Chapter 65
Future Methods of Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a vision of future information and communication technology based methods of adult education informed by recent pedagogical and technological developments. Macro trends that may influence the future of adult education methods are examined, followed by detailed scrutiny of particular methods that are likely to be utilised in the near future. The chapter concludes with a review of the more distant future and suggestions to adult educators.

INTRODUCTION

The art of predicting the future has provided gainful employment for oracles and astrologers from time immemorial. Futurology, based on known science, also has deep historic antecedents. No matter what the source, attempts to predict the future that prove correct attract wide publicity, as in the insightful works of Leonardo da Vinci, but even more so when they are proved incorrect. Ken Olson, founder of well-known mainframe computer manufacturer Digital Equipment (DEC) is reported as saying in 1977 that there was no reason anyone would want a computer in their

home (Listverse, 2007). Future predictions can come back to haunt their initiators when a net savvy generation can read the predictions on their home computers.

Predictions of technology use in education have not fared well either. Built on soaring growth of mass media television penetration in the United States, scholarly books and journal articles about the predicted growth of educational television were written, leading to confident 1950's predictions that educational television would be the dominant form of technology used in education. With 50 million dollar backing from the Ford Foundation and Congress, a plane was commissioned to circle above the Midwest beaming educational television to six states. Finding that classroom uptake was

only two to four percent; the plane was grounded (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). History reveals that educational television did not deliver its touted potential. The same can be said for use of radio, film and video in education; limited uptake and no golden bullet solution to educational problems.

Unlike some of its predecessors, the personal computer, and particularly, the almost universal availability of the internet, has fulfilled the touted potential of changing the face of adult education. Knowles 1970's prediction that adult education would be delivered electronically in the 21st century has proved spectacularly accurate with almost all adult educators now using electronic technology in one form or another.

Time changes all. Fifty years later, one current trend that will be mentioned later in this chapter, describes the re-introduction of educational television as a mainstream medium for the delivery of adult education in some Asian countries. And despite the exponential growth of electronically delivered adult education, traditional face-to-face delivery methods survive alongside the new technological innovations, and, are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Just as the invention of the computer and, more latterly, the widespread availability of the internet, changed the face of the adult education at the end of the 20th century, recent dramatic changes in the political, social, educational and economic systems of the world, combined with the continued and inexorable march of technological innovation, could stimulate new trends in adult education that will once again change its visible face in directions that as yet, we know not. Dron (2007) warns us that "It is a dangerous and foolhardy thing to attempt to predict the future of such a young and volatile discipline as e-learning" (p. 312). Despite the dangers, this chapter attempts to analyse the present to extrapolate pedagogical and technological trends that may provide a guide to future methods used in adult education.

BACKGROUND

An encyclopaedia of information and communication technology (ICT) integration into adult education can encompass a superabundance of research in many areas, so definition of the disciplinary areas discussed in this chapter is necessary. For the purposes of this essay, adult education includes both formal adult education within the higher education sector that often leads to award of a qualification and, informal education, such as community education, that is less likely to lead to a formal qualification. Future methods using ICT includes non-computer technologies, such as telephones and television, as well as the more familiar computer-based technologies. Electronic delivery of adult education, termed e-learning, has a joint focus on traditional, face to face methods that incorporate ICT but, more pervasively, distance education technology, both synchronous and asynchronous.

Leonardo's prediction that helicopters would fly was fulfilled. Every day, helicopters noisily remind us that Leonardo was correct. But, the first helicopter to fly bore minimal resemblance to the detail in Leonardo's helicopter design. We can predict a broad view of future trends in technologically enhanced adult education methods but the detail is unlikely to be apparent until later. Future predictions tend to be broad in scope, as much of the future is likely to be predicated on trends developing in the present, but the detail of the outcome only emerges when the prediction is fulfilled. Hence a sample of current background drivers of future adult education method trends within political, economic, socio-cultural, technological and pedagogical dimensions will be briefly examined with the intention of providing a lens into the future.

Examples of political drivers of trends in adult education that have potential to continue in the future include the increasing use of electronic delivery of adult education to implement state policies, for example, increasing adult literacy in

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