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ODeL-Teacher Education: Philosophical Implications Of Work-Play-Study Triad

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Abstract: *This study is a philosophical deliberation that envisions a situation of boundless learning environments where the students do not necessarily leave the home or work places to attend classes or face-to-face lectures as a matter of routine. The concurrent Student-Worker and Worker-Student scenarios from childhood-plays to adulthood-intentions that are emergent in Open, Distance and Electronic Learning (ODeL) environments are analysed as possibilities and situational promises for the future of global education.*

The employment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) through the Internet and Course Managements Systems (CMS) are slowly and surely creating opportunities where online (electronic) and distance education are, and must be conversational and self-contained thus communicating and eliciting teacher intentions in the latter's absence. As the ordinary classroom turns to a miniature learning space, the face-to-face interaction assumes the role of a complementary forum mainly for practical learning, socialization, mentoring and role modelling. As ICT penetrates all aspect of societies, everyplace becomes a learning space. Such spaces could be at play grounds, social environments, workplaces, home and institutions. While the nature of online education, course development and learner interactions schemes are clear from features that are in-built in CMS and integrated in the courseware, the corresponding preparation in teacher education to fit these developments have remained largely unclear and unexplored thus requiring a philosophical dialogue.

Keywords: *Student-Worker, Worker-Student, Constructivism, Play, Work, Study*

1. Introduction:

The traditional system of education that removes students from their homes and work places to walk in and out of educational institutions on full-time daily basis is currently changing to teaching and learning anywhere. Adapting student-centred approaches to the online environment require development of new skills and intentional adjustments in teaching practices (Bennett Sue, Lockyer & Lori, 2004). Boundless learning environment was postulated by the German philosopher Ivan Illich (1971) but it remained largely controversial and unexplored. He advocated for a non-school environment devoid of restrictions where learners could engage in learning activities when they feel like so that a school retains its etymological definition, *schole*, meaning leisure. Emergence of ODeL has rekindled debate on philosophy of education of which deschoolers are contributors.

ODeL systems which include correspondence courses, interactive radio instruction, using workbooks, online conferencing, and Web-based courses have taken root rapidly and surely in the global environment through learning institutions such as open universities, Virtual Learning Environments and ODeL Centres in several nations.

2. The Philosophy Behind ODeL:

The concept of Open, Distance and Electronic Learning (ODeL) has an implication for technology mediated expansion of access to education (Jerome, *et al.*, 2000) thus making it flexible in terms of choice through elimination of barriers that are normally occasioned by constraints imposed by (1) geographic reach (2) time (3) career (4) personal or collective interests and learning pace/styles (Venkatachary, 2000). ODeL requires no teacher in the usual traditional sense. The teacher is replaced by tutors and a combination of learning materials presented in a conversational way. In an online teaching-learning mode, students and teachers are remotely distributed, ensuring meaningful interactivity, participation and making courseware attractive to the learners. It also encourages students to get involved in activities and group projects that require more critical attention (Kearsley, 2000). The learners study at 'home' or elsewhere on their own and the learning materials carry out several tasks that the face-to-face teacher normally performs, namely, definition of what is to be learnt, provision of information, examples, explanations, questions, setting learning tasks for individuals and groups, marking the work, provision of feedback, assessment of

achievement of objectives, provision of learning resources, provision of study advice and helping with individual problems.

Open Learning (OL) is a philosophy of learning that is based on the principle of flexibility to increase access to and equity in education. An open learning philosophy implies that a provider will try to find a variety of ways to open access to credible learning opportunities to a diverse range of learners. In this context, learners are allowed to determine what they want to learn, how they want to learn, when and where they want to learn, how to get their learning assessed and what to do next in terms of career direction. As a methodology, Distance Education (DE) is generally defined as one in which the learner is separated from the instructional base or teacher, either in space or time, for a significant portion of their learning (Commonwealth of Learning, 2002).

The resultant effect of allowing learners to study what they want, where they want, when they want and how they want brings unique features that challenge the traditional teaching-learning principles of face-to-face interactions regarding learner freedom.

“...computer applications to education have encouraged a growing interest in exploring ways that pedagogy, flexible learning, and knowledge building can be integrated using computer and network based technology.... new interest in learner centred pedagogies has led educators to discover ways that learners can be given strategies and tools to help them construct their own knowledge bases using networked computers. Not only learning, but teaching is affected by the use of computers. Teacher training models are directing teachers to become facilitators of learning rather than simply expert authorities. A number of tools have made this possible (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2003).”

Four principal rationale have supported the integration of ICT in education as Debande (2004) explains: The social rationale aims to utilize technology in students' learning and the teachers' instruction; vocational rationale provides the learner with skills required in the industry and job market; pedagogical rationale utilizes technological tools for all preparations for teaching and catalytic rationale enables the professional teacher to embrace technology and to apply it in all instructional efforts. The effects of the application of technology in teacher education are evident in the emerging ICT enabled trends in course development and delivery.

In ODeL, educators, instructional designers, e-learning experts, media developers and graphic designers come together to create pedagogically effective learning environments that conform to sound learning theories (Campbell, 2001). The following aspects of learning are clearly defined: learner motivation in e-learning, lecturer's role, support and availability in e-learning which bring up an apt comparison that has been proposed by Pandey (2012).

Conventional learning	E-learning
Students attending schools in their local settings	Students are able to operate from multiple locations and may attend multiple schools
Classes follow a strict scheduled timetabled	Students are able to choose times for learning.
Students work individually or in groups	Students work individually and or collaboratively with other groups
Classes are face-to face with the teacher	Classes may be synchronous or asynchronous.
Students are enrolled in one school	Students may access many classes several schools
The teacher sets learning objectives	Students moderate their own objectives and regulate their learning
Students learning is linear as other members of the class must be carried along	Students are allowed to follow a non-linear path, regulate their pace as the teacher facilitates
The teachers works in one school	Online teacher may work in many schools

Table 1: A comparison of conventional learning and e-learning

As teaching and learning get rooted in the digital and online dimensions, the "e" word has become the norm even in government and industry in the form of e-government and e-commerce respectively, for instance.

3. The Magic Of The "e" Word:

"e" stands for the employment of computers and electronic use of the Internet in undertaking teaching-learning activities in all sectors of the society. The "e" word in education is becoming unavoidable as e-learning and e-teaching combine to provide a meaning to e-education as the internet continues to pervade the life of every student and teacher. E-education, that is, the main component of ODeL has been associated with numerous terms such as e-learning, virtual education, virtual learning, Internet-based education, web-based education and computer-mediated communication.

The foregoing scenarios have created some relative confusion to educators and consequently blurred the distinction between self-learning and teaching. In this regard, modern trends show that learning is not just for the person who attends school physically. The e-teacher has the capacity to work in an online environment, blended and face-to-face teaching-learning situations, collaborate and build learning communities with learners and peers. It is evident that although conducting Web-based courses has proved to be demanding and challenging, the Internet affords e-teachers and e-learners an opportunity to incorporate flexible and alternative approaches to the delivery of online education and learning techniques. Learning is therefore a process for everyone anywhere and connects learners' new and old experiences thus creating an indulgence through pedagogy (teacher-focused learning), andragogy (learning processes for all ages) or heutagogy (self determined learning process). In heutagogy, the learner not only focuses on their learning and experiences but also the process itself through socialization, self reflection and value experience. It is in this regard that teaching in technology based environments is shifting away from the acquisition model to the participation model (Collis, deBoer, van der Veen 2001).

The employment of e-teaching and e-learning in all learning environments is the inevitable trend for the future as the forces that drive e-education emanate from every sector of the society such as business partnerships and youth as the latter demand parallel learning environment with the regular school (Layton, 2000). This paradigm has altered the teaching-learning process and methodologies are moving from the traditional uni-directional acquisition of knowledge, skills and aptitudes to a multi-directional and constructivist guided-discovery (Laurillard, 1995). In this regard, teaching-learning styles necessarily change to provide due recognition to learner autonomy. The resultant effect is a "network of learners engaged in the negotiation and construction of knowledge as opposed to a group of uncritical accumulators of content/knowledge" (Venkatachary, 2000).

4. The Concept Of e-education:

The resultant effect of e-teaching and e-learning is e-education since teaching is an educational concept. E-learning is all learning that occurs at the computer (Olaniyi, 2006) as part of a network of technology that is used to create, foster, share, deliver, and facilitate learning. Its relationship with education is captured in Horton's (2005) definition as the use

of digital technologies and Internet and to create experiences that are used to educate human beings thus revolutionizing the teaching-learning process (DfES, 2003).

Since learning is a search for meaning, it has to start with the issues and experiences around which the learner could construct meaning as the creative teacher presents such experiences within the courseware in an ODeL environment. Human learning is “the process by which people acquire new skills or knowledge for the purpose of enhancing their performance” (Rosenberg, 2001), evident as change in one’s dispositions, attitudes, cognitive skills, physical skills and perceptions. It is the improved performance that is educational and consequently the change that an individual experiences as result of an intervention within the environment (Belkin and Gray, 1977, p.211). Learning is a personal act that results either from other individuals or societal collective effort which could be intentional or otherwise. It is such effort which provides the experiences upon which one builds knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Learning that is educational, be it face-to-face or online, is constrained by the definition of education which embraces the four dimensions, namely, cognitive, normative, creative and dialogical (Njoroge & Bennaars, 1986). Appropriate (socially responsible) methodologies, collaborative (teaching) strategies and selective (normative) consideration of what (cognitive) is educational and what is brought into vogue as a contribution expressing unique growth (creative) of an individual human person. Learning therefore becomes educational when it is given a human face consistent with the concept of education that integrates all aspects of human value from religious, social, psychological, economic to technological circles and it is the role of the teacher educator to carry out this integration in order to give e-knowledge and e-learning an educational orientation.

5. The Place Of Constructivist Education:

Educationally, as a teaching practice, constructivism encompasses varied degrees of guided but non-directed learning. It has been proven to be friendly to ODeL and focuses on learners’ ability and capacity to construct meaning mentally from the experiences emanating from their environment and consequently enabling the learner to create their own learning (Forrester & Noel Jantzie, nd). Constructivist principles build upon behaviourism and cognitivism since it accepts multiple perspectives and holds that learning is a personal interpretation of the world.

In constructivism, the learners construct and interpret reality based upon their perception of experiences (Alonso F. et. al., 2005). This is consequent on the fact that a person's learning style is personal in the sense that the effectiveness of how to learn, what to learn and when to learn are largely private and constrained by subjective tendencies. However, the teacher, in a collaborative style provides an environment that the learner interacts with, sets the initial guiding tasks, advises and comments on progress of the individual learners and learning teams through cooperative learning. This is consequent on the fact that sharing one's ideas with others and responding to others' ideas improves thinking and deepens understanding (Power & Guan 2000).

Woolfolk (2001, p.340) defines cooperative learning as "...an arrangement in which students work in mixed ability groups and are rewarded on the basis of the success of the group", and therefore the student is made to realize that cooperative effort within learning teams in an ODeL environment is equally valued. While much of ODeL student's time may be spent working in isolation and responding to instructor-created questions via a discussion boards, an integration of cooperative structures in asynchronous electronic learning environments serves to eliminate prolonged isolation (Dell, 2003) for which face-to-face classroom interaction has been responsible.

The key to successful learning communities is the open communication of ideas. In online collaborative teaching, the Internet becomes a medium of communication that connects learners and instructors. While learners can access resources individually from the Internet, learning groups will also be able to use the same resources. Learners can communicate with other group member by using e-mail or the group areas of many course management systems (Dell, 2004).

Cooperative learning expands the range of students' experiences and thus fosters communication skills, high order thinking and social interaction. In addition, it enhances self confidence, focuses learner control, role performance, time management and improved attitudes towards learning and social interaction and thus alleviates possible feelings of alienation and isolation from learning teams (Dell, 2003). The teacher's emphasis involves building dialogue with learner groups through technology-driven interactive tools in the courseware without the learner or the teacher feeling that face-to-face contact in a teaching-learning environment is mandatory.

6. The Role Of Course Management Systems (CMS) In E-education:

The introduction of CMS in education has brought new dimensions in teacher education and is on the way to perfecting online education. CMS are fast shifting focus away from teacher presentation and explication of content to the integration of student contributions, students' self-search for content and building communities of learners and constructing a community of knowledge through easily usable Web-based templates.

The emergence of CMS with elaborate collaborative and interactive features has continued to provide the e-teacher with instructional tools that closely simulate the activities of the face-to-face Teacher (a-Teacher). In fact CMS have succeeded in providing approaches such as small group teaching and cluster course models which have not been readily possible in traditional face-to-face classroom settings (Young, 2004). They offer structures that enable teachers to put courses online and interact with learners fairly easily. CMS technology and instructional authoring tools have evolved through pedagogical innovations in ways that have made the teaching-learning processes time and place-independent through discussion boards, e-mail, conferencing, and other Internet-based technologies that support synchronous and asynchronous collaborative learning. Consequently, the traditional role of the teacher changes as education focuses more and more on satisfying the needs of technological and economic industry and as adult learning becomes the norm rather than an exemption.

The traditional chalk and talk phenomenon is giving way to learning environments that do not confine students to an institution of learning for long periods of time. Additionally, other technology that is used in ODeL involve CD-ROM which allows students to access large digital video and audio files on their individual computers, Laptop Computers which handle electronic data over the Internet, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), Electronic Networks, Computer Conferencing and Wireless Networks.

7. Integration Of Play, Work And Study In ODeL Environment:

It is becoming increasingly clear that life is about working and learning at every phase of life. That is to say that the human person in the life continuum is either a worker-student or student-worker. As a toddler, one is either student-player or player-student. A learner can play at their work and work at their play (Hampton, 2012 and Illich, 1971). The two activities of playing and working are done without constraints. The learner is free to imagine in a

creative way and to internalize learning outcomes as a part of their psyche. It is learning which is not bound by tight time schedules that have no bearing on the psychology of the learner. Learning under such circumstances may take shorter duration because the learner is fully prepared to undertake the tasks.

The uniqueness of play comes from the fact that it originates benefits that span varied and multiple functional areas of life which include social, physical, mental and emotional domains (Discover Leisure Education, 2006). It is believed that children, and even adults, acquire strength and good health when they engage in activities that exercise their entire body as they learn (or learn as they exercise their entire body) by running, swimming, biking and sports, among others, that promote physical and mental fitness.

Play is “a natural spontaneous and voluntary activity in which all of us, children and adults benefit from engaging in throughout our lives” (Embryonic Play, 1998).

“Play is what children want to do and what they choose to do when given the freedom, independence, time and space to determine their own behaviour. All children have a natural desire to play and will therefore play anywhere they are given the opportunity” (Play Development - What Is Play?, nd).

While they are under no pressure to achieve any predefined extrinsic objectives, children learn through play. In the process to make sense of their environment, they develop social skills, cognitive skills, emotional maturity and self-confidence. The process of self-imposed obligation makes the child’s learning process pleasurable, enjoyable and engaging. As the child matures to adulthood, the spontaneous play gradually converts to work and/or schooling which are then guided by prescriptions that spoil the spontaneity since adults have intent and prescribed outcome.

As a learning theory, constructivist activities do mimic play as learner experiences necessarily need to include inner control and re-construction of reality. Ideally, the long term intention of play ought to graduate into work as guided rather directed activity. If the child is considered as a miniature adult then the distinction amongst play, work and study fades in the adults’ world in a way that is consistent with the requirements of ODeL environment. In this sense, every activity in human life would provide an ODeL opportunity where play, work and study would be made to interact seamlessly. If to play is to exercise, then adults also need it for socialization, physical and intellectual fitness.

The link between play and the learning of young children in language acquisition, problem solving, literacy, numeracy, social skills, physical skills, emotional skills, co-operation skills, empathy and gaining perspectives of other persons among others (Goncu, 2006; Fisher *et. al.*, 2010) cannot be overemphasized. The learning that is incorporated in play is study per excellence; if through play children achieve ends that adults appreciate as growth in children then it is work, albeit children's work; also learning that is incorporated in work is study. If learning is incorporated in work which is in turn incorporated in play and all are wholesome for the child, then the process is equally relevant for adults. Research shows that a positive correlation exists between play and children's learning (Burton, 2011), though, there is no evidence that adults' learning through play is counterproductive. In fact it is proven that play is not just useful for acquisition of facts but beneficial for mastery of declarative knowledge (Pinkham, Kaefer & Neuman, 2012). Consequently play, work and study for children would work for adults also in an ODeL environment where institutionalized learning processes are practiced minimally.

Meaningful human life in both childhood and adulthood involve play, work and study and the three interact in varied degrees at each phase of life. In childhood, it is plenty of play (a lot of free time for socialization and physical outlets), moderate work (learning to carry out chores through imitation) and less study. In late childhood and teenage life, it is increased play (creative art, physical education and social skills practices), work and plenty of study as school going becomes a routine in one's life. In adulthood, it is plenty of each of the three which define a balanced lifestyle that is moderated in measures as one grows to old age. The three activities, namely, play, work and study have traditionally been carried out at home, work place and the school. However, as human beings embrace technology, the physical places for play, work and study are increasingly becoming concurrent, especially for the latter two activities thus making institutionalized schooling non-mandatory.

Key efforts in the triad activities of play, work and study are as follows:

- i. Time management in the case of toddlers is the responsibility of the parents or those who are in charge of their upkeep. This requires an organized daily plan for each of the three activities
- ii. Socialization with the person one shares interest with as a child or adult is a key to normal growth. This could be online or face to face in order to share ideas and experiences and brainstorm on diverse matters

- iii. Setting goals and reward schemes is the third way of keeping one focused and motivated by assessing the need for engagement and evaluating the veracity of continued effort
- iv. Concentration on what one has chosen to do at a particular time is the key to success. This requires ability to seek wise counsel, identify work, play and learning styles and resources that work away from avoidable distractions
- v. Creation of time to play is a key to success. It is important to exercise, engage in recreation and sports to rejuvenate
- vi. Enjoying the changeover amongst play, work and study is all that human life demands. This implies that, there need not be any activity that is executed full time.

All play, work and study must be part-time with an individual choosing how much time should be allocated to each daily with specific priorities regarding the quantity and/or positioning of time allocation.

8. Conclusion:

With the emergence of systems for delivering courses online and the varied ODeL modes in existence, the use of face to face delivery in education would be mentoring and practical exercises. A student may carry a computer or teaching-learning materials to the 'play ground' or 'work place' or "class" to continue engagement in a 'study'. It has been proven as Musyoka et. al., (nd) observes that "Students who work and study seem to enjoy the best of everything. They get their education and at the same time are able to keep their jobs and get a pay check". As a result, the perpetual engagement concurrently as a student, player and worker is sustained through an individuals' life from youth, adulthood and old age.

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