E-learning: expectations and realities, beyond slogans

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EDEN - European Distance and E-learning Network

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the European Distance and E-Learning Network

the largest, active professional community of experts and practitioners of electronic distance education in Europe

EUROPEAN DISTANCE AND E-LEARNING NETWORK

Introducing EDEN

- **The most comprehensive European association of its kind, established in 1991**

- **Fostering developments of distance and e-learning through provision of platform for professional co-operation, information exchange**

- **Open for all levels and sectors of education and training, open for institutions, individuals and networks**

- **UK based non-profit limited company, Secretariat in Budapest since 1997**

A membership organisation

◆ **Institutions - individuals - networks**

◆ **143 institutional members**

◆ **700+ members in NAP - Network of Academics and Professionals (individual section)**

◆ **40 European or national networks present in membership**

◆ **335 institutions represented from 44 countries within and outside Europe**

Members, Partners, Target Groups

- ♦ **Higher education**

- ♦ **National associations and bodies**

- ♦ **Researchers of open, flexible, distance and e-learning**

- ♦ **School level education – the "Open Classroom" initiative**

- ♦ **The corporate sector**

- ♦ **Students - free membership since 1999**

Main activities

♦ **Promotion of networking and co-operation in distance education in Europe**

♦ **Supporting professional development - Annual and thematic conferences**

♦ **Supporting the development of European Policy - *The European ODL Liaison Committee"***

♦ **Policy and feasibility studies - European integration - East-West co-operation**

♦ **Publications and information services: The European Journal of Open and Distance Learning (EURODL)**

♦ **Contribution to EU projects**

The EDEN Annual Conferences

2005 – Helsinki - *Lifelong E-Learning*

2006 Vienna – *E-Competences*

- *2004 - Budapest*
- *2003 - Rhodes*
- *2002 - Granada*
- *2001 - Stockholm*
- *1999 - Moscow*
- *1998 - Bologna*

- *1997 - Budapest*
- *1996 - Poitiers*
- *1995 - Birmingham*
- *1994 - Tallinn*
- *1993 - Berlin*
- *1992 - Krakow*

E-learning: From the exegarated expectations...

US training market (IDC)

… to the sober realities…

Kevin Kruise, elearningguru.com
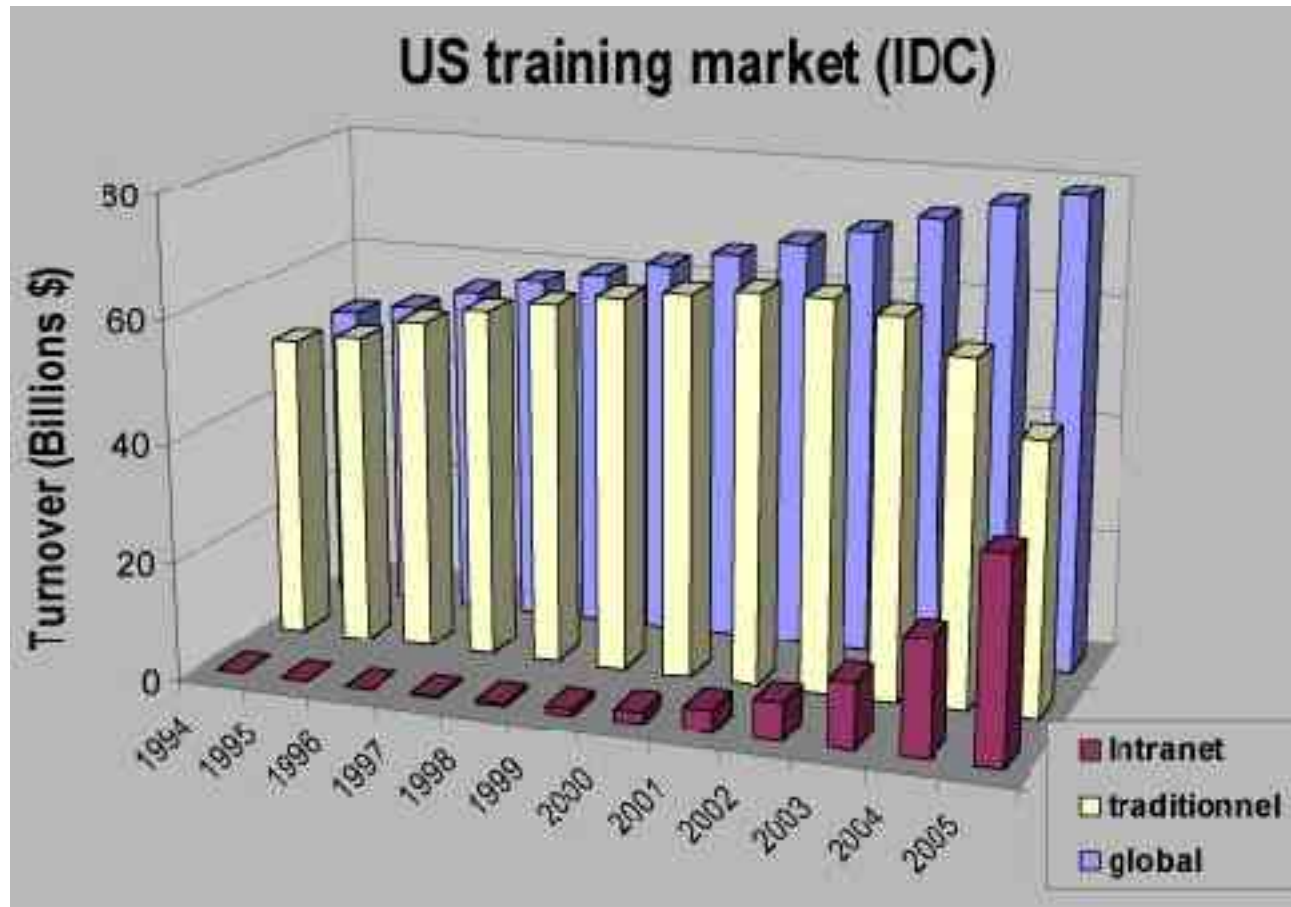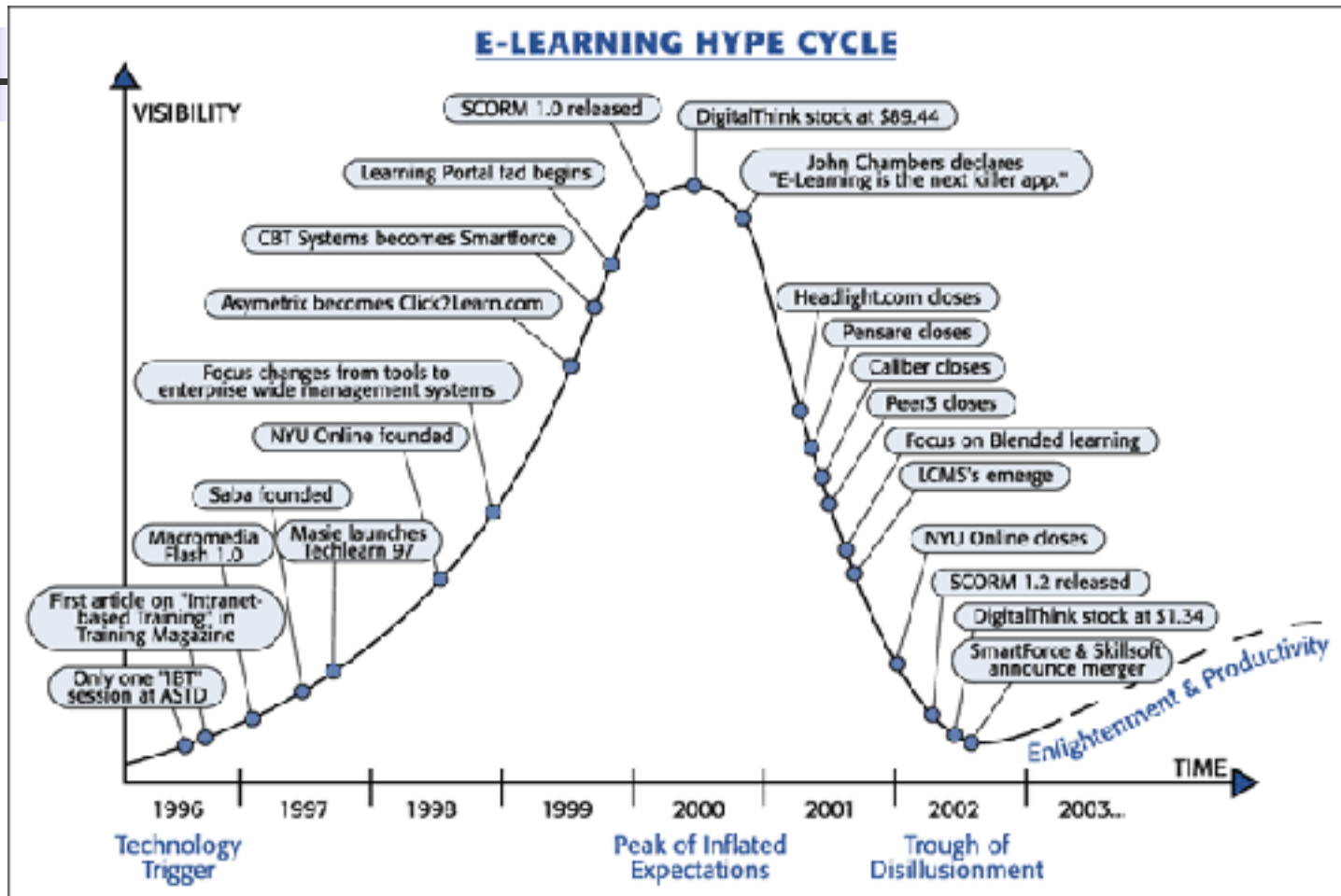
… and the decline of educational software sales

Educational Software

$500 Million — ANNUAL RETAIL SALES

400

300

200

100

'00   '04

Source: NPD Group
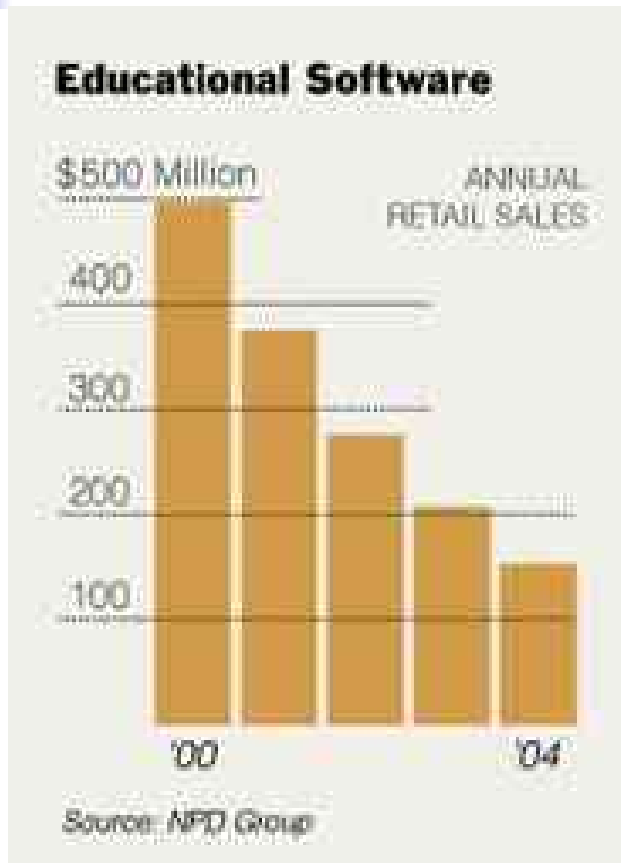
PC based
educational software
(K-12, US)

NB:
slight increase in
total e-learning spending:
due to tutoring!

State of the art - eLearning

- eLearning opens new opportunities for creative and innovative teaching, potentially increases transparency

- Supporting factors: emergence of lifelong learning, development of ICTs

- eLearning helped education to enter the first row of policies - but it has been subject of quick and sometimes superficial incorporation in policy programmes

- Process seems to be driven rather by technology than training.

- Climate of discontinuity and uncertainity present - is eLearning a consolidated phenomenon?

eLearning - Hypes, expectations

- Critical approach: "eLearning has so far demonstrated more potential than performance"

- eLearning has been subject of quick and sometimes superficial incorporation in policy programmes, hype and overpromotion harms credibility

- Prognoses overestimated the power of free market and speed of developments

- eLearning - overrated as business, but still a perspective in supporting renewal teaching institutions

Distance and eLearning – ambigous valuation

- distance and eLearning appraisal rather diverse

- questionnable quality products present on market

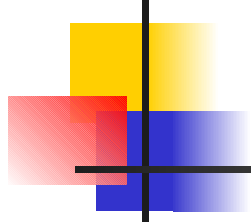- activities mosaic-like, critical mass or coherent functioning is missing

eLearning – Where does it work?

- Effectively works where
  - higher number of people
  - regularly
  - just-in-time, flexibly
  - in small chunks of knowledge

  need to be trained –

  typically in larger scale corporate training

eLearning – difficult to sell ?

- e-Learning survived the collapse of 'e-bubble', it is less damaged than e.g. eBusiness or other 'e'-s

- immature market with low transparency, lack of shared criteria for products

- existing fragmentation of European education systems, lack of openness of the academic education markets

- low level of collaboration between various actors – inside the public sector but also in weak public-private partnerships

- Low eLearning import/export flow in the EU - actors focus on national markets

- "There isn't a real European eLearning industry"

- reasons: language, cultural differences, disliked de-contextualisation of learning

- Remarkable differences exist in maturity across member states and in new member countries

ICTs in higher education
(van der Wende, 2002)

- **Change is slow and not radical**

- **ICT in teaching and learning: Widespread but part of a blend**

- **Instructors gradually doing more but with no reward**

eLearning - Institutional positions

- eLearning is recognised as key element in institutional modernisation at universities – but only occasionally effective terms

- Most universities work at small scale, on pilot level, experimenting with web based platforms, supporting their campus based students

- Only few universities invested with robust technological and pedagogical infrastructure

Universities and eLearning

- Increasing entrance of universities to the eLearning market - mainly as partnerships or consortia of existing institutions

- Leading to development of new business models in higher education

- Reinforcing the internationalisation process

- Stronger links with the labour market

Staff and students

- **Resistance of teachers and opposition of institutions has been underestimated, missing faculty reward is serious inhibitor**

- **Need for culture of innovation for staff - lack of confidence and service- awareness is present**

- **Students' approach: seek for efficiency gain with eLearning, rather than exploring the pedagogic opportunities of ICT in learning**

The EU policy approach

Strong European Union commitment:

- eEurope - eLearning - Information Society Technologies programmes

Main related EU educational strategy objectives:

- improving quality and effectiveness

- facilitating access of all to E&T

- opening education and training systems to the wider world

ODL and e-learning – typical European elements

- Avoiding social exlusion
- Equal access, fighting against digital gap, social exclusion
- A tool to reduce unemployment
- Emphasizing the European dimension as important added value
- Stressing the importance of pedagogy, educational methodology, instructional design
- Monitoring of implementation, focus on quality issues
- Critical and responsible application of technology (ICT)

The eLearning experience: changing perspective

Integration of ICT in education has moved

- From awareness to take-up
- From research to practice
- From hesitation to endorsement

The new stage requires focussing on

- Understanding: Observation, analysis, research
- Mainstreaming: at all learning levels / for all users
- Creativity: new contents and services

Contextual factors affecting future elearning policies in Europe

- Deeper and more complex interpenetration and fusion of three sectors:
    - (a) Work,
    - (b) Education
    - and Training and
    - (c) Lifestyle and Entertainment.
- Accelerated migration of 'influential learning' and 'knowledge construction' away from traditional educational institutions.
- Widening of the gap between citizens' culture and competencies and established educational systems.
- Intensified criticism of canonical knowledge by citizens and organizations.
- Increased dependability of institutionalized learning on external technology and knowledge sources.
- Broader and deeper cultural and mental assimilation of information and communication technologies by citizens.
- Disregard of these issues in the Bologna Process and Erasmus policies.

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Competitiveness as main context

- Education and elearning tend to be approached from a „HR" perspective, with emphasis on efficiency, productivity and market relevance.

- Educational policy makers deal with learning as a bridging method used to 'flexibilize' individuals and bring them in adequacy with the need of the market

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Flexibility paradigm - flexibilization rhetoric

- The adaptability of the citizens to the new market conditions only can be achieved by making them more flexible and mobile
- New market conditions can be met by increasing the mental and cultural flexibility of citizens.
  Marketing a culture of flexibility appears to be the method to achieve this goal.
  - (NB: personal project, self-directed learning, learner autonomy, learner-centeredness and, self-management...)
- The terms of lifelong learning, citizen empowerment, knowledge society are subject of a gradual reinterpretation within the flexibility paradigm

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"Citizen empowerment" – burden on the learner...

- The burden for creating more and better learning is transferred from educational providers to the learner himself.
  - Cost of improving learning efficiency seems unbearable for traditional educational systems.
- In order to be socially acceptable, flexibilization culture needs to exploit the theme of citizen empowerment,
- The emerging collaborative and mobile dimensions rather consolidate than weaken the ruling paradigm of flexibilization.

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Future elearning policies

- The dominant view of elearning has been purely instrumental, legitimizing its *raison d'être* as an ideal method to match consumer choice, market needs with learner autonomy

- *Future elearning policies will need, to overcome the flexibilization rhetoric and link more credibly the rationale for Europe-wide cross-national and local elearning initiatives with key issues in civil society*.

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www.eden-online.org