

Title	Edutainment : knowledge of desire or desire for knowledge?
Author(s)	Chitty, Naren J.
Citation	Chitty, N. (1999). Edutainment : knowledge of desire or desire for knowledge? In AMIC Annual Conference, 8th, on Asia: Information Poor to Information Rich - Strategies for the 21st Century, Chennai, Jul 1-3, 1999. Singapore: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre.
Date	1999
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1826
Rights	

Paper No. 9

**EDUTAINMENT:
Knowledge of Desire or Desire for
Knowledge?**

**SESSION 1: LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES: TRANSMITTING OR
TRANSFORMING EDUCATION**

**by
Naren Chitty**

**Paper for presentation in the session on:
Asian Information Poor to Information Rich: Strategies for the 21st
Century.**

AMIC Conference

July 1999

© Naren Chitty

The phrase “learning technologies” tantalizes with ambiguity. It may allude to the (a) acquiring of new technological skills or to (b) technologies of learning, or (c) to both. I have used the term “know-ware” to mean knowledge ware or knowledge commodities. Technologies of learning have become items of “know-ware” in the Information Marketplace. As the market’s influence on policy and as a shaper of knowledge wares grows, the role of universities as developers of thinking critical to the information revolution gains importance. There is a tendency to overlook important customers in the Information Marketplace. An earlier paper maps the Information Marketplace with respect to Media & Information Technology (MIT) education and recommends an educational strategy for particular MIT education vendors, viz. Universities (Chitty 1998). While my 1998 paper dealt with the influence of the market on educational processes, this paper focuses on the dialectic between the roles of technologies of learning as media and as message.

Media and Information Technology (MIT) or post-convergence communication technologies are the natural media for technologies of learning today. But we should recall that there always have been technologies of learning in human societies. For the purposes of describing complex and fluid historical processes in a simple model, we might distinguish between pre-modern, modern and post-modern technologies of learning. Lerner distinguished between media systems and oral systems the former consonant with modern and the latter with traditional (Lerner 1958,

55). I prefer to use the terms pre-modern and modern because, after all, tradition may be incorporated into modernity. Pre-modern, modern and post-modern as used by me here refer to technologies of learning as media.

The table below builds on Lerner to relate characteristics, examples, audience, content and source with pre-modern, modern and post-modern forms. Table 1. Characteristics of Pre-modern, Modern & Post-modern media

	Pre-modern media	Modern media	Post-modern media
Characteristics of media	Interpersonal	Impersonal mediated	Interpersonal & mediated plus impersonal mediated
Examples of media	1. Classroom	1. National School System (NSS) 2. Classroom 3. Audiovisual support material 4. Broadcast media	1. NSS 2. Classroom 3. Multimedia 4. Internet
Audience	Individual/groups	Mass	Individuals
Content	Prescriptive	Descriptive	Interactive Entertaining
Source	Hierarchical	Professional	Non-professionals Non-hierarchical

Popularisation of Education:

National School Systems (NSS) are important technologies of learning at the social level, which may be viewed as complex largely Uni.-directional communication systems. These have been quick to adopt new classroom and mediated technologies to learning situations. In the modern period, even if content in texts may have been descriptive, NSS have been able to be prescriptive through reliance on libraries and textbooks.

In the postmodern context the Internet is one's library and the distinction between legitimate scholarly knowledge and corporate information becomes blurred.

Broadcast media already presented some challenges from the 30's to the 80's and resulted in new forms of audiovisual materials being used in teaching. Radio, TV, film and print had already in the 20th Century contributed to the demand for technologies of learning to be entertaining as well as educational and for the exclusivity of theory to be replaced by a reliance on popular practical knowledge. Witness the success of *Popular Science*, *National Geography* and numerous radio and TV programs and films about anthropology, biology, chemistry, economics, geography, physics and perhaps every other academic subject.

This process of popularising knowledge has led to the commoditisation of knowledge and information (know-ware) and has accompanied the development of the newly converged Media and Information Technologies (MIT). MIT is not the cause for the demand for infotainment and edutainment. That was nurtured by the cultural industries, particularly radio, TV, film and print in the years after World War II. However, the newer convergent Postmodern technologies of learning lend themselves to edutainment because of the interactivity and multimedia capacity.

While the desire to acquire knowledge, whether as entertainment or serious reading, can only be applauded, there can be such a thing as too much market influence. Uncontrolled market influence can blur the line between formal university-type education and formal training provided by various

institutions and informal education and training provided by media. I think these distinctions, or some distinctions are important because not everyone will be trained for the same kind of decision-making. There will be a difference in expectations of the student whose wish is to acquire MIT skills where her future decision-making will be within the framework of particular technologies, and the students whose wish is to be a policy maker. And who is to say that the former should not end up one day as a policy maker. For this reason I believe strongly that university MIT programs should empower in two ways:

1. First, and rather basically, they should provide students with MIT skills. This is becoming as important today as speaking an international language such as English.
2. Second, they should provide students with research, analytical, critical and communication skills, which will allow them to make those larger decisions in the future.

What does this mean for education providers?

There are serious questions related to the promotion of a purely market determinism in the development of technologies of learning as educational products, which I have addressed earlier (Chitty 1998). The questions are particularly difficult ones because of common values of capitalism and entertainment have been seen to loom large in the culture, information and education industries. Depending on ones point of view this could be viewed as beneficial exogenous change (modern uncritical outlook),

problematic exogenous change (modern critical outlook) or selective endogenous displacement of particular values (postmodern outlook).

Table 2. Outlooks in Relation to Locus & Nature of Change

MODERN OUTLOOK	UNCRITICAL OUTLOOK		POST MODERN OUTLOOK
	Beneficial exogenous change.	Selective endogenous displace- ment	
	Problematic exogenous change.		
	CRITICAL OUTLOOK		

We should not proceed uncritically without recalling these various views of what is happening in the process of international communication. The internet and what I have called “Know-ware Land” will not disappear. It is here to stay, here to grow, and these issues will remain with us in one form or another. While taking positions in relation to big picture political economic influences we must also recommend practical policies for states, National School Systems and educational institutions to follow.

I think we cannot go wrong if we go back to Paulo Freire’s idea of ‘empowering’ students (Freiere). What will empower students in a contemporary context? I believe that students must be empowered by developing the following skills:

- 1. Ability to produce/distribute messages using Media & Information Technology.
- 2. Ability to produce strategies of communication.

3. Ability to produce maps of society/social situations for themselves and employers.
4. Ability to examine maps of society/social situations critically.

These are different types of skills and not everyone needs all of them. The further up one goes (from 1 to 4) the more the skills become policy-related rather than purely practical. We need both the pure practitioner and the policy analyst.

I am not certain whether one can develop analytical skills through consumption of interactive audiovisual material with high entertainment values in quite the same way that one could develop those skills through the application of logic to the linguistic descriptions of situations. This is an area for linguistic inquiry. However I do believe that “analysis” of situations which are represented in interactive media using interactive media, should be possible.

With rising global population and the need for education to be delivered to larger numbers at a quicker pace, entertainment must surely be welcomed as a vehicle through which knowledge is delivered. The study of Latin and Greek are no longer considered prerequisites for the development of logical thinking. Nor is English a prerequisite. Audiovisual media provide their own possibilities in relation to analytical processes.

However, this does not mean that we should not encourage those who have the resources to do so to follow traditional routes of knowledge acquisition. Nor does it mean that 100% of a program of study should be based on entertaining interactive media, on our *knowledge of desire*. We must

continue to package knowledge as a judicious mix of that which attracts because it is entertaining and that, which attracts because it is intriguing and challenging – addresses a *desire for knowledge*.

Naren Chitty has a PhD from American University in Washington DC. He is Head of the Media and Communication Department and Director of the Centre for International Communication of Macquarie University. He is also the Secretary General of the International Association for Media & Communication Research (IAMCR) and Editor of The Journal of International Communication.

References

Chitty, Naren (1998). "Mapping Know-Ware Land". Paper presented at AMIC Conference, Bangkok, 1998.

Freire, Paulo (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Lerner, Daniel (1958). *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. New York.