Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

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Lifelong Learning

Definition

Learning is a very different animal than teaching. By teaching we mean that a curriculum is set, its definitions, structure and process is well understood by students and that its outcomes are defined. Learning, particularly a lifelong learning is very different. It is always partial and incomplete. Its structure, process and progress is tuned by the background of individual students. Its outcomes therefore can never assured to create a common understanding of the subject matter being investigated. All we can hope for is some partial understanding about the discoveries made during the course of an inquiry at a point in time.

The key to a sociable lifelong learning (in a democratic society) then would seem to point to the ways in which people with an common interest may be included within the course of an inquiry, like this one. To paraphrase an ancient philosopher (Charles De Montesquieu in his book *The Spirit of the Laws*); Our laws of education are reflected in our principles of government. Should an inquiry, particularly a government inquiry, achieve success in attracting and including large numbers of citizens in its process, we can say that its learning has been successful. If it achieves only to attract submissions from a small number of experts over a short period we will soon see that its learning is too limited in its scope and interests to have any chance of devising a broad social understanding.

The difference, in modern terms, may be considered as the difference between institutions of teaching and institutions of teaching. In Australia, like most western democracies, we have many modern institutions of teaching- one for every science, each with its own special terms of reference, concepts of judgment, and curricula - but as yet we have no *modern* institution of learning. An institution which, when a particular inquiry begins, can provide its very different students with an understanding of a process that is inclusive of their many differing perspectives and ideas, and ends with their common understanding of the lessons learned. Most importantly, and this is the hardest part for people with entrenched beliefs about their National political institutions, one that provides a relative context for their inquiry's lessons, in an archive *outside* the four walls of their functioning silo.

Taking this argument to its logical end, this particular inquiry has the opportunity to help put some substance on what is now a global search for a modern institution of learning.

I won't go into any great detail about the ways in which all this might be effected. My experience of these types of inquiries leads me to understand nothing about what may happen after this submission is accepted; not even that it may be read.

Let me simply point to the three areas of institutional interest where, without a thorough understanding of each and the possible relationship between, no modern institution of

learning has the slightest chance of being recognised. Each evolves at its own speed in isolation, with never the time to understand how, by taking an common interest in their social relationship, they may adapt to better complement one another.

The first is what we normally class as *media*. In particular the National voice; the ABC. All influential media, as the term is commonly understood today, is mass media. It is massed by format – TV, radio, print, web, etc. Each comes with its own set of principles nd techniques. Each evolves at its own speed, usually in isolation, with a common aim – to produce and push the content that represents communication out the door in a regular manner, on a regular basis.

The fastest growing part of media today centers around the Web and in particular, something that is recognised as a 'virtual classroom'. Most education institutions today use the rooms as a place to store the curricula and learning objects that relate to short courses; to a short learning. In DEST-speak they are sometimes called Community-of-Practice web spaces; a place to run an inquiry, share information and store learning objects. Similar forms of media can be seen at the ABC domain. They are called chat rooms and used to answer and record questions generated by broadcast programmes. Regardless of exactly what form they take and what they are used for, each may be considered as a useful tool to support a quick learning or a short inquiry.

The second area of interest is to do with understanding IP networks. By this I mean to describe the effects of Internet Protocol technologies. Specifically, the area that will create the greatest change in attitudes towards telecommunications and media over the next 5 years is a technology called Voice over Internet Protocol, VoIP. To comprehend how it will effect all global communities, an inquirer must understand that VoIP is just another part of the Internet and a low bandwidth application at that. Effectively, it can move the economic use of telephones, from being used as a point-to- point and person-to-person way of communicating to being used to support global teleconferences. From there it is a very short hop to 'porting' any community conversation as a global radio programme, which can be recorded and archived on a web site.

To give some idea of its economic effect. In Australia, teleconferences are simply too expensive for an average community to afford. The cost for a national teleconference is (indicatively) around 60c/minute for each participant. In the US, these costs have already reached around $A50/ month for 5 participants talking 24 hours a day! It is unlikely that the average Australian community will see this type of cost for a couple of years, due to the lack of (retail) competition in our market, and the lack of national buying groups for education institutions. But eventually it will become possible. As it does, not only can we expect to see it being used as way to extend the average communities chat room, but by its use we may expect to see a new form of web space. This one will support the learning media created by Communities-of-interest that stand between our institutional silo's Communities-of- Practice.

The third area of interest is in the art of Archiving and its associated science of Classifying. The point that needs to be made here is that as the application of VoIP technology is gradually evolves and becomes understood, the mental division between voice and everything-else-IP will crumble. This creates a great problem (and great opportunities) for groups of specialists that today live in very separate silos – ICT specialists, on one hand and all sorts of 'other' media people, on the other. The best illustration here may be to compare between the mindset of librarian and that of any organisation's information officer a CIO.

There are all sorts of shades of gray here, after all the two professions are converging as (web) technologies develop. But to simplify we can say that librarians are only interest in the past and a CIO is only interested in the present. A librarian will look at trying to help their community get access to global information resources just as much as a CIO will be trying to ensure the right level of security for their organisation's information assets.