

Reflections on Open Education Interview, Amsterdam 28th March 2030

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We all urgently need a new class of personalized knowledge & learning management tools to help us navigate towards our future competencies.

Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.

Plato 427-347BC

Preamble: This interview, one of a series of twelve reflection interviews with notable policy-makers and motivators, will be published in the context of the upcoming global conference “**Learn 2030**” and the texts will be included in “Conference Track 6” which addresses the question: “**Did we once have the foresight to plan our future skills and competences – a critique of how to look ahead with a degree of certainty**”.

Interviewer: *As you know I am holding a series of 10 interviews which will be published individually, but I will also make a synthesis of key thoughts for the foresight track at Learn 2030. To start us off, what, in your view, were the main milestones that led us to our current style of learning?*

Educationalist: Thank you for starting with an open question. For me, the answer is very clear, and I think the current trend began in 2013-14 when, and here I give credit simply to causal serendipity. At that moment we witnessed an upsurge of new hardware tablets that had surprisingly good battery autonomy and the open android operating system. The price and timing was perfect and they were bought in masses. As a consequence people were released from the desktop for most of their compute-chores – including learning. This was the same moment in time that there was a sudden increase in the acknowledgment of open educational resources. The two combined to give impetus to what would become a new sort of paradigm for learning i.e ubiquitous - which simply means you can study “anywhere, anytime”.

Interviewer: *So who recognised the potential coming out of this serendipitous moment ?*

Educationalist: Almost no-one (so called) “important” at the time. Of course many researcher and liberated educationalists could see what was happening, but they were rather powerless to make their case as (at least in Europe) the Member States had total control on their curricula and teaching practices. The lack of an EU mandate to push forward creative, innovative ideas was stifling. Some countries were however experimenting and recording successes with so called *avant-garde* educational practices. Finland was particularly notable and became noticed for achieving high-scores on international metrics for educational outcomes and was also at the top of the rankings on advanced internet readiness and usage. They, before all others, saw the full potential of bringing together the huge information resources on the internet, accessible through a set of open platforms, and their educational policy makers took a gamble. Finland can be given the credit for seizing the moment by mandating their curriculum editors to fully acknowledge a new paradigm for learning. It was the Finn’s who decided to embed open educational resources, attribute credits for informal skills acquisition and to provide the necessary certainty for technical investment in new tools.



Interviewer: So what happened next in your view?

Educationalist: Finland launched a tender to develop the “Plato”, “Columbia” and “Magellan” class tools. Whoever had this notion is long forgotten but it was another of the serendipity moments in educational history. “Plato” was the tool that Microsoft and partners developed to capture “how much you know”, “Columbia” was the tool developed by Google to harness and direct search for structured, accredited knowledge in any language, in any subject and at any level. “Magellan”, of course, was the not-for-profit, open source link-up with “Wikipedia” and “Europeana” that challenged the muscle of the big enterprises and that was secretly backed by Apple. The pace of development was incredible. Within a few months free “apps” were available on all platforms. Advertising took a back-seat role and there was a “viral” take-up by students of all ages.

Interviewer: It sounds perfect, so what was missing ?

Educationalist: Well clearly policy-makers had to respond and quickly. In the EU, education ministers quickly put together a plan to incorporate some of these new tools into teaching practices at primary, secondary and tertiary classrooms. It also dawned on Ministers across the EU that formal “establishment” based education could sooner or later be supplanted by an anarchy of private and sponsored education, especially for an “upper tier” where students would effectively design their own learning paths and that they would likely continue this for process for the rest of their careers and life. So a power struggle emerged between the classic old-guard and the new educational impressionists. Industry groups then decided to acknowledge and accept the portfolio’s generated by accredited “plato-class” tools, and they published (on Plato) their in-house training projects which made them visible and index-able by Columbia- and Magellan-class tools. So the stage was set for a convergence of the tools-sets.

Interviewer: So why was there a further delay ?

Educationalist: In a word, “establishment” again bit back. A real luddite-type moment that lasted for several years. Undermining new technology was rather easy since at the primary and secondary level you could easily plant doubt in the minds of parents. Distrust and fear that you might just mould and shape your child into something regrettable or less than optimum was the main motivation used by the doubters.

Interviewer: And in your view what was the key moment that unfroze the confrontation ?

Educationalist: Undoubtedly the realisation in 2020 that you could not simply ignore the fantastic results achieved by students who had embraced “Plato, Columbia and Magellan” tools. We were also in the 3rd generation of tablet computing, the 3rd generation of the navigation tools that had now started to merge functions and provide a personal platform that expressed the competencies, value, and abilities of the whole person. The sheer weight of minds that were contributing, refining and endorsing course structures was overwhelming and the rather feeble, unjustified arguments of the “establishment”, crumbled.

Interviewer: So what have we really achieved in the past decade?

Educationalist: For me, the most important aspect is that whatever your age, competence or skill-set, you can have your own personalised, accepted and accredited status. Moreover, this is certainly not a static status since your navigator tool will guide you through the vast, existing and ever expanding knowledge banks that humankind has now built. So, starting with the choice of navigator at the age of 3 to 5, and most likely a choice made by parents is just a boot-strap. Every one of us is able in some way to some degree and we can all contribute to the community of learning. We can add our nuances of interpretation, our ways to overcome misunderstandings, our realisations. We are now able to preserve these (

usually) innermost thoughts and insights, for others to use. This adds a completely new dimension to our future potential since we can stretch us all, all the time.

Interviewer: Thank you for your comments, I've enjoyed our exchange and your insights. What are your final comments on what has been achieved ?

Educationalist: Well, of course, I can also use my navigator for fun. To explore topics I hear on the news but know little about. I can start at a low level and if I understand well, then I can increase the level until it starts to feel like “hard work – no fun” or just simply continue with a light-weight browse, and continue my fun. I do this regularly and explore obscure topics to chat with my mates in the bar. They do it also.

On the serious side, I have now captured and secured accreditation for everything I learned from the age of 5 until my current 55 years. It took a while to get accreditation for the pre-2010 stuff, but it was actually possible. I've also left plenty of information on how to go about it to make it easier for others with portfolios and backgrounds similar to mine. Right now I have a very complete digital learning portfolio that I can legitimately use to proforma into a CV, or a career history, or simply allow (with appropriate permissions), my prospective employers to browse at their leisure.

On an even more serious note. There are billions of lives of experience, out there, and accessible on the internet. Which of them are speculative, false, true ? How do I segregate imagination from reality. How can I learn if I can't discriminate between fact and fiction, real and imagined, proven or scurrilous. Even worse, I need to be able to work across linguistic and cultural boundaries in order to get to the truth. Clearly the development navigator-class multilingual, search and link tools 15 years ago were crucial to help us find “stuff”. As were the learner class tools that helped to gain credit and to structure our learning process – sometimes aligned and sometimes mi-aligned to known pedagogical methodologies. It was also possible to track newly founded, emerging or risky research areas and like-minded, like-competence people to collaborate with. Lady luck, and her best friend serendipity played their part, as did the policy-makers, the industrial “muscles” and (eventually) the educational researchers. We can thank them all for getting us to the place we are now.

What puzzles a little bit is, that despite these fantastic tools and the liberation formal settings and formal institutions, we have “chosen” to maintain the “classroom” paradigm albeit in a rather modified form. I think that we are making a conscious choice to stay within a structured process that, in turn, helps formalise our thoughts and our understanding. In essence the promise of anarchy lost out, but formality got somewhat liberated. We all gained. Now we have to look at where we go next.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one.
John Lennon 1988*

References:

1. **Plato** (pedagogical & curriculum assistants)

A tool to guide individuals through a set of learning experiences. Based on being usable in multilingual, multicultural, multi-competence and multi-disciplinary dimensions. It is intended that this tool and its derivatives are life-long companions that record learning experiences, embody achievement, and advise on increasing level of educational outcomes. Soon after Plato.v1 a suite of tools began to evolve in a global context. Open standards emerged in terms of user-interfaces as well as well as API's to link with formal educational institutions around the globe. By 2020 these tools had evolved to their 4th generation. Evolution has now slowed which, in turn is an appreciation of maturity and acceptance.

2. **Columbus & Magellan** (OS) (structured, accredited material searchers)

A class of tools that helped the user to find, retrieve and progressively index learning material. Materials are classified in terms of “factual-intensity” ranging from speculative to multiply-proven. In addition to search and retrieval the tools also incorporate the accreditation modules that enable people (students and teachers) to contribute new, modify or enhance existing materials. These tools strategically linked to known accredited resources such as Wikipedia and Europeana and were able to gain the “blessing” of academia and institutional teaching establishments.

Imagined by David Broster 28th March 2013