Avoiding the Sins of the Global Village: Leading and Managing Successful Partnerships in the Global Education Market

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This paper focuses on the "sins of the global village" and their genesis, factors generally related to the modernisation process and, often, specifically, to international development work and competing in the global education marketplace. Best practices regarding forming international partnerships is vital for us to successfully compete. This paper forms the basis for my shorter presentation to engage audience participation to share their international experiences and ideas.

Redemption is possible: but it requires the application of the human capacity for invention, the greatest of mysteries. In Classical Athens, Sophocles said: "Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man." And at about the same time, Confucius said "Going too far is the same as not going far enough." ("The Analects of Confucius" 11: 15)

As we look back at the technological inventions of this century and the steadily increasing pace at which material changes occur in the knowledge economy, it seems that there are few, if any, limits to how far the mind may go. And so, as we peer forward into our current century, it is natural to assume that we must equip future generations with a flexibility and openness of mind that will enable them to continuously learn and adapt throughout their lifetimes. To desire such flexibility and openness, however, means that we must equally reject a single standardised mimicry of the Western cultural landscape and technology and ensure that pedagogical methods and choices reflect the needs of individual cultures in the global context.

Many educators have been so captivated by the rapid advance of telecommunications and computer technology that has produced so many marvels — satellites, microwaves, fibre optics — that overcome barriers of time and space that they uncritically assume that the technology itself will be the panacea that will solve the problems of restructuring education and will result in poverty alleviation. We must remember that it is, instead, only the most recent panacea du jour.

Embracing "cutting-edge" technology is not only financially risky and frequently unsustainable but also often pedagogically unsound. Moving too fast for fear of being left behind may create international projects and programmes of questionable quality and we might disenchant our international partners.

Technology itself is powerless. Without the human mind, the most sophisticated machine is merely "lights and wires in a box"[1]. Human creativity has brought the Information Age to the Western world in a tidal wave of change that may transform our learning environment map forever. We must use the same creativity to determine how to use the technology in ways that extend access to knowledge and improve teaching and learning and life itself.

We are moving beyond the classroom and the traditional roles of teacher and student. Instructional innovations now enable students to take a more proactive role in their education. Students will increasingly expect to take part in this type of role, and will become increasingly more selective of the institutional learning environments they desire.

[1] There are very few wise statements that have lasting value through time. A statement by broadcasting pioneer Edward R. Murrow is an exception. Early in his career he said about the power of radio: "This instrument can teach. It can illustrate, yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it's nothing but wires and lights in a box."

Sins of the Global Village

All national capitals are beginning to look alike; they have become Marshall McLuhan's global village (McLuhan wrote about the electronic age and its effects sealing "the entire human family into a single global tribe", in the sense of a greater human awareness of responsibility on a global level rather than merely concerning ourselves with our own smaller communities). Their mimicry of Western models extends to all facets of society, including the adoption of technology for distance and open learning. To the ethnocentric westerner or the westernised local in the Third World, this conformity may seem to be the natural result of the modernisation or development process. But the desire to adopt and possess the latest high-technology that is pervasive throughout the global village really derives from cultural imperialism and the colonial mindset. The aim of having the technology is not only to impress old colonial rulers but also to impress others in the Third World in the way everyone would recognise—the Western way.

Dispassionate observers, however, are worried by the growing world uniformity through the effects of the knowledge economy. The enormous new possibilities for intercultural exchange suggest there should be more diversity, more indigenous styles and more models of development. Instead, people of the Third World and people of the Fourth World, the indigenous people of Australia, South and North America, and elsewhere have become obsessed with the western way of life. That obsession has very often misguided development and is rapidly destroying positive features of traditional cultures. And we from the developed world can become contaminated with this obsession in our relationships with international partners.

Cultural imperialism began its conquest of the Third and Fourth World peoples with the education of an elite of local collaborators. The conquest was made easier because there is a psychological motive for adopting modern ways; the educated elite is made to feel ashamed of their culture and their social being, and so they aim to prove their social equality by emulating western ways.

Missionary schools everywhere sought to eliminate traditional cultures as they proselytised among indigenous people. Later, government schools sought to train junior bureaucrats and lower military officers who would administer and subdue their own people. And there is, of course, the indirect and more voluntary "reference-group" behaviour of copying the habits and lifestyle of westernised people and abandoning those behaviours of one's own group.

Since the beginning of democratisation, Third World leaders have talked a great deal about education —as an instrument of social engineering to improve the standard of living and the economy, as a vehicle for homogenising heterogeneous populations, and as means of entrenching power positions, both indigenous and foreign (also see Easterly 2002: 71-84).

The desire to prove equality helps to explain why Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah built the triumphal arch of Black Star Square in Accra, Ghana, and why Indonesia's Sukarno scared Jakarta with six-lane highways and neo-fascist monuments. Similarly, the effort to provide General Certificate of Education "0" level education sponsored by the universities of Cambridge and London through formal and distance education means in British Commonwealth countries serves only to introduce a style of education that "unfits" students for a constructive role in their own urban and rural communities (Yerbury, Dingalo, and Mphinyane, 1991). Now, the creation of open learning mega-universities in a number of British Commonwealth countries and elsewhere that lack resources to sustain existing public institutions is another example.

In short, the choice to imitate western approaches has meant that only a few will ever benefit; the majority will continue to languish in neglected poverty, often uprooted from traditional villages into urban ghettos where they come to despise their own cultures. Strategically forming institutional partnerships means avoiding this development pitfall.

Human Capital and Modernisation

Two theories — "human capital and modernisation" — have greatly shaped development policies and projects for several decades, and only recently have they been challenged (Saint-Germain, 1985: 17-21). Both reflect the Western industrial ideology of emphasising the adaptation of Third World individuals by educating them in Western economic and societal values.

Human capital theory presumes that training and upgrading can improve the productive capacity of the labour force and make it possible to achieve development and economic growth. Education is seen as the essential ingredient for the development of human capital, and it is presumed that Third World elates, trained in secular, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial values of the Western World will lead their countries into the modern age. Critics believe that this model overestimates the connection between

the level of formal education and an improvement in living standards and underestimates individual qualities and environment (1985: 18). Perhaps the most important criticism of this model is that it assumes that Third World underdevelopment and economic inertia are internal factors within a developing nation, not the result of external international forces (1985: 17).

Modernisation theorists (Rostow 1966; Inkeles and Smith, 1974; Galbraith 1979), assume that societies progress along a linear pathway and undergo development as traditional values change to modern ones. To modernise, Third World peoples must adopt individual values that open their societies to economic and technological change (Saint-Germain, 1985: 18). Again, education is seen as the instrument of social engineering; educational technology in the knowledge economy is the most recent panacea du jour in this process.

The modernisation model has been criticised for failing to recognise that change "inevitably opens" a social gap "between the 'modern' and 'traditional' members" and therefore leads to social conflicts (Saint-Germain 1985: 18-9). Also, both this model and the "human capital" model are ethnocentric. They fail to recognise the cultural integrity of the ideas, values, and attitudes of peoples in Third World societies.

The ignorance or avoidance of cultural pluralism is intimately related to misuses, non-use and abuse of knowledge, skills, and technologies introduced through development projects. Traditional Third World systems should not incorporate new ideologies, skills, or attitudes that are not coherent within their own systems. The cultural perspective on the study of development or modernisation processes requires that we discover the "inside" point of view and the needs of the populations receiving the programmes and the technology before we ever, for example, implement education projects heavily dependent upon educational technology and Western World information in the knowledge economy.

New Information Age visionaries are enthusiastic about the prospects of the new millennium, in which they see a telecommunications revolution that will transform human consciousness and answer many of the world's problems. But just as highways in Third World countries run side-by-side with footpaths along which women with babies strapped to their backs carry bundles of firewood, the information highway flows ahead as many developing countries still struggle against the most basic of ailments such as diarrhoea, which take the lives of millions of children. The agenda of our developed world is often insensitive and excludes much of the world. Third World countries have to draw their own agenda, including their plans for development. And it is our role to know our institutional partners and to work along side them while demonstrating our sensitivity to their cultural situation and societal needs.

Theory of Disconnection

Redemption from the "sins of the global village" is possible. Perhaps the "theory of disconnection" discussed at the 18th World Conference of the Society for International Development in Rome during July 1985 holds the most promise. It generally recognises the value of cultural pluralism. In order for Third World populations to achieve self-sufficiency, they must disconnect or distance themselves from the economic mainstream, but at the same time they must be open to the outside to gain knowledge, skills, and attitudes meaningful to their societies.

The "theory of educational disconnection" is one enlightened interpretation of this model that proposes the use of education in development in a way that does not run callously over the lives of people in developing countries (Saint-Germain, 1985). "Educational disconnecting" would involve the detachment of certain activities from the formal educational system, making them available and useful to people at the local level. The formal educational system is only necessary for a small percentage of students. Activities geared toward dealing with local problems and needs and involving local people at the community level are considered more likely to be effective and socially sound for human development.

Disconnection includes considering the hidden perils of uncritically adopting technology for education in Third World countries. And when moving beyond traditional roles in teaching and learning, in both First and Third World countries, there are basic questions that pertain. These questions concern the issues of pedagogical and social soundness and the issue of how to manage and maintain performance in three dimensions—capacity, efficiency and effectiveness, and sustainability. These issues are not unique in any context; they are pervasive in higher education today.

The formation of international partnerships is often based on using educational technology for development purposes. Educational technology should improve teaching and learning; otherwise, there is no pedagogical reason to adopt it. So often in the global village, educators are seduced by the latest cutting-edge technology without assessing pedagogi-

cal soundness. They attack those who defend proven and reliable delivery methods for lacking the latest technological glitz. There has to be an appropriate pedagogical balance of media and methods. For example, it is too easy today to dismiss print as the most important available educational medium to deliver educational content. The logistical advantages of print are greater for transmitting curriculum content than any other media. Pedagogically it has advantages over classroom teaching or lectures in its completeness. And most importantly, print is controllable by the learner. Print's primary disadvantage is its failure to be interactive, adaptive or reflective. Interactive educational technology can aid print to overcome pedagogical deficiencies.

While properly selected educational technology may be a powerful, effective enhancement, it has social limitations, too. In the Philippines, as in many countries in which kinship and social relations are strong, we should carefully consider the social implications of using technology for teaching and learning. The process of education and learning is not just individual, it is doing it together with others that is and should be valued. Assessing the potential of adopting new technology should be based on criteria for social soundness. And successful partnerships reflect social soundness.

Before adopting any technology or establishing an educational project or programme, an effort needs to be made to look ahead and anticipate successful performance. Issues of efficiency, equity, values, culture and power affect the definition and measurement of performance. Given these considerations, performance, nevertheless, can be conceptualised as composed of three general dimensions: capacity, efficiency and effectiveness, and sustainability.

Capacity is the ability to generate output. An assessment of capacity building is the task of relating existing resources to the presumed potential of implementing education systems or adopting new educational technology as the latest panacea du jour. An assessment of whether or not, for example, technology will allow us to do more with the same or fewer resources apply. If new technology is to be useful and responsive, it must ensure capacity building, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. And it certainly should not block user access to teaching and learning opportunities.

Technology consumes resources. Efficiency and effectiveness of new technology for distance and open learning, as an example, must be assessed particularly in developing countries where the gap between available resources and needs is wide. Efficiency relates to the cost of transforming inputs into outputs, and effectiveness concerns the usefulness and appropriateness of outputs relative to the systems to be improved or replaced, or relative to the problem that the technology is to solve. Both efficiency and effectiveness are critical to leading and managing educational programmes and our institutional partnerships. Sustainability depends upon being effective with the level of resources available in the long term, so becoming efficient is critical. If new educational technology shows no potential improvement of performance, then it adds nothing and, worse, could create dependency and deficits, affecting our reputation and relationships.

Sustainability is not simply survival. There are numerous moribund technological-based distance education entities in the global village that limp along with short term funding and just enough resources to survive, but provide no service or serve no useful function beyond the employment of a few. Sustainability as the third dimension of measuring performance incorporates both capacity and efficiency/effectiveness to address the related issues of continuation over time and responsiveness to needs and desires. Sustainability is the ability to produce outputs that are sufficiently valued by both beneficiaries and stakeholders to provide enough resources and inputs so that they continue over time. New educational technology for distance education delivery must have the value component of sustainability; it must be effective and efficient, doing what works with less.

If properly established and managed well, distance education programmes should normally be more cost-effective and efficient than delivering traditional forms of instruction ("If" to me is a wonderful word, a word of infinite intellectual significance, for it indicates actions to be completed but with the possibility of alternate outcomes!) So often distance education programmes have inefficient management and delivery models from their inception. This includes developed countries as well. And the recent demise of the Technical University of British Columbia is a case in point. This is an institution that cost taxpayers more than four times the cost per full time student compared to other universities.

The final point to be made regarding the learning environment map for the knowledge economy is that as responsible institutional partners, we need to ensure that our international partnership projects and programmes are credible and sustainable. Success is

dependent upon getting our relationships and the management and delivery models right from their genesis! This means ensuring that projects or programmes are adequately supported and funded and that the system is pedagogically sound and sustainable, given the educational technologies used.

Finally, Sophocles' and Confucius' visions and challenges to the future still apply today, for educational institutions involved in international development. To all of us, the challenge is both a journey and destination along the human pathway. As Canadians, we have neither gone too far nor far enough in the global education world.

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