

Short Communication

TODAY'S E-EDUCATION WORLD AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A. S. Guha*

The educational well being of society also ensures a moral and social commitment to it. The opportunities of education are missed out by teeming numbers in underdeveloped countries and regions of the world. To plug this lacuna and to build bridges between such hiatus, models of education in consonance with the philosophy of lifelong education must be persistently adopted. Consistent models will help in devising methods to attain the objective of continuing education.

Institutionalised learning which is campus based, teacher based and degree based has an aura of sacrosanctity about it. The fetish for securing the prescribed marks has actually traumatized student and parent alike. Many students who leave school or college as dropouts or are unable to attend them due to a complexity of reasons feel hopeless, lost and isolated. To break the barriers of such isolation is the avowed objective of education goals, reconciling opposites and paradoxes in society. People, who are disadvantaged, do not deserve opprobrium.

Rather, on the other hand they need compassion, help and empathy. Education is a powerful medium so as to integrate and narrow down the differences between the traditional and the non-traditional, the rural and the urban the old and the young, gender differences, established methods of pedagogy and innovative or 'new' methods. The classroom has no boundaries. It can be created and typified also in newer settings and contexts. This can in very good measure reduce time, space and distance.

Lifelong education is learning at any time one's life, at any place or pace and to recreate opportunities for those who have sadly enough missed out on them. This is the dimension of educational contiguity and continuity which can attain objectives of:

- studying need based courses
- studying vocational / professional courses

Learning, not studying is the philosophical maxim today substantiated with the phrase: "EDUCATION FOR ALL". The onus is undoubtedly on the learner who strives to be independent and autodidactic. At the same time educators

will have to manage and handle new teaching contexts and mediums. The lecture method of teaching may then be construed as only one of the means to the end. Learning is then a pleasure the level of it is attainable, only when the learner is able to comprehend its avowed objectives, and applicability.

How then are we to create newer, finer contexts of education? The philosophy of education is wide-ranging, complex and multitudinal. Professional courses assuage the hunger of select and even elitist target groups. The so-called 'non –professional' courses have to be contextualized in the light of the oft talked about professionalism and vocationalization of education. We have in my opinion to be very careful in the usage of such terms as more often than not they tend to fragment the holistic concept of education presenting 'narrow' frontiers to the privileged few, learning then is :

- to know
- to do
- to think and act
- to learn, how to learn
- to live together

Academic courses which are not popular or frowned upon create or lead to divides and tension. Education and its management must then reduce tension or polarities cycling at the same time what may be described as a platform of opportunities. Learning paradigms must not only create such opportunities but must also break the barriers of isolation, hurt and loneliness. They must give a beacon of hope with guts and feeling. Societies which are de-sensitized must look to education as not only a reflector of light but, as a true means to enlighten individuals with the spirit of knowledge. Knowing something, being informed about it lies at one end: applying that knowledge lies perhaps at another and constantly there are attempts towards reconciliation of such dialectical opposites and differences.

Beginning with literacy at the grassroots level to higher education, the emphasis must always be on pedagogical methods which have fresh approaches, are interesting and innovative rather than simply generating information and

* Officer on Special Duty; IGNOU Institute For Vocational Education & Training (IIVET), Shillong

recording such activity on paper for the satisfaction of higher authorities. The following terms and expressions in new educational contexts are significant:

- learner autonomy / independence
- learner contiguity
- learner continuity
- lifelong learning
- taking responsibility for one's own learning

They help in attaining wholesome educational objectives with the help of course of zealous educational policy makers and planners. The management of education must be planned cautiously and systemically.

In the overall framing of the ideas enunciated above distance education helps in narrowing the barriers of education if not actually breaking them. It also helps in capturing learning situations, which are in conformity with the spirit of continuing and lifelong education. Distance Education and Open Learning keeps the very spirit of education alive thereby stultifying old attitudes, recreating them in new contexts re-establishing them with complementary and innovative devices such as tele-teaching, audio visual aids, teaching via internet facilities etc. The compartmentalization of education has been broken and the degree bias attenuated due to the emergence of Distance Education and the Open University as very viable, effective and composite teaching learning systems. Teaching and learning have a mutuality and reciprocity. We have to establish such basics of educational processes if we have to view teachers and, learners in new and hitherto unexamined roles. One such is the invisibility of the teacher whether he/she is a course writer, an audio visual scriptwriter or a counsellor and manager. This invisibility pushes the learner to an independences and autonomy, when he/she needs help, go to the mediators in the system who exist in the form of educational facilitators. The strengthening of Correspondence Course Institutes in the traditional Universities will transform them into Distance Education Directorates following the pathways of the Open University methods of education. This will be an opportunistically created situation where the chances to learn will be sufficiently there for the aged, adolescents, adults, women, housewives, working men/women etc.

This is the contiguity, the time place and space continuum of education which I largely hinted at earlier on. More and more educators must learn to vigorously experiment and innovate; must also attempt to autonomize learning which is at its best when there is a high level of motivation on the part of the learner. Yet the learner always needs attention, help, guidance fostered by a spirit of empathy.

The empathetic connection between the teacher and the learner is a must; it stimulates the concept, indeed the logic of teaching learning which at this point of time in the traditional

bodies of education suffers from a very disquieting fatigue. Such fatigue needs a shot in the arm and a fillip to look at bold ways of learning. In seeking to achieve this educational systems cannot be hermetically sealed. The prescriptive point of view must go in order to develop learner pointedness and friendly learner perspectives.

What the educators want may not always be important, what on the other hand is the need of learners and target groups is paramount and as such require critical examination.

Now we come to the emphasis of training as an educational objective. To be trained, assumes a great significance here and distance education methods of pedagogy have radicalised the concept of learning for training and upgradation purposes. Teacher education, higher education and Management education can be thrust areas here. Working people need updating in their working environments from time to time, in order to be informed of the world of work and the holistic principles that govern work and environment. Distance Education, the augments of part time studies, is very convenient here.

Distance Education and Open University teaching/learning have made daunting forays into hitherto unexplored areas of teaching and learning, such as science education and technical education. The exploration of distance education into the area of management education has been one of the higher points of its experimentation. For example, the IGNOU in India has a very popular MBA programme, which has as its target group-working people with professional/managerial and supervisory experience. This is a breakaway from traditional management education, which in different management institutions of the country has as its target group young graduates. Further this may also shape the way for new avenues, professionally for the learner.

If Correspondence Course Directorates of universities in the country (India) begins to offer management courses, these will no doubt be popular, through the distance education mode. However they will have to ensure the following:

- Course Quality
- Innovation in teaching/ learning
- Cost effectiveness
- Flexibility regarding duration, eligibility, examination etc.

Such courses may also be categorized specifically for the following target groups:

- young graduates without work experience
- working professionals

The former hypothetically, should take care of employability and the latter of training/professional needs. The conventional universities in the country must, come forward in this regard to give a chance to learners who are not able to make it in

Management Institutes because of fixed criteria and severe competition. These attitudinal changes in the very ethos of Management Education took place and shape in the non-formal system of education though remaining at the same time in the very sphere of higher and the University system of education. Again, offering courses via the distance educational system will have to take into consideration the 'new' contextualisation of education systems accounted for above. Technology as a teaching-learning factor and the media will be the compendium of instruction and learning. The other way of looking at the problem defined here will be to prepare modules for professionals on specialized areas. These may be short term, capsule courses. In such a manner, we will be able to ramify the existing nature of management education and take it to learners who desire to be trained in areas of knowledge, pertaining to their work situation. Thus, we can have the following model/ approach:

- Category I – MBA for graduates with reference to employment /campus recruitment etc
- Category II- MBA for working people
- Category III- Capsule courses for working people of short term duration: Say 2/3 months.

Both categories I – II will adopt the modular form in the sense that they may contain a series of diplomas reading to an MBA degree.

Management Education is thus a work force in new areas of education because of the 'training' factor cited above. It can be made very exciting and effective if distance education methodologies are applied to it creatively. The science of distance education such as well written and well edited quality study material will surely be an inventive device coupled with audio-video conferencing and good audio video tapes. The Philosophy of education which is now gradually taking shape into a dualistic principle can further radicalize higher institutes of learning by introducing management education/ professional education/vocational education via distance education methods. Learning when it contains a treasure is indeed a pleasure and defies circumscription.

In short, what we will aim at is – more opportunities for learning, more sites for learning, more methods for the delivery of learning and the key factor underlying such evolutionary processes is flexibility (Calder & Mc Collon 1998).

Education especially through the aegis of Distance Education is becoming more and more industrialized in the corporate world of today. Learners buy courses and institutes 'sell' them. But the word of caution is that this market approach should not affect quality services and the commitment of the teacher or educator. Once this is compromised then educational institutions private, public or even governmental will degenerate into educational 'shops'.

The Corporate World is making forays in the area of education today. With Corporate Social Responsibility becoming a

major concern the corporate sector is making interventions in the form of vocational education and training and skills development. The target groups which cannot enter the formal education sector for reasons beyond their control can be targetted for skills building depending on an individual's aptitude and hands on skills. This has become a 'substitute' for conventional learning to procure degrees. It is now felt by the government that those who may not have access to higher learning can go to vocational training for which they have an aptitude or flair. This is a very important and significant matrix as the entire focus on education is given a cultural shift. The degree bias or for that matter acquiring a diploma is also attenuated.

Thus, there is gradually an intersection between industry and academia. Corporate Houses and Social Entrepreneur Groups such as Aircel, BASIX India, BASIX Academy For Lifelong Employability (B-ABLE), IDBI Mutual, Indian Welding Society (IWS), Indian Society For Technical Education (ISTE), Rustomjee Academy for Global Careers, National Academy of Construction, Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS), Domestic Workers and Shelter Home Associations, Don Bosco Technical School etc are making such interventions in the arena of education to take it to the most disadvantaged groups of the society as well as trying to bridge the digital divide. The IGNOU Institute for Vocational Education and Training (IIVET), Shillong where I work in has been having collaborations with the above mentioned organisations. This has made education a contiguous force to bridge the hiatus between a formalised system leading only to degrees and diplomas and a less formal structure, which can at the same time give the learner or the trainee a certification and a recognition of his/her prowess for skills as well as acquisition of prior learning. If we are to talk about building lifelong skills then education is a continuous process and training right from technical skills to aesthetic skills must be a clear perception.

To cite an example, our institute has started a course on Citizen Journalism which has attracted students from all over the country. This course of three months duration is meant for college going students and in the city of Guwahati alone there are over 150 students, while in the state of Nagaland there are more than 100 students. We have also prepared an e-learning module on this course using multitasking devices. Similarly, we have prepared three tourism modules on the states of Meghalaya, Assam and Sikkim for prospective tourist guides and tourist operators and this has also become very popular in these three states. The idea is to create a group of tourist guides and operators who can pursue a vocation both part time and full time.

Further, too much hue and cry is being made about the supposed distinction between what is professional and what is vocational. This erroneous distinction or classification must be neatly subverted to bring in more holistic thinking in the complex processes and dynamics of education.