

The Role of Mediation and Communication in the New Learning Culture

Tapio Varis

UNESCO Chair in Global E-Learning with applications to multiple domains

University of Tampere, Finland

tapio.varis@uta.fi

Professor Starr Roxanne Hiltz predicted already in the 1990's that the impacts of college-level courses via asynchronous learning networks will increase the competition for students and probably lead to a decrease in the total number of colleges and universities: "large institutions and consortia of smaller institutions will develop programs that students anywhere can enroll in". E-learning, OER's and MOOC's have confirmed this trend. But the theoretical basis for understanding the changes has become vital to focus on relevant issues. For example, in 2014 Raija Latva-Karjanmaa in the University of Helsinki examined the role of mediation in learning self-regulation in a web-based course. The function of mediation as a promoter of higher mental processes and the elements of qualitatively good mediation can be built on sound theoretical base (Vygotski, Feuerstein). Communication and media are important elements in constructing the theoretical model for mediation and in understanding of the problems of mediators in web-based learning of self-regulation (Dewey, Debray). It broadens the discussion towards new horizons of the pedagogy and even new humanistic spirit of the learning culture. A new look should be given to the role of personality in the human mediation in learning institutions as well as in organizations in general. Mediators should encourage learners to take charge, make their own space in learning, and carry their personal thoughts without fear of being criticized.

The rapid development of ICT's raises some problems as to education: are we concentrating too much on "lower mental processes" (Vygotsky), practical and simple tools and ignoring slower development of sociocultural processes? Is the technology-push approach pushing aside the main human mediating force: the personality? Is New Humanism or Higher Humanity a genuine spirit or disguise for old structures?