and new methods are asked for future educational tasks as well as open minded teachers who like to innovate learning environments and empower students for the 21 Century.