“B(e) Here Now – Further Realities and Potential for e-learning”

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper and research is to present opportunities for further growth and innovation in online education, with a focus on music-related curricula. Evaluation and discussion of current industry standards and practices in e-learning will inform new opportunities and approaches to e-learning. Specific attention is given to the impacts of technological innovation and consumer preferences and habits on the education, educational delivery and costs.

Keywords. Global learning, Music Education, Online learning; Consumer preferences

Preface

“Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen has predicted that as many as half of the more than 4,000 universities and colleges in the U.S. may fail in the next 15 years. The growing acceptance of online learning means higher education is ripe for technological upheaval, he has said [1]”.

1 Introduction

“E-learning”, or online education is often referred to by the older moniker of “distance learning”. Whereas this is an arguably semantic distinction, the difference in terminology does merit consideration and should be considered in the dialogue and debate in examining ways to improve, innovate and enhance online education. While traditional “distance” learning served constituencies in which geographical “distance” was an obstacle in person, or in-residence, education, online education (e-learning) can serve to foster community and mitigate distance.[1]

[1] This paper does not serve to discredit necessity or need in distance learning; a premise is that there is unrealized potential that goes beyond fundamental necessity.

A central focus of this analysis is to stimulate thought concerning ways that e- learning can bring people together though education in the online environment– the focus here is on community and collaboration, not distance. And, while, specific disciplines (for example, music) have traditionally relied on "real time" in person interaction between students and teachers, in both individual and group (ensemble) contexts.

This analysis will examine ever-expanding opportunities for the development, delivery and growth of online learning in music related education, and will observe two (2) continual threads – that of the influence of technology, **and** consumer expectations & preferences.

Background

Much has been written about the evolution of, and obstacles associated with online learning [2], and this analysis does not serve to retread old ground; nonetheless a brief look at the context and current state of online learning is important in contextualizing opportunities and unrealized potential of e-learning.

The concept of education from "afar" is not new – distance learning's roots can be traced to the 16th Century, with the advent of "correspondence" education [3]. Central to the administration and innovation of correspondence education was the opening of new channels of communication and distribution, specifically, improved modes and routes of transportation leading to what is now considered a utility - postal communication.

Today, the Internet and digital technology platforms provide the channels of communication and dissemination; their popularity and continued acceptance are and have been integral to the growth of "distance" learning.

Notwithstanding, there remains formidable resistance to the acceptance of online education as a viable means (or alternative) of delivering college and university educations, experiences and degrees [4].

Common and Specific Challenges associated with Online Learning

The proliferation of for-profit online educational institutions has further exacerbated the debate surrounding the future of online education.

Questions regarding the ethics of accepting tuition for potentially under-prepared students represent just one concern that for-profit online education has raised [5]. Further intensifying the debate over online education is the specter of online institutions serving as *de facto* diploma mills – ostensibly, online education provides more opportunities and platforms for diploma mills to flourish in the digital age [6].

And, online learning, like any other form of education, is rife with inherent challenges – socialization and learning outcomes, career preparedness, professional qualifications, academic integrity, overhead and operating costs, and tuition price-points are but a few of the challenges facing educational professionals and institutions worldwide, whether online, or in-person.

In addition to these pragmatic considerations, online education faces other serious challenges: perception and acceptance in the public sphere and the academy.

While distance, learning continues to gain acceptance around the globe through notable institutions, such as the Open University (in the U.K.), not all correspondence education is accepted as a necessarily viable or "legitimate" alternative, or complement, to education in residency.
Another concern regarding online learning is whether it is considered by employers and governmental/societal agencies as an equivalent or acceptable substitute to a "traditional" education or degree [7].
With more institutions offering online curricula and degrees, employers are continuing to accept distance, or online, education as a viable complement or alternative to the accepted standards and norms of a "traditional" education and degree [8], indicating meaningful potential for growth and opportunity.

This paper acknowledges the above oft-recognized challenges of online learning, and instead poses solutions and additional e-learning music education opportunities to address existing or perceived barriers.

2 Assessment Software Tools

Assessment is at the core of the educational process and yet teaching in the online sphere may intrinsically imply a degree of distance (geographically, or otherwise) between the student population and the teacher & institution: distance that can be perceived to lessen teacher awareness and assessment capabilities.
There are, however, robust assessment software tools to increase efficiency and which allow teachers and facilitators to concentrate more on interaction and student engagement; these tools, or "filters", can have a pronounced impact on increasing student participation and can serve to mediate or close perceived distance ("disconnect") by assisting in learning assessment.

Academic Integrity
One critical form of assessment is focused on Academic Integrity, which is a persistent challenge of educators worldwide [9], commonly in the form of plagiarism. Whether online or in-person, the digital age has ushered in new concerns regarding the authenticity of student work, and instances of *de rigeur* plagiarism in today's "cut & paste" world (in the digital age) have brought in to question fundamental aspects of intellectual property and access to information.
E-learning thus brings up new questions on the authenticity of a student's work – particularly whether students are in fact doing the work for which they are seeking credit and attribution. The potential "anonymity" of the online environment underscores the importance of due diligence in this assessment
With societal norms regarding "ownership" and authorship of intellectual property differing from country to country, education in a post-globalized world requires vigilant attention to academic integrity, regardless of territory, or whether the education is online or in residency [10].
In terms of assessing academic integrity, there is no shortage of plagiarism detection

tools to be utilized in analyzing student work for original authorship – tools easily adapted to the online instructional environment. These aides are not the sole arbiters of determining original authorship but should complement the teacher's role in assessment of Academic Integrity [11].

Assessment – Learning Outcomes

Likewise, there are many different software platforms that can assist in the online environment for the delivery and assessment of music skills and knowledge, including ear-training, history, and music theory and which can increase efficiency for students and teachers, alike. Proprietary software such as "smartmusic" and "Auralia" are readily adaptable to the online environment.

These tools too should be used to enhance the learning environment – excessive reliance on assessment tools serves to undermine the quality and perception of online education, relegating it as a "watered down" or "automated" alternative" to traditional residence learning and assessment.

3 Distance and e-Learning in a Global Context

While there are important challenges and realities to traditional international education and communities, there is abundant potential for Global Distance and e-learning in this area.

In particular, travel expenses and convenience often create obstacles for students wishing to engage in international education: the expense of tuition, airfare and relative changes in the cost of living (including currency considerations) prevent many students from this unique educational experience and perspective.

Immigration regulations also impact international student education and exchanges; the online environment can help to avoid these impediments to international study. E-learning is poised to facilitate international educational experiences for students who may otherwise been unable to participate in international education.

E-learning in distinction to Study Abroad

According to Stacie Nevamdomski Berdan in her critique of "Student Learning Abroad: What our Students are Learning, What they're Not and What We Can Do About it", one of the deficiencies of study abroad programs "is the lack of engagement – both before students go abroad and after their return – between professors (or study-abroad leader) and students, with the intention of helping students interpret their experiences [12]".

Distance and e-learning in a global context allows for multi-national student cohorts to grow and advance together online, while providing cultural awareness and education, and also exposing students to business practices and standards from around the world. This cultural and industry exposure and awareness is paramount to career preparedness in today's music industry, for musicians, educators, and music industry professionals. E-learning is poised to surpass in residency education and its ability to expose students to these professional and international foundations and experiences.

My experiences teaching Music Industry curricula online has allowed for the opportunity to teach students from multiple countries and continents simultaneously. Arguably, some of my most exciting and rewarding experiences in music (business) education are of connecting with students across four (4) continents in "real time", and through interactive web-based conferencing tools.

Another attribute of Global e-learning is networking – students enrolled in Global online music programs are able to build their international professional networks in ways that others in residency programs would take years to build, if ever.

4 Blended Learning

Potential Models

A logical extension of the e-learning in the Global context is the exploration of blended learning initiatives, including extrapolating from "low residency" educational models.

Low residency programs were historically predicated on class communication through the mail, with a culminating end-of-semester meeting, or limited residency schedule, thus earning these programs the moniker of "low-residency". Extrapolating from the low residency model shows the potential to combine e-learning and its robust and interactive learning environment, with low-residency (a week; 10 day) meetings at appointed times (per semester; academic year) according to accreditation and/or professional standards.

Another permutation of this approach is to combine the Global Learning Context with the Blended Learning/Low residency model noted in Section III. In this scenario a "study abroad" semester or multi-week session would replace a "traditional" study abroad experience. Instead of studying apart from their residency cohort back at home, students in an online Global environment would convene in another country, interacting with each other and faculty face to face, while also experiencing the richness of study abroad.

These blended learning models can also alleviate the potential for "lack of engagement – both before and after students go abroad", (as noted above in Section III.) Specifically, students enrolled in blended learning environments will have had the opportunity to acclimate themselves to a multi-national and multi-cultural learning environment and will have forged important relationships with students, faculty and administration before their travels abroad. They can also remain with their online cohort after they study abroad experience, thus allowing an opportunity for all to reflect on and apply their experiences to the learning environment.

5 Errors in e-Learning

Debatably, some common, and impactful errors that may arise in the arena of e-

learning are that of equating e-learning with "traditional" in residency learning, or characterizing it as a (cost effective) proxy for in residence learning. A foremost challenge to building community and delivering education effectively in the online sphere is that of inspiring and maintaining individual (and collective) student participation and interaction.

"Time Shifting" and access of Content

Online education is mirroring popular trends and consumer expectations regarding how content is disseminated and consumed: this is taking the form of "time shifting".

The 1970s ushered in a major shift in broadcasting and consumption – the landmark case of *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc.*, codified the ability to record and view television programming at one's leisure; no longer were consumers constrained to watching their favorite television shows at prescribed times – instead they could "time shift" and personalize their viewing experience.

Time shifting, or self-directed consumption, is a trend that is firmly embedding itself in consumer preferences; on-demand platforms such as Netflix and Amazon allow consumers to choose and watch favorite movies or television shows on demand, unfettered by network broadcasting timeframes.

Time shifting conveniently lends itself to student acceptance of e-learning and has tremendous potential for attracting "non-traditional" students.

However, while time shifting can help to attract new student populations, it can also affect the online educational process. In particular, instead of accessing online content as delivered by the teacher/facilitator, students may wish to "time shift" their participation, resulting in sporadic or flurried activity which does not mirror a "real-time" educational environment, experience, or interaction. (Television has recently encountered a "binge watching" phenomenon, with viewers watching a whole season of television programming in a weekend [13].) This "binging" behavior can work its way from television viewing preferences to study and class participation habits.

While time shifting provides important growth opportunities for online education, institutions and educators must be vigilant in setting course delivery dates; assignment due dates; "virtual participation" requirements and "virtual attendance" expectations in order to minimize the potential for "excessive" time shifting.

Furthermore, just as many in the information age confuse data and access to information, with knowledge, another error related to time shifting and access to content is "that the delivery and access of content equals education".

The history of human communication and education is predicated on the oral tradition; education, however, is differentiated from "mere" communication, and consists of conveying, explaining, applying and "demystifying" the "content" – that is, effectively putting the information in to context to achieve specific learning objectives and goals [14].

Creating a "stand alone" course that may unwittingly encourage students to consume content at an abstract pace, divorced from the "process" of learning and interaction with faculty and fellow students does not necessarily further stated learning objectives, institutional objectives or even accreditation standards.

Whereas, moocs have raised awareness regarding the "democratization" of informa-

tion and affordability of higher education, they also call in to question the underlying importance of the learning process, itself [15].
Institutions, faculty and students must be mindful that access to educational materials does not in and of itself impart education, credentials or learning outcomes.

Assumptions regarding the Cost of Educational Delivery

Another shortcoming or "error" of e-learning is the assumption that because the virtual learning environment appears to obviate common "threats" facing in residency learning (costs of maintaining and developing infrastructure, facilities and costs of staffing) that it is inherently a less expensive in delivering education.
Careful attention should be paid in avoiding associating online delivery as a "budget" or "bargain" brand when it comes to building an effective learning environment and community.
Two areas of significant investment for an e-learning delivery process are: the "Course Management System (CMS) and the "Learning Management System" (LMS). The CMS is a key consideration in "building", editing, maintaining and updating course offerings and deliverable materials; the CMS allows for direct input from course authors in course development and maintenance processes: thus vesting control with the institution, and not 3rd party vendors.
While the CMS is an intrinsically "internal" consideration, the LMS is "external" in the sense that it is fundamental to student recruitment, engagement, and retention. In effect, the LMS is the core or lifeblood of the online educational experience – it is the bridge between students and the overall learning environment.
In creating an effective LMS, the evaluation of formats and environments to best suit delivery of content is a key consideration (lecture; laboratory; ensemble; individual instruction; seminar.) And, institutions should be reticent to use a "one size fits all" approach to course infrastructure and "home pages" – the environment for a history course would differ in definitional and practical terms from "one-on-one" individualized instruction, an ensemble environment or a course in ear training.

Institutional "Control" and Consistency

Institutions entering the online arena should be aware that CMS infrastructural requirements may require ongoing support of 3rd party partners and vendors.
Just as private sector businesses rely on 3rd party cloud computing service providers (Amazon), educational institutions can no longer be "insular" in their operations. And, 3rd party providers can yield important benefits – the 3rd party technologies that have existed for B2B (business to business) teleconferencing and communication provide robust platforms to support the educational process and environment [16], and can provide services and support that many IT departments are unable to provide.
A reputation of consistency in the LMS learning environment is a key ingredient in reassuring students and educators that e-learning is not a cost-cutting alternative to the traditional classroom. Just as first-rate teaching is the "face" of an institution in residence learning, so must the Learning Environment serve as an attribute and face of the e-learning environment. On this note, institutions should be careful not to substitute a mere" electronic blackboard" learning page for an LMS.

The deciding factors on LMS and CMS choices should not primarily rely on financial factors and budgeting: the CMS and LMS exist to support learning, students and faculty and building community.

Learning from other industries – e-Commerce

Another error of e-learning has been a lack of learning from other industries: specifically, industries that have experienced e-commerce disrupt their operating models. Paradigm examples of such industries include recorded music, film, and news & journalism – informative parallels (and, in some cases, reverse parallels) and lessons from these industries can be transposed and applied to e-learning.

Lessons from the Recorded Music Sector

For example, the recorded music industry historically has based its model on control and exclusivity – that is record labels owned and controlled the exclusive rights to their artists' recorded music output. When a consumer wanted a specific recording, they would need to go through prescribed channels of retail and distribution licensed by the rights holders (the record labels.) This resulted in a "scarcity" effect and institutional control by the labels.

The advent of file-sharing sites, however, has resulted in a Pandora's box that has wrested control of the recorded music ("content") from the label rights holders. As a result, many music consumers today have a profoundly different idea of the "value" of recorded music from consumers of fifteen years ago: today, "free music" is a much heard consumer mantra.

The music industry, however, is adapting – from a scarcity model based on unit sales (CDs; vinyl records) to one predicated on access (in the form of streaming platforms and subscriptions.)

Record label rights holders are also finding new ways to "leverage" their content– for example, licensing recorded music for use in advertising and branding – in which the music drives consumer interest and traffic to specific brands or platforms.

Labels and artist also use "free content" to generate revenue generating scenarios; for example, in exchange for a free download, artists and labels can obtain important consumer data (email; geographic) to use in future marketing campaigns and fan interaction initiatives; such "free" content can also generate important goodwill leading to future sales of their music, merchandise and concert tickets.

Application of Music Industry Adaptations and Lessons to e-Learning

While not all educational materials and concepts consist of such exclusive content, education, like recorded music is undergoing its own digital sea change.

Consumer expectations are shifting from traditionally controlled academic delivery of education to more student (consumer) driven preferences and models.

One advantage of e-learning is that proprietary lesson and "lecture" materials serve as core assets of the learning experience. E-learning environments do not necessarily default to a lecture format predicated on 3rd party copyright protected source materials, such as mass-distributed textbooks. Instead, a key attribute of effective e-learning can lie with its uniquely authored learning environment and course materials.

This richness of a uniquely curated learning environment is exclusive to a particular institution and can provide the "exclusive" value that students are expecting to receive with their tuition; the exclusive control of the learning environment and proprietary content lends itself to an exploration of subscription-based and related platforms in which e-learning institutions can leverage these exclusive learning assets.

Subscription models

While consumer preferences have furthered the idea of the "democratization" of information and content, e-learning can learn from current subscription models, such as Netflix and Spotify in which consumers purchase "all you can eat" access to music and movies.

Valuable lessons and insight can be wrought from current trends in subscriptions. For example, offering different packages of credits/electives in return for more preferential tuition can align with consumer expectations [17]; additionally offering subscription content/accessibility on a less stringent quarter/semester timetable can enhance the possibility for consumer interest and preference for e-learning. And, providing "exclusive" content can differentiate an institution and serve as the appeal for current and potential (future) students.

"Free content"

Whereas the music industry has integrated "free music" in its efforts generate interest and revenue, online education is lagging behind in this approach.

While a variety of institutions offer free online courses and moocs, it remains to be seen if this is more of an exercise in bolstering mailing lists and gauging consumer behavior and consumption trends than it is in generating viable business models in which "free" content serves as a means to monetize other aspects of an institution's educational assets or services.

6 Digital Libraries for e-Learning

Libraries serve multiple purposes: in addition to being a repository for an institution's textual and research materials, they also serve as a "common" area for students to study, research and build community.

Some of the costs and obstacles of libraries in higher education stem from logistical matters: the size and physical capacity of a library (the number of volumes is a statistic often cited in institutional rankings), maintenance of the physical structure (the weight of books is an important engineering and architectural consideration), aesthetics of the environment, physical cataloging and storage, staffing and library expertise, and the cost of new publications and editions.

In essence, the age of the digital library is already here – whether we subscribe to an audio-visual streaming service (Netflix; Amazon); a music streaming service (Deezer; Spotify) or a research platform (Lexis-Nexis), we are, in effect, subscribing to a "library" of content. Consumer preferences guide us in deciding which "library" to choose – for example, size and diversity of the catalog; convenience of use and con-

tent delivery; and pricing are common determining factors.

Consortium models
Opportunities in the form of online "consortium" relationships can facilitate the pooling of resources and creation of larger digital library networks. A practical example of such a structure is that each consortium member contributes library resources in their specific concentration – when the various consortium members resources are pooled, the aggregate result can be that of a "super" library with resources and access to information far exceeding the scope of a singular institution.
While the "pooling" of library resources and access has been in practice for many years among consortium schools, there has been the fundamental limitation of physical facilities – students and faculty typically must (physically) visit member facilities for access to these pooled resources.
Additionally, nominal "facilities" fees can offset additional licensing costs associated with expanding online digital library resources and infrastructure in the consortium e-library model.

Proprietary and exclusive materials in Digital Libraries
Another area of intrinsic value of digital libraries lies with the unique proprietary materials in each institution's e-learning environments - the pooling of these unique and specifically curated materials have potential for added value. Instead of hosting primarily publicly accessible 3rd party publications, providing a collection of branded and uniquely authored exclusive materials can serve as a primary attribute of a digital library. Such digital libraries will have educational content not available anywhere else (and will not merely house mass-produced publications.)

Workshop and Chat Room Applications
Digital libraries also have potential to recreate the social atmosphere of a library, but in an online context. In particular, digital libraries have tremendous potential to foster student and faculty interaction and scholarship through online learning communities ("chat rooms"), workshop presentations and symposia.

7 E-Learning: Realizing Potential – Brand Building and Trasformation

E-learning institutions can continue to reference their geographic "anchor" in their marketing initiatives, but operating in the online environment provides new prospects. Specific potential lies in the role of e-learning in building and transforming an institution's brand.

New programming opportunities
Non-constrained e-learning environments provide potential for new programming and curricular development initiatives: without traditional limitations such as physical classrooms, laboratory or practice room environments, institutions can expand beyond traditional barriers and focus on new and innovative educational programming and

class sizes.

Faculty expertise and diversity
Another advantage of non-geographically centered e-learning is in the diversity and quality of the educators. E-learning allows institutions to engage educators on regional, national and international levels, without the restrictions of physical residency faculty relocation. Institutions are now able tap in to both national and international faculty to best provide for their student and curricular needs, and institutional branding.

Institutional Collaborations
Additionally, e-learning further redefines the relationship between and institution and geography, and can allow for new custom-tailored collaborations between institutions – an excellent example of such a collaboration and programming is the relationship between Berklee College of Music and Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) in which they have collaborated in offering an MBA in specialized professionals areas, such as Music Business [18]

Socialization and Communication Skills
The college experience is often viewed as a "rite of passage" – so much so that these years are memorialized in films and novels, and many graduates look back with nostalgia for the friendships (and socialization) from this formative time.
While socialization is often considered an important takeaway from the college experience [19], it can also be regarded as a weakness in e-learning; critics may argue that the online sphere does not present the face-to-face experiences that a "traditional" educational environment provides in preparing for the realities of adulthood and socialization.
However, e-learning's space in the digital sphere can prove itself to be an asset to the idea of socialization and communication in the age of digital and new media.
E-learning is poised to educate and inform students on interaction and communication skills by providing specific examples, expectations and applications of the standards and practices of e-commerce and the 21st Century workplace.

Application to Music Education practices – Unrealized Potential
Various educational tracks and disciplines fundamentally lend themselves to an online learning environment, while others are perceived to be best served by in residency education: medical and legal studies are two disciplines firmly entrenched in "the latter. Music education, too, can be perceived best served by in person education and contact.

As one of the oldest forms of human communication and expression – music originated in oral and aural traditions. Yet, music has been accessed and enjoyed in "virtual" formats for over a hundred years: from piano rolls (player pianos); radio; vinyl and cassette formats; file-sharing and torrent sites; iTunes to the many streaming services of today (Spotify; Deezer). Just as the musical art form does not require live

performance experiences for enjoyment, neither does music education require in person "live" educational environments.

As music is often a collaborative undertaking, with listening and communication being key elements – "give and take" between participants is a cornerstone of music and the educational process and which begs the question –" how effectively can music be taught in e-learning environments?"

There are myriad platforms available to help answer this question and effectively facilitate community and communication in music-related e-learning; whether the content is focused on ear training; ensemble playing skills or individual instrument/voice instruction, the age of "YouTube" and "Face Time" is here. While these platforms have often resulted in individual or isolated consumption practices they can be harnessed in an interactive manner to create community in music e-learning.

Additionally, the robust tools available for music e-learning is ever expanding. Through real-time conferencing, individual e-learning instruction is now a reality – something that is reflected in music industry practices: for example, "crowd-sourcing" platforms such as Kickstarter commonly offer "virtual" lessons (over Skype and related platforms) as an incentive for fans to contribute to musical recordings/projects.

Additionally, video conferencing, voice and text conferencing ("chats"); interactive group exercises, and video recording options can create meaningful community in the educational environment, not only within the institution itself, but across provincial, state and international borders. A paradigm example of the potential for international collaboration in action is that of the "Virtual Choir", here as described by founder Eric Whiteacre.

The Virtual Choir is a global phenomenon, creating a user-generated choir that brings together singers from around the world and their love of music in a new way through the use of technology. Singers record and upload their videos from locations all over the world. Each one of the videos is then synchronised and combined into one single performance to create the Virtual Choir [20].

8 Conclusion

Even with an established history, e-learning has a relatively clean slate on which to innovate from, and is aptly positioned to bring education in to alignment with other industries that have adapted to disruption of their business models in the digital age.

Instead of attempting to "fit" e-learning in to existing education paradigms, models and practices, the time is right for e-learning to step out of the shadows and transform education as we know it today, and education of tomorrow.

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