Emerging Concepts in E-Learning

E-Learning, technology-enhanced learning, blended e-learning and concepts like computer-mediated pedagogies are currently emerging fields in education that are receiving widespread attention from educators, researchers, teachers and practitioners all over the world. The number of national and international e-learning/computers in education conferences is increasing yearly where presenters expose lots of new and innovative ideas, revolutionary and sometimes controversial practices, and systems/technologies that have been developed to facilitate the implementation of these new modes of education.

E-learning at many institutions like the Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies (VCILT), the TECFA at the University of Geneva and the TeleUniversity of Quebec (this list is non-exhaustive) is currently in a phase that is mainly ***process-driven***. The generations of technology-driven and/or content-driven e-learning systems are no longer seen as having major roles in the teaching and learning process. The focus therefore is on sustaining innovative educational processes that guide the students in the learning processes grounded mainly in socio-constructivist contexts.

The integration of technology in learning, needs to address the very important issue of enhancing the teaching and learning process, rather than just being seen as a new flexible delivery medium (Nichols, 2003). In other words, it offers a new paradigm for learning.

The belief is that classic e-learning through well-structured platforms, diffusion of contents online with structured chapters and classic activities such as open-ended questions and Multiple Choice Questions defeat the purpose of using e-learning technologies to foster innovative pedagogies and to promote knowledge construction and autonomous development of the student (Santally & Senteni, 2004). The occurrence of successful learning in this module is therefore defined as a three-phased activity: (a) Knowledge Acquisition phase (b) Knowledge Application Phase; (b) Knowledge Construction through Sharing and Reflexive Practice.

From an activity-theoretical point of view, learning is being reconceptualized in the sense that the course contents are no longer the object of the activity but they are perceived as tools to help learners achieve the object, which is now some skills, or competencies that they need to develop. The framework that governs the setting up of this module is therefore based on the educational ecology concept (Santally, 2005) where teaching and learning is re-conceptualized as an activity framework governed by the following rules:

:*Self-Reliance: Act using the resources available locally using for example our learning object repository.
:*Empowerment: Enable subjects to react immediately to changing circumstances by having access to decision-making.
:*Interdependence: Obtain resources elsewhere in order to act, to mutualize [human] resources using Internet, and peer-networks.
:*Asynchrony: Enable subjects to operate as quickly as possible, given local circumstances.

:*Reflexivity: Enable critical thinking and creativity to continuously improve current practices.
:*Commitment: Regulate social interaction, reciprocity and collaboration for knowledge construction and sharing.