



III Międzynarodowa
Konferencja OA

III Międzynarodowa Konferencja Open Access w Polsce
„Otwarta nauka i edukacja”

13-14 marca 2012, Bydgoszcz, Polska

III International Conference Open Access in Poland
“Open learning and education”

March 13-14, 2012, Bydgoszcz, Poland

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What do we need TED for?

Abstract: *TED is still not very popular in Poland. The author analyses the TED service in view of the needs of two groups of its users: representatives of the world of education and Poles as a nation with its specific baggage of history. From the Polish point of view free recordings from TED.com are extraordinary — well-thought out and perfectly presented, illustrated by beautiful slides, they are also relatively short. These inspiring talks present current state of art in various disciplines of knowledge and human activities. The speakers are both world-wide known and not widely recognized people.*

The title question is discussed in the context of such educational initiatives as Khan Academy (for teaching at grammar and secondary level) and Academic Earth (for teaching at academic level) or in some aspects even more ambitious Stanford Engineering Everywhere and MITx. As the needs of two groups of users have been analyzed, two reasons for the use of TED Talks have been referred to:

- 1. the can be used as an excellent introduction or illustration of lectures or classes as well as instruction for teachers,*
- 2. the talks can be treated as patterns of public presentations worth to be followed in Poland — the country in which teaching of the art of such presentations has not a long tradition.*

Keywords: *open lectures TED.com, projects supporting education*

Available for free on the Internet, these video recordings are changing the world of education in front of our eyes. They are still used by a relatively small number of educators but, in the next several years, a series of currently developing initiatives will shape the quality of teaching, a discipline that has been essentially unchanging for hundreds or years. This paper presents the mentioned initiative, known as TED, a service of inspiring talks openly published on the TED.com website (<http://www.ted.com/>¹). It also attempts to place this initiative among the remaining projects, as seen from the Polish perspective.

TED (*Technology, Entertainment, Design*) is a set of conferences launched in California by Richard Saul Wurman in the mid-1980s. In the beginning, the project had purely commercial objectives. The tickets had a price, the events were closed, the recordings only made it to the participants and, as noted by one of its most popular speakers, sir Ken Robinson, they were unlikely to have been moved from the shelf where they were put in the first place.

The popularity of TED arose significantly when it was taken over by Chris Anderson², who reorganised the functioning of the conferences in 2010s. The slogan “Ideas Worth Spreading”, appearing next to the TED logo, conveys the mission of these

¹ Website link redirects to the current version as accessed on 29.07.2012.

² Not to be confused with the editor-in-chief of the “WIRED” magazine, who shares the same first and last name.



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conferences. The website itself was adapted to the needs of the publication of video recording itself (as of February 2012, there are over 1000 recordings, which can still be seen as a relatively small number considering the overall body of available information), which can be translated easily (as it is done by many volunteers).

In addition, the TED Prize has been introduced, as well as, the TEDx programme, which seems to be the most significant step, next to providing open access to the conference recordings. The TEDx programme enables almost anyone to organise an event exhibiting the characteristics of a TED conference: maximum 18 minutes for each speaker, an absence of questions from the audience, as well as, a strong emphasis on attendees meeting new people during relatively long breaks between sessions. The conferences, which take place in California every year are still priced, a fact which not aimed at gaining profits, as much as, limiting the number of attendees.

However, this does not provide the answer to the question of what can make this initiative, linked by these three letters, so exceptionally interesting. A partial explanation is surely the fact that, the videos published on the TED website are, not only from the Polish perspective, unusual; they are thoroughly thought and presented perfectly, accompanied by beautiful slides as well as, what is important, relatively short in duration. The talks demonstrate current knowledge in the various areas of science and human activity. Among the speakers, there are some of the most renown names from all over the world, representing various disciplines, for example, Bill Gates, Phillip Zimbardo or Frank Gehry, as well as, persons not as widely known, who simply have an interesting story to tell.

However, there are series of websites with video recordings that are a lot more valuable, from an educational point of view, than the ones available on TED.com. The TED talks deal with a wide variety of subjects, often not having much to do with learning. At best, they can be described as popular science materials. After all, it is not possible to learn anything minimally complicated within 18 minutes, which is the established maximum duration of the talks.

Meanwhile, there are initiatives, such as the now world-famous *Khan Academy*, excellent for showing rather small amounts of material in primary and secondary education, or the *Academic Earth*, which is addressed to university students. There are even more ambitious projects, for example, the *Stanford Engineering Everywhere*, starting up with delays — *Coursera*, *Udacity*³, or finally, the upcoming MITx. The latter, from the beginning, offers the possibility of obtaining a diploma of completion of the free courses, available on the Internet (though, obviously it will not

³ Sebastian Thrun is developing this project following the surprising success of his first on-line course organised as part of his work at Stanford. See DeSANTIS, N. Stanford professor gives up teaching position, hopes to reach 500,000 students at online start-up. In: *The Chronicle of Higher Education: blogs* [on-line]. January 23, 2012 [Cited 29.02.2012]. Available from Internet: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/stanford-professor-gives-up-teaching-position-hopes-to-reach-500000-students-at-online-start-up/35135>.



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hold the same value as a regular MIT diploma; nevertheless, it will confirm the achievement of specific skills). The mentioned initiatives mainly offer the knowledge, the satisfaction and the possibility of contact with the best lecturers in the world.

The courses currently available are being used by hundreds of thousands of people, a number that can easily reach tens of millions. The possibility of playing the videos at a time convenient to the viewer, repeated watching, discussions with other students — all these elements speak for the inevitable rise of popularity of on-line video education.

Meanwhile, the creator of TED, Richard Saul Wurman, is organising a new event, known as *The WWW Conference*. It is interesting that the conference is meant to be completely contrary to the known TED format. It can even be said that, to a large extent, it is being created in opposition to TED since it assumes a format of a loosely held discussion between at least two persons, carried out on a stage and dealing with a subject that is not known to them in great detail, which is meant to stimulate new perspectives on already known issues.

All the mentioned projects raise serious questions on the future of education as we know it, that is, consisting of a teacher, a relatively small group of students and a classroom. No doubt less significant, yet equally interesting, is the question about the place of TED in the current and inevitable process of change.

Above all, it must be emphasised that 18 minutes is a time for inspiring the viewer, convincing him to one's point of view, not for teaching him. The actual education can take place at a later time, thanks to the inspiration. This is why TED can be considered an excellent class intermission, a popular science introduction to a topic of a lecture or training material for lecturers on a subject of interest to them⁴. Therefore, the TED talks have the same function as the Discovery Channel shows by presenting interesting information in an accessible way but without going into detail.

One of the functions of the TED talks that should be used by Poles in an especially intensive way is the exemplary public speaking. In a country of relatively weak traditions in this area, where the art of presentation is not commonly taught nor required, it seems an extremely important aspect. Learning that the preparation of a presentation of this length takes several days offers a new perspective. The obvious truth concerning the cause-effect relationship between the time spent efficiently on preparing for an exam and the achieved result, in Poland, does not

⁴ See McKinsey Global Institute report, which lists the development of teaching skills of educators among one of the three key factors influencing the quality of education. Analysing the speeches of some of the best speakers in the world, it can be easily qualified as an important element of this development. *How the world's best performing school systems come out on top* [on-line]. London: McKinsey&Company, 2007 [Cited 29.02.2012]. Available from Internet: http://www.glp.net/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=473555&folderId=12858&name=DLFE-4122.pdf.



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translate into a concern with the art of presentation (for reasons not entirely understandable)⁵.

Especially effective in the popularisation of the latter is the TEDx programme. It is an accessible, excellent platform for presenting knowledge and research findings, for inspiring and sharing one’s passions in a contemporary way. Considering the variety of events that can be organised, from small meetings among acquaintances at someone’s house through several-hour brainstorming sessions at universities to all-day, professionally prepared events, typical of the actual TED conferences; it is possible to adapt the event any specific need. Moreover, if reaching a younger audience is of interest, the TEDxYouth format is also available. The overall programme is under continuous development by thousands of volunteers around the world, which bears great testimony to its value.

Poles still have a lot to learn. The TEDx events can be regarded as a sort of “evangelisation” of good presentations, in terms of the actual speech, as well as, the accompanying slides. The refinement of these aspects is one of the key elements of an effective talk. In fact, lectures devoted to the issue of presentations can also be found⁶.

Returning to the title question, the fact remains that TED’s function is the widely understood broadening of knowledge. By attentively viewing the video recordings on the TED.com website we can be better prepared for upcoming changes in the near future.

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⁵ During her talk at TEDxEast, Nancy Duarte, a speaker trainer and author of books on the art of presentation states: *It’s not about idea, it’s about selling it.*

⁶ See an exemplary talk on the art of presentation: McCANDLESS, D. The beauty of data visualization. In: *TED* [on-line]. [Cited 29.02.2012]. Available from Internet: http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/david_mccandless_the_beauty_of_data_visualization.html.



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Biography

He has obtained BA degree in Management at the University of Warsaw. Recently he is a student at the Civil Engineering Faculty of Warsaw University of Technology. He is interested in problems of economy and education. Innovator and committed discussant.

He has been working in TEDxWarsaw Team since the very beginning. Inventor and main organizer of TEDxYouth@Warsaw. He used to work as a researcher and an analyst for Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In his free time he is a volunteer in the Republican Foundation and a horse riding instructor.