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Chapter III

New Issues Arising from E-Education

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ABSTRACT

The Internet provides access to an unlimited wealth of resources, such as virtual libraries, databases, and electronic communities. In e-education, the World Wide Web and the Internet are the vehicles for information dissemination and retrieval, and also for networking and collaboration. Computer technology is thus broadening choices for the mode of delivery, content, and access, because information can be stored anywhere and transmitted anywhere. There is the danger that the tools of technology are used because they are the latest phenomenon. In this chapter, the focus is on sound pillars of ethics for the mass production of education. We deal first with knowledge processing and the implications for various changes that have arisen in e-education. We discuss ethical issues regarding student–student and student–faculty interaction. We then discuss assessment of learning and the potential problems and possible solutions. Finally, we address institutional management of e-education.

BACKGROUND

The Internet is a worldwide computer network that enables communication among millions of users from around the world. It also provides access to an unlimited wealth of resources such as virtual libraries, databases, and electronic communities. Additionally, it enables electronic communication and collaboration among individuals and organizations to enable e-commerce. In e-education, the World Wide Web and the Internet are the vehicles for information dissemination and retrieval, and also for networking and collaboration (Horvath & Teles, 1999). Whatever term is used—networked learning or e-education or

virtual learning or computer-mediated education—this new approach to teaching and learning is challenging the traditional mode of operation for universities. In online learning environments, information no longer emanates from the "throne" of respected academics, in a one-to-one mode of transmitting knowledge, but in this mode, there is a rapid move to a one-to-many mode, where faculty become facilitators of learning (Watts, 1998). Computer technology is thus broadening choices for the mode of delivery, content, and access, because information can be stored anywhere and transmitted anywhere.

Because of the vast amount of information (volume of traffic) available and high-capacity communication links (high speed), the Internet is often referred to as the Information Superhighway. However, this highway still has few guidelines, let alone rules. Gilbert (1996), in comparing the Internet to a library, said: "It's something like a library already overflowing with books, with more arriving all the time, but there's nothing like an Internet Dewey decimal system yet to help you find what you need. It's becoming a librarian's nightmare—or paradise, depending on how you look at it." There is the danger that the tools of technology are used because they are the latest phenomenon. Although these tools of technology can be extremely valuable, Watts (1998) warned that "tools are tools, and just that." Without sound pedagogical principles guiding the use of these tools, we will "fail miserably in our mission to educate." What is needed is a sound pillar of ethics for the mass production of education.

Collins dictionary defined ethics as "moral beliefs and rules about right and wrong that influences the behavior attitudes and philosophy of life of a group of people." There are no universal ethical principles that can apply to every culture, and least of all, to education in all cultures. In general, there have been few guidelines for ethical decision making in education. In fact, ethical issues arising from educational networked learning are a phenomenon only of the last 10 years. We have been catapulted into this revolutionary fast-track of integrating technology into teaching, often without taking a critical look at the ethics surrounding it. An example of traditional ethical beliefs about education is that information is transferred from a specialist to a learner. Seen from specialists' point of view, they have control over the curriculum, the depth of understanding delved into, and the mode of presentation. Similarly, learners believe they have the right to expect a lecture in a one-way format. Learning is thus transferred from one to another. E-education challenges these ethical positions and poses new issues for discussion. It poses questions as to how knowledge should be processed, the demands of the new delivery system, how outcomes are assessed, the right of what is learned, and who has the right to such knowledge.

In this chapter, we look at ethical issues related to networked learning. We deal first with knowledge processing and the implications for various changes that have arisen in e-education. We discuss issues regarding student–student interaction, as well as student–faculty interaction. We then discuss matters related to assessment of learning and the potential problems and possible solutions for assessing such learning without face-to-face contact. Finally, we address institutional management of e-education.

KNOWLEDGE PROCESSING

Inherent in our traditional view of education, there is the belief that information is delivered by face-to-face human contact. This certainly was true until the printing press, television, and video came along. Until recently, it was felt that texts could be read and video/