

Humanities Education in the Information Age: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT ONLY

The advent of information age is rapidly and pervasively transforming the society and our daily lives. Higher education in this age sees a multifaceted paradigm shift brought about by the exponential growth of IT and consequent free flow of information. The paradigm shift in education has at least the following three facets. (1) The widespread implementation of Computer-aided teaching and learning facilitates a shift from a textbook-based teacher-centered approach to a more interactive and learner-centered approach. (2) Knowledge explosion and accelerated obsolescence stimulates a shift from a knowledge-oriented education to a competence-oriented education. (3) The vast and easily accessible network world of knowledge and information expedites the breaking down of traditional boundaries between disciplines and fosters the transition from a strictly intra-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning to an interdisciplinary / multidisciplinary one.

Though the ongoing paradigm shift affects every segment of education, it understandably presents more acute challenges to the humanities than to disciplines in other academic spheres. The humanities subjects are traditionally conceived as book-oriented, non-computing disciplines, in which knowledge continuity and inheritance, rather than obsolescence, is a matter of concern. What the humanities disciplines all have in common is that they study expressions and products of the human mind, ranging from language, rhetoric and logical thought to literary and artistic creation, religious belief, the meaning of history, culture and others. There exists a perceptible wide gap between the most traditional and the most futuristic, between the warmth of humanistic concerns and the coldness of digital manipulation, and between the subtlety of mind and the uniformity of machine.

I am going to discuss on the consequences of the new trends in the digital age for the renewal of humanities education, the challenges brought about by the paradigm shift that we must pick up, and the tremendous opportunities presented to us by the technological advances. We view the integration of information technology into humanities education not as a passive response to the perils of marginalization or even fossilization, but as an effective means to enrich the learning content and innovate the delivery of courses. I will also report on an envisaged IT-aided interdisciplinary approach to humanities education, which the author has implemented to some extent in his teaching of undergraduate courses in linguistics.