

School on Air: The New Possibilities for Radio

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Sub-theme (Track) 4 - Future Directions, Spaces and Possibilities in ODeL

Trends and Issues

Multiple trends influence education and training in most countries. Recent years have seen structural reforms in education and society, diversification of resource-base and privatization either as a result of or resulting from an even more knowledge-intensive economy and the increasing integration and interdependence of world economies. Higher education, in particular, is seeing the delivery of education unrestrained by existing campuses and a hazy distinction between on-campus instruction and distance education because students use the internet wherever they are and whenever they can. Technology does not reduce governments' budget for higher education. However, it can avoid extra costs and allow more effective and convenient service and consequently creating a market for higher education that will give students much greater choice.

Learning, working, family and social life is converging. Hence, both curriculum and delivery mode put academic content in real-world context. Courses are becoming affordable to students not because actual cost is low but largely because opportunities are easier to access and more directly targeted on individual needs. Inherent in this emphasis on affordability and student choice, the effectiveness of technological delivery systems must be measured by criteria that center on the learner.

Various issues are likewise confronted by the current model of conventional, campus universities. Foremost of which, is cost. Expenditure for this form of higher education is consistently escalating thus rendering it too expensive for the majority who aspire for university training. There too, is the persistent shortage of trained academic staff to create university campuses fast enough to meet potential demand from an incessantly growing population.

Despite the cost, people need to become lifelong learners to remain employable so that attendance of mature and part-time students continue to expand in university systems even at very high cost and often inappropriately served by campus instruction. Consequently, a growing number of students, who wish to combine work and study, are looking for more flexible means of obtaining a degree.

Amidst these trends and issues, opportunities abound as well. Technology is a major feature of conversion and competition. Rapid developments of telecommunications-based information and

communications technologies will be a key instrument to steer further transformations of campus universities.

Technology is not important for its own sake (Williams, Paprock, Covington, 1999). However, its effects are important. Technology is a tool – the procedures, systems and machines, which solve problems or make life simple. It is in itself a dynamic force that should be used for the benefit of education. They should not be ends in themselves but means to extend the opportunities of learning and make learning more efficient and flexible. New technologies, notably the Internet and telecommunications have the potential to provide mechanisms of forming academic communities.

Developments in technology alter the structures of industries. Education, as an industry, has traditionally been an icon of constancy often remaining resistant to technological change. Yet, a significant change in education, from the conventional classroom to distance education to e-learning and now mobile learning, is currently being observed. It is without doubt that even more changes in open and distance e-learning can be expected along with technological development and adoption.

Technology can shape educational institutions by its impact in several aspects. First, it has the power to broaden the borders of distance education and the training industry. Geographically, it has already done so. Second, desktop publishing, a popular method for the production of course materials on demand, has lowered the entry barriers to distance education and diminished the advantages of operating on economies of scale. Third, well-resourced students can access online courses and this increase in buyer power expands the market for distance and e-learning. Fourth, several public and private-sector institutions have developed multimedia educational materials that have brought down the cost of in-house course materials development. Finally, the burgeoning of television and radio networks may decrease the power and exclusivity of broadcasting authorities. In a very cut-throat marketplace, these networks may extend affordable air time to allow universities to broadcast course materials. The multiple impacts of technology basically imply that distance education and e-learning is an attractive segment with vast competitive advantage in the industry.

School on Air: From vision to reality

Radio is among the original, low-cost, flexible teaching medium available. Millions of people around the world who cannot read or do not have access to television have a radio set. In developed countries, almost all households have at least a radio. In the Philippines approximately seventy-two percent (72%) of the adult Filipino population depend on the internet and television for information, twenty-three percent (23%) prefer the radio and newspaper and only five percent (5%) read books (Dela Rosa, 2011). While the idea that radio can provide cheap and easy access to educational materials for distance learners may be arguable because of these statistics, consideration must be taken to include other technologies that complement radio.

A case in point is the weekly program *Buhay Manggagawa sa Radio Iskool* (Workers' lives over Radio School). The educational program was a broadcast of DZUP 1602, the AM radio station of the University of the Philippines, Diliman, every Wednesday from 6:00 to 7:00 pm. It is one of several programs under the "Radio Iskool concept" supervised by Professor Mel Estonilo of

the UP College of Mass Communication and aired by the station under memoranda of agreements (MOA) with various academic units of the University of the Philippines. The “Radio Iskool concept”, which could literally translate to “Radio is cool” or “Radio School” has invited fifteen (15) Colleges to co-produce educational radio programs from Mondays to Fridays to fill up the station’s 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm airtime.

Being a program jointly produced with the School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR), *Buhay Manggagawa sa Radio Iskool* focuses on labor education of both workers and employers. It has a classroom discourse format where a specified topic is discussed with the host as facilitator and/or content provider. Resource persons/guests were tapped to further enrich the discussion and analysis, and share current practices in the workplace.

In its July 13, 2011 episode for example, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for workers was the subject matter in focus. The guest resource person was Ms. Shirley Castro, Vice President of Universal City and former training officer Occupational Safety and Health Center. The radio program, usually divided into four (4) – fourteen (14) minutes segment discussed the subject matter along the following lines:

- General Principles
Hazards in the workplace must be recognized and one alternative control for hazards is the use of personal protective equipment or PPE.
- Problems
While PPE is an essential protection for many hazards, it may not be sufficient. There are several things that may prevent it from being adequate. These are:
 - Effectiveness – one must have the right /appropriate PPE for the identified hazard
 - Fit – poor fit may result in inadequate protection or be uncomfortable to users and discourage wearing PPE
 - Use – PPE must be worn even if it is perceived that hazards may not be present at all times
- Regulations and Standards
Occupational Safety and Health Standards of the Philippines requires the use of PPE and places the burden on the employers. Employers must provide the appropriate PPE base on workplace hazards. PPE must be in good working condition and a good fit.
- Requirements
 - PPE must not create additional hazards to the workers using them.
 - The materials of construction should hold up under reasonable use – withstanding conditions for which they are intended.
 - PPE must be comfortable and where possible, style and appearance are important for user acceptance.
 - PPE must be cleanable and training should be provided to users regarding maintenance.
 - Ensure PPE performance by using certified PPE.

Buhay Manggagawa sa Radio Iskool constantly ends with a recapitulation of major discussion points and a reminder to listeners to keep themselves safe and healthy as they perform their work. Also, it reminds both employers and employees to ensure the welfare of everyone in the workplace.

DZUP has a 5 kilowatt power with signal strength over the whole of Metro Manila and the nearby provinces of Pampanga in the North and Laguna in the South. Its reach is further enhanced by live streaming through dzup.org. This website is maintained in partnership with Diliman Interactive Learning Center (DILC). Archiving is now underway for listeners to gain access and download previous episodes of any radio program of DZUP at their convenience.

The convergence of radio with internet technology has provided access to an even broader market – that of radio listeners. By live streaming of radio, students who were not able to listen when programs were actually on air may download or record them to fit and coincide with their study patterns.

Radio, as space for delivering instructional materials to distance learner, is cheap, easy to use, and generally educationally effective. But radio, bundled with new information and communication technologies, can provide a new enabling space for open, distance and online education. However, because it is familiar and not an exotic technology, radio has often been ignored or undervalued by educational decision makers. With DZUP paving the way, the path could be navigated through its radio school concept.

Crossing the chasm

For universities, the interdependence of the university's technology and the student's technology is an increasingly important linkage. Besides massive connectivity through the technology of the internet, universities have now expanded their operations to include radio stations and broadcast special events on television. Students have eagerly and easily adapted to new telecommunications technologies. More and more students are experiencing radio and television bundled together through tele-radio. This phenomenon and rapid developments of telecommunications-based information and communications technologies provide prime mechanisms for ushering in changes in delivery models for educational institutions. By enhancing the quality and attractiveness of courses it can usher in even more students. The widening set of interrelationships between distance education and the media, information technology and communications industries can affect and effect not only structural changes but likewise present additional opportunities to universities.

To date, most universities still carry out a large majority of their teaching activities on campus. With student demands outweighing the capacity of conventional universities and governments aspiring to see higher education become less expensive, there is a need to develop an approach that will enable universities to become more efficient and sufficient by taking advantage of information and communication technology infrastructures that are now rapidly being adopted. Technology-based instruction that abolishes geographical, authority and time boundaries will create new educational systems. Such new education systems will put together real-world and

academic concerns and provide students with wider and more affordable choices. Hence, the strategic challenge for conventional universities is to change from campus-based, teacher centric delivery to a student-centered learning productivity model.

For governments, the challenge posed is the need to develop policies that will change funding approaches to support students rather than institutions. Governments must also seek relevant quality assessment procedures for higher education that will work to appropriately measure learner-centered delivery. Over the years, government tended to exercise increasing control over universities. Technology-based delivery models will be difficult to control. Thus, the acid test will lay on governments' and universities' abilities to survive the turbulent stage of technology-based education systems.

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