Chapter 15
An ROI Ed–Biz Approach for Deploying Mobile Pedagogy

Douglas McConatha
West Chester University of Pennsylvania, USA

ABSTRACT

The long history and short past of online distance education is posited as a precursor to the monumental changes revolutionizing global educational activity. The author argues for the use of Mobile Pedagogy as an idiom for the inclusive nature of the platforms, processes, teaching methodologies, and infrastructures (technical and instructional) that comprise this new approach in the world of learning. As such, this chapter discusses the critical element of finances by looking at contemporary learning theory and a specific E-learning system model termed CADRE (Content, Access, Distribution, Revenue, and Evaluation). To help delineate connections between elements in this emerging ecosystem the important component of cost is used as exemplar. As the cost of Higher Education rises, answers to questions long been taken for granted have come to the forefront of the concern for parents and students: Is College worth the cost? Are expensive elite schools a guarantee to entry into the world of work? Are the opportunity costs for a four year (or more) degree program worth the investment? These questions are examined in the context of an ROI (Return on Investment) conjecture that assumes benefits must outweigh costs in order to be worthwhile. In the era of Open Courseware, free courses, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and teaching and learning anytime, anywhere by anybody the issues of cost, quality, sustainability and evaluation are addressed within the context of an educational-business (Ed-Biz) framework. Various strategies relating to the kinds of monetization that could support these directions are offered.

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to argue that the educational environment is stagnant. Change is all around us. Wikipedia traces the history of electronically mediated virtual learning back to the mid-1900s (and distance education in general back another 200 years). These early platforms were hardly what we would consider transformative in today's terms, but at the time using radio and television to "teach" was just so. By the end of the 20th century, another powerful and transformational advance had begun to mature on the Internet: The computer based online learning management system. The changes wrought by this innovation go without question. Hardly an educational environment in the world lacks some of today's learning technological devices. Although many do lack access to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4333-8.ch015

the resources promised by the availability of the devices due to bandwidth or connectivity problems (Hessler & McNeil 2010). Nevertheless, a new era has begun. This is especially true in the relatively recent Internet mediated educational ecosystem we call online learning. The mid-1990s saw a proliferation of online course platforms. Learning Management System (LMS) companies or providers like TeleEducation NB (1994), TopClass (1995), WebCT (1996), WebStudy (1996), CourseInfo (1997) and, Blackboard (1997) were a few. All founded prior to the Internet bubble in 1999, but after the bust others quickly followed (Wikipedia, 2013a).

Today's most recent innovations build on those early LMS systems and offer access to a panoply of resources. Much of this newly available cornucopia of content is free and is increasingly being offered on no cost access platforms that have much of the functionality of the old LMS providers but include elements of social networking, collaboration, employment opportunities and other heretofore components that were seen as non-educational in nature. These include things like e-commerce sites, tutoring technologies, advertising and marketing sites as well as blogs, wikis and various educational and non-educational apps. Most, if not all, of these resources are designed to work or be operated on mobile devices and this is where we will see the most progress. As Roschelle, Patton, and Tatar, (2007) have pointed out, "Wireless tablet computers can offer new affordances for informal sketches, improvisation, and interactive engagement that take this form factor beyond that possible with prior technologies."

The widely respected Educause Horizon Report (2012) notes that the prominent position of mobile devices, including tablets and phones has been and will continue to be at the forefront of teaching and learning. Kukulsak (2013) points out that "(w)ith mobile phone subscriptions totaling around six billion, and predictions that sales of tablets and e-book readers will increase substantially as prices continue to fall, mobile devices are rightly seen as a compelling means of solving pressing global problems in education." She goes on to note that while this poses significant challenges to the traditional classroom and traditional distance education:

Developments in mobile policy and pedagogy are the keys to the future. Mobile pedagogy has some distinctive characteristics, not least of all its learner-centeredness. People of all ages who have a suitable device and affordable connectivity should be able to get necessary information and access to social support networks and subject mentors where and when they want, so will they still choose to attend conventional classes? If encouraged and supported in adopting a more active role, learners (and potential learners) will have an influence over future educational content and methodology, since their active engagement changes the nature of the curriculum.

Others have been observers of this trend in free, open-sourced learning. Wildavasky (2012) argues that as costs go up, states cut funding and student debt rises. In the United States undergraduate enrollment will also rise by 14 percent in just a few years. This means more than 20 million U.S. students will be expecting to go to college by 2021. Without more innovative models for educational pursuits available to this growing population, supply (of educational opportunity) will not be able to meet demand (from those wanting more education).

This trend can be seen globally as well. Global postsecondary enrollment increased 50% in just nine years starting in 2000 and will grow another 40% by 2025 when a quarter of a billion students will be looking for American styled higher education. "In many cash-strapped countries, demand for high-quality courses far outstrips supply" (Wildavasky, 2012). This has the potential to be a transformative part of the future of learning on a massive scale. But another question remains: Will the cost of this education provide an acceptable