Challenging the firewalls of the mind: opportunities for universities to overcome the constraints of austerity

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ABSTRACT. The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created – created first in the mind and will, created next in activity”. The methodologies of 21st Century learning and teaching offer positive, hopeful answers in an age of austerity and exponential change. Ubiquitous information, open global communication, instantaneous, universal and almost costless access, challenge the rights of universities to assure the quality of learning. Lost in translation is profound teaching and learning - the kind which changes the course of lives and colours existence with meaning and moral significance. Teaching is an art, a conversation between people, an act of service; a desire to serve the common good. While 21st Century learning and teaching is challenging traditional taught delivery patterns and methods, these challenges may turn out to be a blessing in disguise for the future of learning. Learners have already learned how to collaborate, share and care for the other outside the constraints of formalised learning. They are equipped, as John Schaar says, to make paths to the future because the activity of making the future using the affordances of social technologies has changed both the maker and destination.

KEYWORDS: Commodification, Distance learning, Heutagogy, Higher education, Massification, Online, Policy, Reification

Introduction

John Schaar (quoted in JISC Effective Practice in a Digital Age) says beautifully: “The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created – created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and destination”. If we are to make
a path to the future in the face of significant challenges at this time of unprecedented austerity, we will need to examine the will of universities to deliver their responsibilities to the learners of the 21st century. It is they, the learners of the 21st century, who will have to solve the problems created by my generation in the 20th century.

The premise of the argument expressed in this paper is as follows: Teaching is an act of scholarship in the pursuit of truth and wisdom. It is also an art, a conversation between people, an act of service and a desire to serve the common good. It may be a truism that the management styles and operational arrangements of universities, built solidly on 20th Century industrialism and corporatism, are in diametric conflict with connected learning, delivered instantly, globally, freely and openly. It is probable that the reification of social systems in institutions of higher education, driven by University management practices, predicated on the principles of the educational massification and commodification from a previous century, are perverting forms of learning made possible by new learning technologies and approaches and methodologies as a response to the storm of challenges brought about by the global collapse of unsustainable financial systems.

Caught out by the sheer speed of change and often clinging to venerable assumptions (De la Luz Reyes, 1992), universities worldwide are struggling to recruit, engage and retain students with few resources. Learners, in increasing numbers, for a variety of complex reasons, are rejecting a higher education which the state can, in any case, no longer afford. Without the means to pay for a degree and no prospects of work, young Europeans are participating in a worrying new diaspora in search of work away from their homes and cultures.

In the bruising encounters between values and practices developed over centuries, the commodification of scholarship by managers desperate to constrain resources to ensure survival, and the impatience of consumerised “tech-savvy” learners, there is a need to consider why and how formal instruction gets in the way of learning, and how these challenges can be overcome. Academics have a duty to prepare for citizens for this future by arming them with the knowledge and the skills to judge and use information wisely and effectively for the common good.
Assumptions

The assumptions which underlie this discussion are that technological advances are intended to serve pedagogical effectiveness and pedagogical effectiveness is constructivist in nature and is, thus, characterised by the following hallmarks:

- provides multiple representations of reality;
- represents the natural complexity of the real world;
- focusses on knowledge construction, not reproduction;
- presents authentic tasks (by contextualising rather than abstracting instruction);
- provides real-world, case-based learning environments, rather than pre-determined instructional sequences;
- fosters reflective practice;
- enables context- and content-dependent knowledge construction;
- supports collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation (Adapted from Jonassen, 1994).

Definition of terms

Massification: “to become, or cause to become, oriented toward mass production, mass consumption, and high throughput rather than individuality” (Wiktionary, 2013).

Commodification (or commoditisation): “the transformation of goods and services, as well as ideas or other entities that normally may not be considered goods, into a commodity” (Wiktionary, 2013).

Reification: “...the act (or its result) of attributing to analytic or abstract concepts a material reality – it is a misplaced concreteness. Through reification people regard human relations, actions, and ideas as independent of themselves, sometimes governing them. The abstraction “society”, is frequently reified into something that has the power to act. Society does not act – people do” (Ritzer, 2007).

Heutagogy: “a form of self-determined learning with practices and principles rooted in andragogy... In a heutagogical approach to
teaching and learning, learners are highly autonomous and self-determined and emphasis is placed on development of learner capacity and capability” (Blaschke, 2012).

**HE learning in a time of austerity and exponential change**

In closed institutional reactions to unprecedented austerity measures in higher education, there seems to be, currently, an absence of focus on the values and wisdom that accompany deep, life-changing learning. Universities – for all the innovation that they lay claim to – appear to bury innovative teaching and learning in the administrative minutiae and the corporate language of targets, clients and business drivers. Students are clients and marketing and client satisfaction is a major concern. On the part of university administrators and policy makers, there seems to be a hunkering down, an intense commercialising of information and knowledge transfer often to the oblivious exclusion of good teaching and learning in response to austerity – thus entrenching the commodification of learning.

To exacerbate the challenges in transforming education for 21st century learners, exponential technological developments in the way information is accessed and knowledge is gained, and used, appear to make the concept of formal instruction increasingly irrelevant. There is an equally significant focus by university policy makers on the kind of employability skills required by industrial models of commerce and industry - in a world where these models have fragmented into chaotic political responses and violent student protests. The prospects for graduates in Europe are bleak indeed. Present responses in formal learning institutions focus on declining figures, rising student debt and the rejection of synchronous, place-based clicks and bricks learning by students, student dropout rates and student dissatisfaction – a veritable litany of woes for higher education. Sadly, the resultant stasis in views on the purpose of higher education are objectifying the student as a client who can in some way buy the necessary learning to be employed.

Reification of university systems into dysfunctional patterns has led to urgent appeals by Ecclesfield and Garnett (2010), among others, for adaptive institutions which practise dialogic systems
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of communication and policy, and which recognise that targets are dynamic and to be adapted and negotiated to circumstance. However, the reality of arrangements in many universities appears to be directly contradictory to the fluidity, cost effectiveness and transparency of providing learning by digital means. I am suggesting, here, that reactive, fragmented, ethic institutional policy making may be at the heart of the HE malaise.

For example, in discussing the impact of the prolongation of studies, Katsikasa and Dergiades (2010) show how policy change in Greece seems to be uninformed and potentially incoherent: “It constitutes also an indication of how ineffective our system is at supporting disadvantaged students to succeed in higher education. The expansion in the number of entrants from other modes has not been complemented by the adoption of strategies to improve academic quality and provide support, guidance and advise to the needy students”. They go on to say: “While one can hardly disagree that the prolongation of studies constitutes a serious defect of Greek higher education, nevertheless, the way it is confronted underlines the opportunistic nature of the process of policy making” (Katsikasa, Dergiades, 2010, p. 1467).

In this state of affairs Greece is not alone. In the UK, we do great harm to widening access and participation for those who do not have the wherewithal to play the game, by clinging to institutionally commodified policies which reify to exclude disadvantaged students in surreptitious ways. It is no wonder that student are rejecting higher education which forces them into debt while preparing them for unemployment. The future will certainly need the brightest and the best rather than the disillusioned and the angry.

Ubiquitous, pervasive information, open global communication, learning analytics, personalised learning, crowd sourcing and collaborative sharing, as well as instantaneous, universal and almost costless access to information, challenge the rights of universities to assure the quality of learning. Digitally savvy, socially-networked and thoroughly gamified students access a global wealth of free learning, albeit, as a thoroughly marketised consumers of learning, without the realisation, possibly, that “if you are not paying for the product, you are the product”. Pervasive information, open resources, universal and almost costless access are challenging the rights of universities to assure the quality of learning.

In reified systems educators are treated as deliverers of learning
products; not as facilitators of learning but as cogs in the wheel of higher education graduate production designed to feed the economy. Lecturers struggle to cope at the coalface of teaching. They are exhorted to transform learning and teaching for the development of digital literacies, confident digital citizenship and other graduate attributes deemed suitable for knowledge workers but may not have the time and opportunity to develop such skills themselves, unless as Daloz Parks et al., (1996) put it, “they save the whales on the weekend”. They cope with exhausting workloads - marking and preparation, feedback, office hours, teaching and administrative bureaucracy sometimes, literally, for hundreds of learners - all while attempting to remain inspirational as teachers, and up to date as researchers.

I make no apology for these strong statements to those who would silence such a protest. I am supported in my view by studies such as, among others, Tight’s (2010) analysis of evidence from ten national work surveys undertaken since 1963 which shows that the average UK academic has had a fifty-five hour working week since the early nineteen seventies. Tight reports that “not only are academics expected to teach larger classes and research and publish more but they are also expected to document and justify all of this activity, filling in forms and undergoing evaluations”. Many of the activities that are required for good academic delivery are unseen, unrecorded and unrecognised; thus, good teaching practice generally goes unrewarded and thus remains “cost effective” for universities in financial terms. Despite current attention by the UK Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) to the use of the TRAC system to surface what academics do, the reality of the workload of academics, what they actually do, is generally unrecognised; in particular by short-sighted and harassed managers in pursuit of targets. This leads to the so-called time poverty of academics which is a significant barrier to change and transformation of learning. As one academic colleague darkly put it, The hamster is dead, but the wheel is still spinning.

A principal spine of concern within this perfect storm of challenges to HE learning is that the University as a social design for the delivery of scholarship, research and teaching seems no longer to serve. On the one hand, the firewalls of the mind, the term aptly described by Stephanie Henry (2011), seem to stifle the innovation required for institutions to adapt their systems to a different type
of learner and, by extrapolation, a new kind of learning facilitator. Deception cannot be the business of an Academy designed to prepare graduates to tackle intricate, deep-rooted, intractable global problems.

What appears to have been lost in the discourse is a consideration of the deep humanity implicit in profound teaching and learning - the kind which changes the course of lives and colours existence with meaning and moral significance. The real task of our learners is to solve the most significant challenges that have faced humankind. Thus, learners cannot afford to be seen as digital residents or Google millennials.

We need, then, to think about education policy making from both the ethic and the emic perspective collectively and with courage fairly urgently.

How are HE students learning in an austere digital age?

I have thus far described a bleak scenario which may lead to the irrelevance the University as an institution of formal learning in the 21st century, but is this such a state of affairs inevitable? While the 21st Century is challenging traditional taught delivery patterns and methods, and resource constraint is challenging higher education provision, these trials may turn out to be a blessing in disguise for the future of learning. Let us reconsider John Schaar’s words. “The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created – created first in the mind and will, be created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating”.

Turning now to how digital learners are finding the locus of learning for themselves primarily through social media: heutagological developments made possible by 21st century technologies have created opportunities for independent, self-directed learning on a vast scale. As said already, the slow pace of response to the Internet for formalised teaching and learning by universities and the uncertainty of employability as the result of a degree has driven learners to reject much of what universities offer. Fortunately and perhaps serendipitously, the ability to make sense of, and effectively use, the affordances of an increasingly semantic
Web requires attributes such as trust, team work, communication, collaboration and open sharing – the very attributes graduates need to solve complex problems. Learners have already learned how to collaborate, share and care - outside the constraints of formalised learning; they are using, deftly and aptly, the ubiquity of free access to information and social media apps to develop the skills and knowledge they find relevant to their situations. They are learning and collaborating with each other on the things that matter to them in interesting heutagogical (self-directed) ways. MOOCs, for example, abound to the extent that they are being considered as threatening to university business.

It is most fortunate that the nature of learning online, when well designed and delivered, favours social constructivism and heutagogical teaching and learning approaches. Ecclesfield and Gearnett (2010) define heutagogy as “enabling the development of original responses to the learning being engaged with and original ways of presenting work for summative assessment”. Blaschke (2012), as pointed out in the definition of terms, describes heutagogical learners as “highly autonomous and self-determined” Thus, heutagogy perfectly describes the kinds of learning and teaching approaches evolving out of the Internet and the World-Wide Web.

Self-directed learners tend to develop 21st century lifelong learning skills very quickly and effectively. It is not uncommon to read of under-twenty year olds selling Internet companies for millions of pounds, having been funded by crowd sourcing in the first instance. They, and their fellow learners, are making alternative paths to the being gainfully employed because the affordances of social technologies learners have changed both the learner-maker and the University as a destination for scholars in new and exciting ways. Using such affordances, and learning informally at the point of need and desire, self-directed learners develop, arguably, the kind of confidence that is required for surviving in the future world.

Two excerpts from a TED Talk by Massimo Banzi of Italy (How Arduino is open-sourcing imagination, http://on.ted.com/Arduino) illustrate the point:

“So, this idea that you have a new, sort of turbo-charged DIY community that believes in open-source, in collaboration, collaborates online, collaborates in different spaces. There
is this magazine called *Make* that sort of gathered all these people and sort of put them together as a community, and you see a very technical project explained in a very simple language, beautifully typeset. Or you have websites, like this one, like *Instructables*, where people actually teach each other about anything. So this one is about Arduino projects, the page you see on the screen, but effectively here you can learn how to make a cake and everything else. So let’s look at some projects”.

“But let’s start from this example: So, the group of people that started this company called Pebble, they prototyped a watch that communicates via Bluetooth with your phone, and you can display information on it. And they prototyped with an old LCD screen from a Nokia mobile phone and an Arduino. And then, when they had a final project, they actually went to Kickstarter and they were asking for 100,000 dollars to make a few of them to sell. They got 10 million dollars. They got a completely fully funded start-up, and they don’t have to, you know, get VCs involved or anything, just excite the people with their great project”.

**How can 21st century universities serve HE learners?**

There are indications that allowing teachers to do their real work as expert professionals will allow the development of new and critical pedagogies to support to take on these new kinds of learning. In the UK, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) 2011 Commentary states that findings show that the “high priority given to narrowly-focused learning outcomes has been found to restrict teachers’ identities and professionalism” and that, while systemic inequality has affected student-teacher relationships and forms of learning in all subjects including inter-disciplinary work, there remain opportunities for developing new and critical pedagogies. They state further: “More inclusive or connectionist approaches, rather than ‘teaching to the test’, would engage socially diverse students in a range of higher education subjects and settings” (TLRP, 2011, p. 7 and p. 33).

Ecclesfield and Rebbeck (2012) say that the transformation of
learning and teaching is more likely to come from professional practice than from institutional design because:

- Digital teacher practitioners have enquiring minds.
- They are influenced by social media and Web 2.0 behaviour.
- They are pragmatic in the use of technologies, old or new – whatever works.
- That use a tapestry of technologies and are diverse in their experience of it.

To illustrate the point that Universities have something of irreplaceable value to offer learners that learners want and value, that is personal contact with their tutors, I quote from a 2011 post on one of my own blogs:

“During the student protests occasioned by the Coalition response to funding public education last year, I walked past the Students Union Offices and, displayed as a larger banner in their window, was their comment on this state of affairs: WE ARE STUDENTS, NOT CLIENTS!

Since, on the surface of it, they can learn more efficiently and enjoyably from their iPads than by trying to decode the Boylean narratives of the Academy – if told in the style of commercial expediency in the genre of an industrialised model (I am being a little harsh here!) – I believe they are seeking something new of us – that is, they are looking for find warmth, guidance and modelling of what it means to be human and a practitioner of a discipline. When they experience concerned, knowledgeable and engaged tutors to help them achieve this kind of actualisation, they feel they are getting value for money. Read the student surveys carefully. Perhaps as developers we need to model values rather than to meet KPIs? As HE practitioners we help students solve deep and complex problems, extend narrow and overly focussed thinking towards balanced views, how to work together in service of meaningful work and all the understandings that distinguish a skilled, educated individual from an instrumental one. However, we can only do that by working in institutions that model these behaviours themselves.1

As can be deduced from this post, and the discussion hitherto, I am deeply concerned about the commodification and subsequent objectifying of students in the corporatisation supported by universities. I fear this state of affairs will lead to the capitulation of our responsibilities as scholars in some irresolvable way, if we, as academics, use students as a market to fund what seem to be increasingly dysfunctional views of formal instruction. Assurance in the form of business drivers and cases, while necessary for funding and finance, is a false substitute for the personalised care and attention of students in the conversation that is learning. As a result, I fear we may be reaching a point in our struggle to survive as the Academy – the University as a place for the development of higher order thinking and problem-solving - that we are, to quote Donald Schön (1987), at a point where we are about to slip into patterns of error we cannot correct. The end game here is non-survival of universities.

Universities – for all the innovation that they lay claim to – appear to bury teaching innovation in the administrative minutiae of targets, clients and business drivers. Lecturers struggle to cope at the coalface of teaching under the burdens of the massification and the commodification of education. They are exhorted to transform learning and teaching for the development of digital literacies, confident digital citizenship and other graduate attributes deemed suitable for knowledge workers. What appears to have been lost in the discourse is a consideration of the deep humanity implicit in profound teaching and learning - the kind which changes the course of lives and colours existence with meaning and moral significance. The real task of our learners is to solve the most significant challenges that have faced humankind. Thus, learners cannot afford to be seen as digital residents or Google millennials, let alone as clients!

Knowing how to access and use information does not of itself constitute wisdom. However, as a result of the sharing and transparency that characterises social media, the means to connect and collaborate instantly and globally for a common purpose are used to amplify the power of one to address a specific issue - as dictators who underestimate the power of social media have discovered, as well as the thousands who have raised Kickstarter funding for hugely successful ventures. Fortunately for universities, administrative overload, the infantalising of lecturers and the “cult
of the amateur” (Keen, 2010) fall away in practice when a new age of austerity enforces initiative, hope, passion and commitment from those within its systems.

The greatest assets of any university lie in the quality of its teaching staff and everywhere still there are great teachers who charge lives with meaning and moral purpose. In Shaar’s words, we make paths, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and destination (Schaar, 2010). Without doing injustice to the logical need for effective financial, administrative and procurement systems, policy that requires transformation, innovation and quality needs to recognise that our assets are teachers and learning support because that is where students find satisfaction in learning. I am suggesting here that many universities are unconsciously reifying their systems at the cost of profound teaching and learning as a response to austerity and that this may be a self-defeating exercise. I repeat here the words of Ritzer, (2007) by way of driving the point home: “Through reification people regard human relations, actions, and ideas as independent of themselves, sometimes governing them. The abstraction ‘society’, is frequently reified into something that has the power to act. Society does not act – people do.”

Peter Senge in discussing his experience of Chris Argyris as a good teacher highlights the need for universities, or rather those who make policies in them, to think differently in this way: “As the afternoon moved on, all of us were led to see (sometimes for the first time in our lives) subtle patterns of reasoning which underlay our behaviour; and how those patterns continually got us into trouble. I had never had such a dramatic demonstration of own mental models in action… But even more interesting, it became clear that, with proper training, I could become much more aware of my mental models and how they operated. Mark K. Smith, (2001) points out, that the ability, demonstrated here, to engage with others, to make links with the general and the particular, and to explore basic orientations and values is just what Argyris talks about when exploring the sorts of behaviours and beliefs that are necessary if organizations are to learn and develop” (Infed.org, 2013).

Unless national agendas are infused with negotiated and understood values, they remain at best a sterile framework for regulations and at worst a bureaucratic hierarchy of good intentions. Since our national agendas are a collective mirror for our mental models
about students, it is thus necessary to speak up about the values and visions that really matter in helping students learn effectively and to reflect upon what it is we are actually learning in the co-constructed space called the University. Universities, the people in them, may, in some sense like the fictional Margo and Raphael (see Daloz Parks et al., 1996, p. 3), refuse to play out a circumscribed role with little relation to a complex global reality simply by valuing and developing the capacities for connected, reflective, creative strategic responses. Turning out ruthless bankers and competitive consumers for a broken, bankrupt society seems illogical and short-sighted. The real task for choosing a future - rather than being chosen by it - is to determine HE policy in ways that honour scholarship and the courage to learn, and which reward learners for being excellent, for being caring and compassionate, wise and skilful; for being open, balanced, empathic human beings.

**Conclusion**

New methodologies and technologies offer positive, hopeful answers to teachers who really do know what learning is about and who wish to use available technological affordances to engage students in rich and deep learning. The role of a 21st century University remains, perhaps, in its ancient purpose - to impart wisdom and skill to learners by providing the opportunities for them to take on changed and broadened views of life; to express values that support the kind of “common fire”, described by Daloz Parks, et al. (1996) – in short, to act in protection of the public good. A recent longitudinal study on the success of humanities graduates by Oxford University found that: “Competition is an important driver of quality in education, as in employment. Interviews show, however, that successful employment experience is not explained by a market model of competition. New ideas and processes may be stimulated by market competition, but product design, commercial excellence, and intelligent marketing are not driven solely by demand and supply. New ideas and processes may be stimulated by market competition, but product design, commercial excellence, and intelligent marketing are not driven solely by demand and supply. Graduates, as employers and employees, have found that
competition is a learning process in which people and their ideas need careful nurturance. They point out that Humanities-based higher education provided them with applicable models of how to generate new and workable ideas, and for managing the people who have them” (Kreager, 2013, p. 3).

Since information is freely available, educators may relinquish the role of information provider and model what it means to be a confident problem-solving, fully actualised independent learner using scarcer, more precious, and more expensive, synchronous face to face teaching opportunities. Facebook-weary students are beginning to seek the cognitive, social and teaching presence that is so often missing in virtual spaces. Therein lies a raison d’être for universities in the 21st century. The methodologies of effective learning and teaching can yet be based on scholarship, rather than on policies of gain and profit. We can continue long-tested and successful practices that foster “double-loop” learning in new ways, by empowering teaching professionals as confident digital practitioners; thus working to avoid the consequences of surface Google knowledge and the deceptions hidden in many poorly constructed MOOC’s.

A course of action that enables educators to practice common good values may have the commercial value to save the Academy, as well as the moral value of serving society. Universities, in short, are necessary to prepare ourselves and our learners to live in, work in, and understand the world, as a fully actualised, capable human beings; to adapt to and, in fact, resolve and deal with ongoing austerity and exponential change in a more than uncertain future. Compassion, acceptance and understanding go hand in hand with successful learning in an uncertain world. Learning is difficult. We, fallible and imperfect, may often fall short of intention and motivation as we learn. We need teachers to guide and encourage, especially when the future is uncertain – no learning analytic is able to provide a shoulder to lean on when learning gets, using Schön’s apt word, “messy”. There are real opportunities for new and critical pedagogies that serve these purposes in the face of, or perhaps because of, the severe resource constraints and exponential speed of the change. Policy makers who support heutagogy would focus on the ability of the university to engage with others, to make links with the general and the particular, and to explore basic orientations and values or, in other words, create learning organisations that
respond to change and innovation with agility and confidence. They would keep an eye on the bottom line but not substitute it for the real reasons universities exist. We can foster the standing of academics and the interests of students by examining the firewalls of the mind that rest on venerable assumptions (aptly described by Maria de la Luz Reyes, 1992) that have led to the reification of our systems and the objectifying of our learners. Universities in the 21st century may represent bastions for protecting and enhancing learning and teaching. As such they are worth fighting for. As an academic, I choose, therefore, to create the future and not be created by it.

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Sintesi

Nonostante la crisi economica internazionale in atto, l’università è chiamata a restare fedele all’assunto che intende l’educazione come il cardine della costruzione del futuro, in grado di prospettare spazi possibili di innovazione e di crescita, che vadano oltre le possibilità – a volte limitate - del tempo presente. Le tecnologie della comunicazione sociale ed il loro utilizzo educativo hanno, in questo quadro, notevoli potenzialità creative che, diversamente da quanto è avvenuto in passato, si concentrano sull’attività degli studenti piuttosto che su quella dei docenti. Esiste una incongruenza tra il modello di interazione tra pari – esemplificato dai social network del 21° secolo – e il management centralistico delle università storiche, che la crisi ha sempre più orientato alla ricerca fondi, riducendo gli studenti a clienti e i docenti ad esecutori di compiti burocratici? Un rischio per l’educazione, legato alla crisi e alla massificazione, è costituito proprio dal considerare gli studenti alla stregua di “clienti”, fattori di un ordine solo economico e non profundamente educativo. Una prospettiva che condanna l’università all’inefficacia sociale, a meno che essa non riesca a virare verso nuovi modelli basati sulla adattabilità dei percorsi e sulla valorizzazione della partecipazione condivisa tra docenti e studenti, nonché sulla rinnovata attenzione al problema etico dell’accessibilità della formazione universitaria per gli studenti economicamente disagiati. Del resto, proprio la possibilità di accedere
all’informazione in rete – pur di scarsa qualità - ma a costo zero, mette in crisi il monopolio universitario alla formazione nonché la qualità stessa delle informazioni diffuse.
L’intera problematica può, però, essere trasformata in una chance positiva per la formazione universitaria, perché l’apprendimento online, se ben progettato, stimola la modalità costruttivista di apprendimento, che i social media rendono familiare agli studenti ancor prima di intraprendere gli studi universitari. Si parla in tal senso di Heutagogical approach, una forma di studio in piena autonomia che valorizza la condivisione tra pari senza forzare l’innovazione in canali formali e istituzionali inadatti a sostenerla.
Nell’educazione tecnologica in particolare la flessibilità della formazione può essere valorizzata moderando i costi e permettendo ai docenti di concentrarsi sul loro ruolo principale di stimolare la crescita complessiva, in senso umanistico, degli studenti, avvalendosi del loro stesso contributo, orientando la formazione al problem solving e alla condivisione.