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DISTANCE LEARNING

... For Educators, Trainers, and Leaders

In this issue the spotlight is on

Engage the Disengaged: Today's Online Millennials

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Distance Learning, an official publication of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), is sponsored by the USDLA, by the Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University, and by Information Age Publishing. Distance Learning is published four times a year for leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the fields of distance learning, e-learning, telecommunications, and related areas. It is a professional magazine with information for those who provide instruction to all types of learners, of all ages, using telecommunications technologies of all types. Articles are written by practitioners for practitioners with the intent of providing usable information and ideas for readers. Articles are accepted from authors with interesting and important information about the effective practice of distance teaching and learning.

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Evolution of the ODL System in Nigeria	*Odeyemi O. Janet*

SPOTLIGHT ARTICLE

Engage the Disengaged

Strategies for Addressing the Expectations of Today's Online Millennials

Usha Jagannathan and Risa Blair

Introduction

College students enrolling in introductory classes and not participating in classrooms or learning communities have demonstrated a higher attrition rate and a lower completion rate (Briggs, 2012; Neal, 2009; Southerland, 2010) as compared to college students who were engaged and participated in learning communities; the latter academically outperformed nonparticipants (Lerma, 2010; Raftery, 2005; Wilmer, 2008). In order to increase student retention rates in web-based learning environments, colleges and universities need to look at how they are engaging students. Tighe (2008) stated that focus on retention should begin the moment the student signs up for classes, and mandatory orientation should be a part of every first year student's experience in undergraduate programs. College administration perceives student retention rates as indicators of academic quality and student success (Tighe, 2008). Today's

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students are reliant upon technology, surrounded with computers, video games, and MP3s. Educators observe that the students they teach today are confident in the positive value of technology, have something that they are really good at and something that has an engaging, creative component to it (Teo, 2013).

The first year can be overwhelming for many students, especially when transitioning from high school to college level or if returning back to school after a long gap. Investing in first-year student engagement programs can help students feel more connected to the institution, and in turn, may help increase retention efforts (Cazabon, 2009; Clounch, 2010). Higher education institutions must focus on student success and determine predictors of student retention (Fike & Fike, 2008). Administrators within higher education institutions need to find ways to train staff and faculty on student engagement initiatives and to monitor how the established initiatives are supporting students achieve academic success (Alward, 2012). Higher education institutions must also find ways to engage students to help them feel appreciated and motivated.

Factors that contribute to students' persistence and academic success for today's generation include; student engagement (Alward, 2012; Cazabon, 2009; Clounch, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008; Fruzzetti, 2011; Kress, 2007; Lerma, 2010; Southerland, 2010; Willekens, 2009), improving student motivation and influencing learning strategies (Khan, 2009; Vanthournout, Gijbels, Coertjens, Donche, & Peter, 2012), faculty and peer mentoring (Corella, 2010; Forbess, 2007; Meyers, Silliman, Gedde, & Ohland, 2010), authentic learning (James, 2011; Keeley, 2011; Lombardi, 2007) and college support personnel (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011). This article focuses on exploring ways instructors engage students in virtual classrooms through various engagement factors for millennials and stresses the importance of keeping students engaged for retention and academic success.

According to Astin (1985), rather than judging educational excellence on the basis of institutional reputation and resources, it should be judged according to the intellectual and personal development of students. Astin's theory of involvement focuses less on what the educator does and more on what the student does, leading the student to be an active participant in the process of learning. The most basic principle of Astin's "Theory of Involvement" (1985) is that the more students learn, the more actively they are engaged in the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience (Hutley, 2008).

With the growing popularity of online and blended learning, there has been an increase of literature related to effective online teaching and learning practices, much of it focusing on the value of deep or "significant learning" strategies (Fink, 2003). Some recent studies further suggest that deep learning theory involves a variety of learner-centered approaches that are designed to encourage students to use higher order thinking skills and to work directly with information, thus promoting deeper, more significant levels of understanding (Fink, 2003; Floyd, Harrington & Santiago, 2009; Majeski & Stover, 2007). In today's digital age, it is necessary for online students to be information literate and know how to navigate, search, analyze, and use information to be successful in an academic environment as well as preparing for the workplace (Zachery, 2010). Some students seem to have very specific technology skills. For instance, they may know exactly where and how to download the latest version of their favorite video games, or how to post an album or movie on Facebook, but have limited skills in searching for academic articles in an online college library required to write a paper. Successfully integrating technology into the instruction by actively engaging college students within the college environ-

ment is a crucial concern for improving student success and learning in the first-year undergraduate programs.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is generally viewed as the degree to which a student feels involved or connected in a variety of educationally related activities (Southerland, 2010). If student involvement or engagement is related to learning objectives, students tend to be more engaged with their educational activities and connected to their institution (Cazabon, 2009). Creating student engagement tools and resources is important as many new students encounter obstacles in their transition into college, including inadequate academic preparation, lack of an educational plan or clear goals, psychological or social adjustments to college, unfamiliarity with the institution, finance challenges, and other outside responsibilities (Clounch, 2010). Student engagement activities that have been found to create a positive student outcome include participation in collaborative learning activities, interacting regularly with staff, faculty and other students, and taking a genuine interest in completing meaningful academic work (Lerma, 2010).

Motivation

Motivation is another key factor mentioned regularly in the literature for students to achieve academic success by participating in college support programs. Studies on retention of college students (Ke, 2010; Khan, 2009) indicate that students who enter college with a desire and strong motivation to graduate with a college degree are more likely to persist. College institutions should provide workshops, resources, tutorials, and other student aids to help keep students engaged in their academic program (Collins, 2011). Students who are highly involved in their institution and education tend to spend more time studying, utilize resources provided by the institution including workshops and extracurricular activities, and have more frequent contact with staff, faculty, and other students (Clounch, 2010). Similarly, the most successful first-year college students are the ones who have a strong support system (Collins, 2011; Cruz-Johnson, 2012). Institutions who invest in support programs and student resources geared to accommodate the adult learner will likely see increased student retention and successful degree completion (Southerland, 2010; Wilmer, 2008).

Faculty and Peer Mentoring Programs

The process of becoming socially and academically integrated into the institution via peer and faculty support is important for students, especially in the first year of their college education, and has proven a significant factor for student retention (Clounch, 2010). Faculty and peer mentoring programs are commonly used within higher education institutions to help integrate first-year college students to the institution. Peer mentoring programs are very effective within higher education institutions for building connections with other students (Corella, 2010; Forbess, 2007; Meyers et al., 2010; Willekens, 2009). Students are generally more comfortable going to another student rather than their instructor to ask questions or seek clarification on subject matter material. Student-to-student or peer support groups help provide support to students, especially throughout the first year of college experience. These peer groups are offered through the college services (Corella, 2010) for students in their first-year degree programs, thus offering social and emotional support while students acclimate to college and seek help with any course difficulties.

Authentic Learning

Authentic learning is built on the concept of learning-by-doing and focusing on real-world applications. Authentic learning is seamlessly integrated or implanted into meaningful, real-life situations (Jonassen, Howland, Marra, & Crismond, 2008). By engaging learners in authentic activities, learners' motivation increases, and they develop skills that they can immediately apply on the job. On-the-job training without the job is the essence of authentic activities. This performance-based instructional strategy engages, enlightens, and intrigues the learners. When educators do not effectively integrate technology into educational process, students are not fully engaged and miss out an authentic learning experience emphasizing collaboration, creativity, and innovation (James, 2011). This may leave students unprepared to be productive digital age citizens and participants in the highly competitive, global, digital workplace. ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education, 2011) believes the convergence of technology, coaching, and building community is essential to model learning and teaching effectively in a connected, global society. To develop a transformational learning ecosystem, the most effective professional development for teachers to teach effectively in a globally connected, digital society should be technology rich, delivering via a coaching model, and enhanced by the power of community and social learning. Students learn best when they are faced with genuine challenges, choices, and take ownership for their learning. It becomes the responsibility of the educator to provide a curriculum that is authentic and engaging. Learning should be experiential and provide the social activity that helps students make connections between knowledge and societal issues or problems (Starratt, 2008). Also, the presence of communication tools alone is not enough for effective online learning; knowledge is constructed through social interactions, reflection, feedback, and authentic real-life activities (Ruey, 2010).

Support Systems

Adult learners, young or middle-aged, attending a higher education institution for the first time will undergo a dramatic role adjustment to their new environment (Southerland, 2010). However, this adjustment is often complicated as many 4-year institutions focus on online learning today. For instance, there are more services offered for online students at 4-year institutions including creating a college culture, student activities, and extracurricular events including clubs and organizations (Collins, 2011).

Though college support programs recognize that each student comes with different learning requirements, the key to student success depends on how much involvement the students show in academic activities and also outside the classroom for other college activities. The most successful students are those who actively participate in collegial activities, not only focused on their academics, but also in student support groups and peer tutoring, and have constant communication with faculty for academic success and in enhancing their skill set (Klem & Connell, 2004). Recent reports indicate that the skills that are most important to employers when hiring recent college graduates are: teamwork skills (44%), critical thinking and reasoning skills (33%), oral and written communication skills (30%), and the ability to assemble or organize information (21%) (NLC, 2011).

Interactivity

Interactivity can be achieved through integrating technology as the major component and a striking characteristic of web-based learning environments (Chou, 2003). An interactive web-based learning environment often involves four types of inter-

action: learner-content, learner-learner, learner-instructor and, learner-interface (Wang, 2007). Most of the web-based simulation games being used in the higher education field today aim at developing core knowledge of the course skills with situated problems using collaborative learning. On the most practical of levels, one of the great advantages when using computer-based strategy games in the classroom is that these games are so familiar to the students who have grown up using them (Proske, Narciss, & Körndle, 2007). Once the students are engaged, the graphical user interface of the game presents the critical learning material in windows and pop-up screens that require no training or a user guide. The flow of the game and the navigational schemes are entirely intuitive and familiar to the gamer generation. Interactive video games and newer web 2.0 tools should be seen as a complement to, not a replacement for, other teaching tools and methods (Ghergulescu & Muntean, 2010).

Conclusion

Thus the most common factors mentioned in the literature to engage the disengaged students in online and blended learning environments can be achieved through: student engagement, collaboration between students and instructor for community-based learning, peer-mentoring to help with course difficulties, authentic learning, and enhancing student motivation. These key elements help students to build a sense of confidence to actively engage in the classrooms, as well to participate in other college activities that promote learner satisfaction and academic success.

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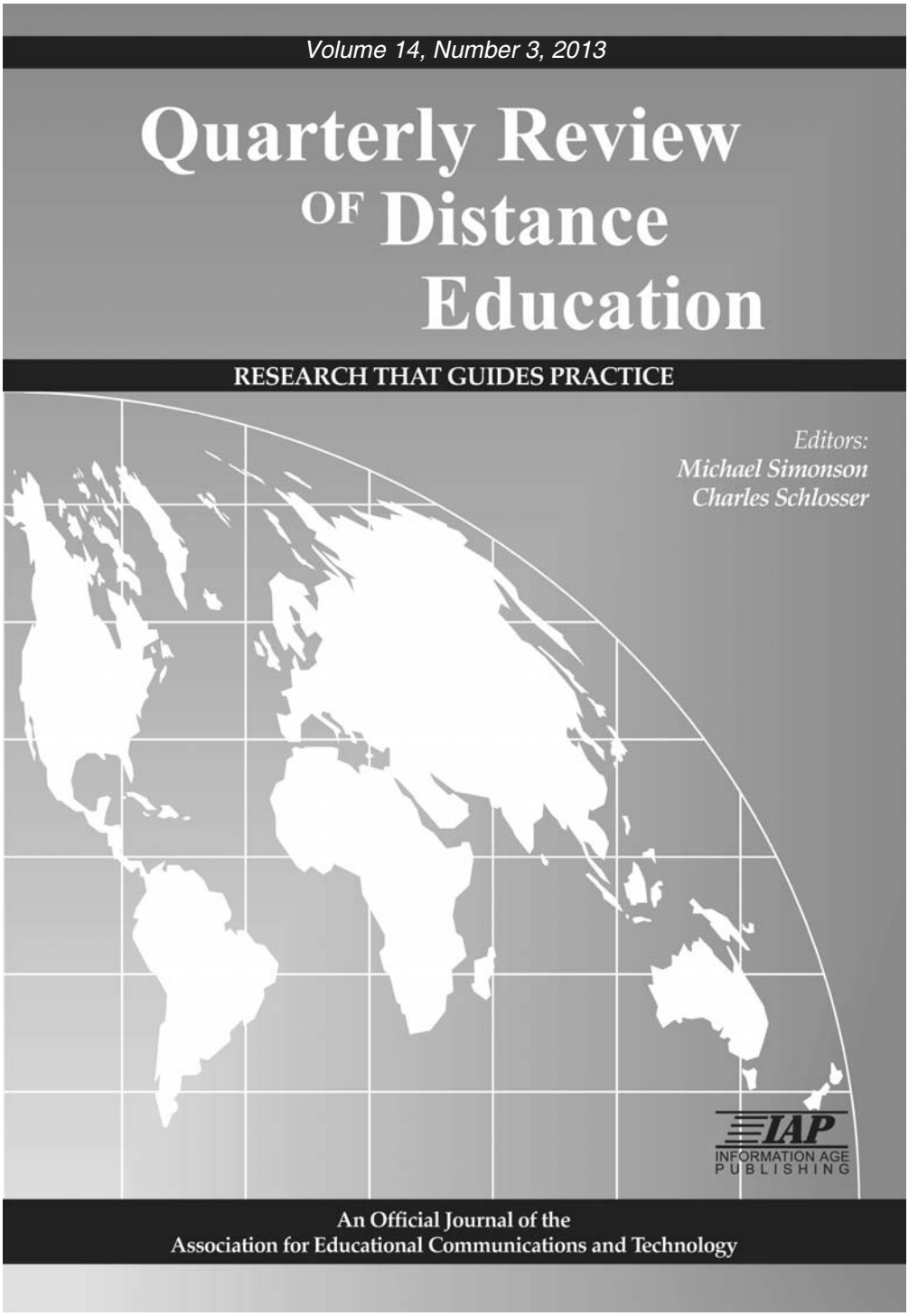
THUS THE MOST COMMON FACTORS MENTIONED IN THE LITERATURE TO ENGAGE THE DISENGAGED STUDENTS IN ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTOR FOR COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING, PEER-MENTORING TO HELP WITH COURSE DIFFICULTIES, AUTHENTIC LEARNING, AND ENHANCING STUDENT MOTIVATION.



PBL and Technology
A Perfect Match

Miroslava B. Vargas

Problem-based learning (PBL) has been found to strengthen students' problem-solving skills through collaborative efforts and it has been used in face-to-face classrooms. The approach requires the learner to collaborate with peers and brainstorm to develop a driving question (Bender, 2012; David, 2008; Okobi, 2012). It has been used and researched in various disciplines. Lundeberg, Yadav, Bunting, and Subedi (2011) found that students enrolled in an electrical engineering course earned higher scores when they experienced both the traditional approach to teaching and PBL.

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Interestingly, students' responses indicated that they did not see any differences in learning between the lecture and the PBL approaches. The medical field has also used PBL. Hung, Jonassen, and Lui (2008) found that traditional approaches were not preparing medical students to work with realistic problems in the workplace. The need for an approach that created an educational environment where students would interact and solve realistic situations was desired. Besides the electrical engineering and the medical fields, colleges from different disciplines have begun to use the PBL approach.

Williams (2003) identified organizations in which PBL through the use of technology increased student performance and increased test scores. The studies were based on the SRI International on the use of technology, a study by the Center for Research in Educational Policy, and a study by the Center for Children and Technology at the Educational Development Center. At this center, eighth graders from a New Jersey school scored 27% higher on standardized measures than did eighth graders from other urban school districts. Williams (2003) also noted that PBL could be used in a variety of disciplines such as science, social studies, mathematics, and language arts.

It has been noted that PBL increases test scores; however, the approach does present challenges in articulating the curricula (Jonassen & Hung, 2008). The implementation of PBL is also challenging (Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 1997). These challenges stem from pedagogical

approaches. The shifting from teacher-centered instruction to inquiry-based instruction is problematic when teachers are not accustomed to using the approach. Other factors that impede effective implementation are the length of class periods and the pressure to meet the curriculum topics.

Taking the PBL literature into consideration, a course was designed based on the characteristics of PBL. The learners engaged in the project through obtaining knowledge of the approach, live chats and the use of scaffolding for topic selections. Learners engaged in the PBL process by collecting, researching, and recommending strategies to address the issues in public schools. The learners as teachers in public school interacted on topics of interest that would enable to better instruct their students. The main student population was English language learners (ELLs). ELLs have difficulty in academic achievement as documented on state standardized tests. There is a high percentage of ELLs in the South Texas region (Texas Education Agency, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The learners engaged in the education course were teachers seeking a master's degree in bilingual education. The goal was to create a learning experience that was meaningful and motivational and would provide a hands-on experience with the approach.

Several aspects of the graduate online course, besides the PBL phases, were the development of the collaborative research that learners were required to complete. The PBL research project required the learners to conduct explorations, collaborate, develop a curriculum based on their findings, and provide assessment. The instructor for the course worked as a facilitator and used scaffolding techniques to guide students into developing the research question. The facilitator also designed the various sections that were needed in order for the learners to complete the project. The course was held during one semester.

Although the process was new to students, the majority were able to engage in the project successfully through live chats and by participating in the scaffolding phases. Learners engaged in the PBL process by collaborating, researching, and recommending strategies to address the issues in public school ELLs' classrooms problems.

Collaboration

Discussions are necessary in order to create a project that is developed through a mutual agreement. Mutual agreements that result from authentic reflections and interactions provide students with ownership of a project. A student driven project develops motivational drive, increases responsibility for project completion, and instills a sense of interdependence and connectedness. Palloff and Pratt (2007) note the importance of learners being able to connect with peers and the instructor and to respond to one another in order to build a community of learners.

Motivation is a factor that determines learning success. It influences self-management and self-monitoring, two significant factors in learners completing a project (Abd-El & Sabry, 2010; Diaz-Rico, 2004). Motivation is also an integral part of online PBL courses. Strategies that support motivation are: setting goals, task values, self-efficacy, learner beliefs, autonomy, and community support (Diaz-Rico, 2004; Svinicki, 2013). PBL courses structured to include ownership of the research question lead to a positive relationship between the instructor and learners. Motivation, either intrinsic or extrinsic, is viewed as a means for student learning. Intrinsic motivation is internally controlled by individuals who generally engage in a task either because they are seeking information or because they have achieved a level of belief in their own intellectual capabilities.

Extrinsic motivation is externally controlled and the learners engage in the task

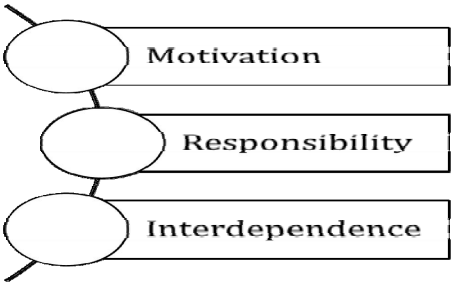

Figure 1. Collaboration.

because they have to and not by choice (Raffini, 1996). Fullan (2011) identified the consequences of extrinsic motivation based on Pink (2009). Findings indicated that intrinsic motivation is extinguished, learner performance is extinguished, creativity is eliminated, and learners have a tendency to engage in cheating and other unethical behavior. Furthermore, extrinsic motivation is addictive and results in short term understanding (Fullan, 2011).

On the other hand, intrinsic motivation produces long-term learning. The necessary requirements for intrinsic motivation include having a purpose, providing opportunities for autonomy, and creating an environment where the learner is able to connect to others (Fullan, 2011). Learners that seek immediate feedback through grades are more extrinsically motivated and may have difficulty engaging in synchronous forums.

Thompson, Wade, and Fauske (2008) provide literature that supports both students' preference for the asynchronous and synchronous forums. The argument stems from whether the learner needs to review, reflect individually before responding. However, in PBL, a question for the project has to be selected. An exchange of ideas and online discussions facilitate the process. Synchronous activities such as chat rooms where the discussions are out in the open cause a learning outcome. Learners become risktakers and learn to develop self-confidence in their abilities. The task of group problem solving led by the instructor is necessary to initiate the process. For online courses, learners who engage in project-based learning can acquire lifelong abilities in problem solving.

Besides motivation, the idea of being part of a team increases the responsibility factor. Members of a team know that their participation and contributions are essential for the completion of the project. While, online courses provide learners with self-paced materials, a project based learning course has "positive" limitations. The limitation of having time periods for discussions and interactions eliminate risking inability to meet deadlines, a common situation that occurs when learners are not accustomed to online courses. By providing learners with a window of time for interactions and scholarly discussions, they had a positive limitation.

Each member involved in a project becomes interdependent on each other rather than on the course instructor. While learners can select research topics, they are still dependent on the instructor for feedback and guidance. For PBL online courses students become less dependent on the instructor and become more dependent on their peers. The interplay of discussions between the peers and questions asked to the instructor provides an environment in which all can participate. Learners are aware that the instructor is participating as a collaborator and part of the project.

Figure 2. Collaboration.

Figure 3. Scaffolding.

SCAFFOLDING

The instructor's role in project-based learning is to facilitate the process (Bender, 2012). The facilitator designs instruction with the necessary components that will assist the learner in successful completion of the project in several phases. Scaffolding by the facilitator can take several forms; for the online project based learning, several phases are necessary to guide students to successful completion.

For the graduate online course that implemented the PBL approach, several phases were observed. At the onset of the course, the conception phase was initiated. During this phase, the learners were assigned readings on the PBL approach. It was critical that learners developed a foundation of knowledge on the approach before engaging in discussions. Interactions and questioning techniques on the approach between the facilitator and learners followed. Authentic assessments on the topic demonstrate the learner's knowledge and comprehension.

A second phase was the development of the project question or the expansion phase. To develop a project question, learners engaged in several live chats concerning current issues in public schools. This phase was critical. The selection of a topic that is meaningful to the learners and the provision of opportunities for discussion result in academic success for the

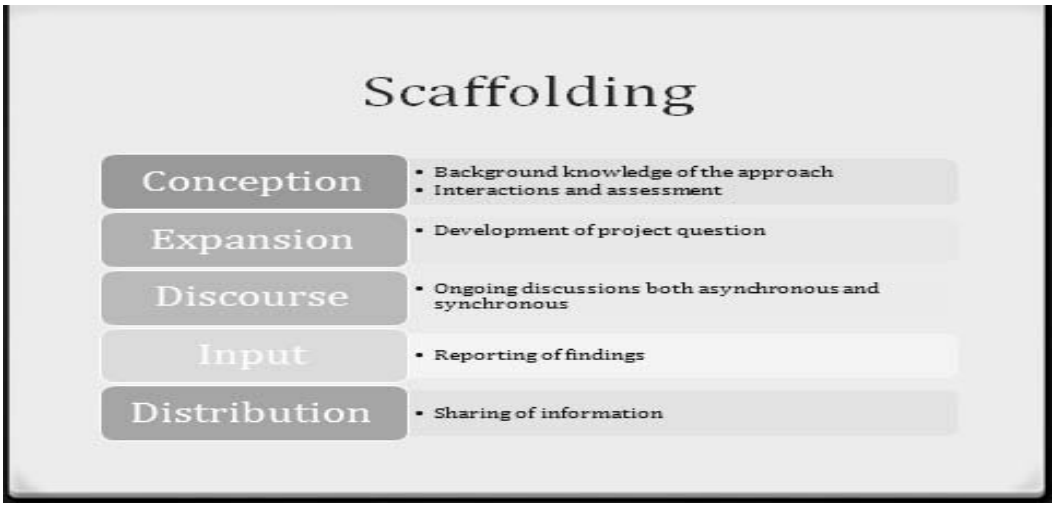

Figure 4. Scaffolding.

learner (David, 2008). The issues had to be current, without any previous research on the topic. Guided questions by the instructor led the learners to arrive at a mutually agreed research question for the project. Learners interacted about concerns and issues in working with the ELLs. In Laredo, Texas, there exists approximately 42-62% population of ELLs in public schools (Texas Education Agency, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The scores on standardized tests indicate that schools are at an academically acceptable level; however, scores on standardized tests seem to indicate low academic achievement for ELLs. Several weekly interactions took place before a research question for the project was selected. The research question that resulted was based on the factors affecting ELLs' academic success and how instruction for this group could be improved. Scholarly discourse was the third phase. One-to-one interactions and group interactions occurred during online activities such as live chats scheduled on a weekly basis. Live chats provide an excellent source of information for all the learners. Live chats are transparent and are recorded for course participants who might not have been able to attend or for those learners who did attend or those that want to revisit their thoughts and those of their peers. Although synchronous forums were desired, asynchronous forums were available for those learners who were not able to participate. Weekly interactions are also essential to discuss progress and /or questions that might may developed during the different phases of the project.

Input was the fourth phase in which the learners contributed their research findings. A project based learning format was provided to the learners for inputting their information. The final phase was the sharing of the information or the distribution phase. This phase is necessary in order to complete the project. The recommendation or remedies to solve the problem need to reach the targeted audience. The distribution could take various forms such as publications, presentations at the local, state, or national conferences, and professional development for public school personnel. The intent is to conduct meaningful research in order to solve problems and improve conditions.

By having students engaged in PBL online, there were several stages that were

identified as needed to develop future course curriculum and the learners developed several recommendations. The challenges are many; however, the benefits to the learner make it a worthwhile approach.

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Learning at Georgia Virtual School

Courtney L. Teague

Introduction

Hearing school bells ring, lockers closing, and school bus engines running are becoming sounds of the past. Classrooms are no longer four-wall rooms filled with uniformed learners sitting in desks and chairs. Learners are no longer wearing backpacks filled with heavy and outdated textbooks. Learners are now using mobile devices, tablets, smartphones, desktops, and laptops. Georgia's educational system includes learners with diverse needs: 1,639,077 enrolled in 2,289 schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). In 2005-2006, an estimated 700,000 K-12 learners were enrolled in online courses (Picciano & Seaman, 2007). In 2009, more than 3 million K-12 learners have taken an online course (Horn & Staker, 2011). Research suggests that by 2019, more than 50% of high school courses will be offered online (Christensen & Horn, 2008). Georgia Virtual School, established by Georgia Department of Education, is set up like a Georgia public school without a physical location. The address is a web URL (Hawkins, 2013).

This article will discuss Georgia Virtual School's (GaVS) background, mission, strategic learning plan, course offerings, program accreditation and evaluation, and instructional technology. GaVS was established in 5 years, demonstrating the diffusion of innovation theory. Diffusion of innovation is described as, "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a societal system" (Rogers, 2003, p. 5). Elements of diffusion include communication, a mission, evaluations and assessments by experts.

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Georgia Virtual School

In 2001, the Georgia State Board of Education approved the virtual learning business plan to endorse online Advanced Placement courses. The virtual learning plan addressed the needs of Georgia's learners. Georgia learners need to be prepared to compete with their global counterparts. In 2001, Georgia was a second-year AP Nexus recipient, a United States Department of

Education Advanced Placement Test free program grant that focused on at-risk learners (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). The online courses provided course options for learners in rural areas, in areas with a lack of highly qualified teachers, scheduling conflicts, and limited curricular offerings (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Background

GaVS is the child organization of Georgia Virtual Learning. GaVS courses are created based on the following factors: program need, Department of Education requirements, fund availability, graduation requirements, and public request (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). Each of the courses is designed to meet Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (J. Cozart, personal communication, July 29, 2013).

GaVS Strategic Plan

GaVS does not grant diplomas or course credits independently, but in a collaborative effort with local school degree awarding districts. The strategic plan includes the following vision, mission, belief statements, and goals (J. Cozart, personal communication, July 29, 2013):

Vision:

- quality learning,
- innovating opportunities, and
- elevating performances.

Mission: Serve as a stimulus for dynamic change by providing quality digital programs to strengthen teaching and learning.

Belief statements:

- change creates opportunity;
- make education work; and
- open, equitable learning.

Goals:

- learner performance exceeds the state average;
- provide opportunities for learners with annual growth of at least 20%;
- all teachers demonstrate quality teaching; and
- prepare learners for college and career readiness.

Enrollment in GaVS

For the 2012-2013 school year over 18,567 learners from 479 schools were in enrolled in 332 online courses. The overall completion rate for GaVS is 90%. GaVS total enrollments since 2005 is 67,787 (J. Cozart, personal communication, July 29, 2013). Schools can sign up their learners for whatever class period that works for them. In order to enroll in a GaVS course, a local school facilitator must approve. Home school and out of state learners will be assigned a GaVS facilitator (Georgia Virtual School, 2010). Registration is a two-phase process. Public school learners receive preferential enrollment. Phase 1 allows public school learners the right to enroll and register for courses before and the courses are available to private school learners and home school learners. Phase 2 allows private and home school learners the opportunity to enroll (Georgia Virtual School, 2010). The course start dates are flexible and the course ends before the traditional course ends because grades have to be submitted earlier.

GaVS Learners' Needs

GaVS learners can experience individualized learning. Prior to starting an online course, the learner can complete an online course self-assessment inventory. The online inventory asks questions about the personal attitude and technology. The learner rates each question "1 = *never*, 3 = *sometimes*, 5 = *always*" (Georgia Virtual, School, 2010). The scores serve as an indicator as to whether the learner is a good

online candidate. What follows are questions that the learner answers on an online self-assessment inventory (Georgia Virtual, School, 2010):

Personal Attitude

- "I stay on task when doing schoolwork."
- "I schedule my time well at school."
- "I schedule my time well outside of school."
- "I stay on task while doing work on the Internet."
- "I follow through on requests from my teachers."
- "I answer e-mail in a timely manner."
- "I turn in my assignments on time."
- "I ask teachers for help when I need it."
- "I am willing to put in extra time for a challenging class."

Technology Skills

- "I have access to the Internet at home."
- "I know how to login to my home Internet provider."
- "My home computer has a word processing program like Word, WordPerfect, or Works."
- "I know how to use a word processing program."
- "I know how to use e-mail."
- "I know how to do Internet research."
- "I know how to copy and paste text."
- "I know how to download a file from a web page."
- "I know how to attach and send a file through e-mail."

GaVS learners also complete a survey at the beginning of the course to indicate desired course length. During the fall and spring Advanced Placement learners can choose their courses to be 14, 16, or 18 weeks long. Regular learners can chose 12, 14, 16, or 18 weeks long. The summer courses can be 5 or 6 weeks long. All of the courses have the same workload and end on the same date (Georgia Virtual School, Course Information, 2010).

Learners take online courses because approximately 77 of Georgia's high schools do not offer Advanced Placement courses. Learners are placed in an at-risk category and are at a disadvantage when applying for college because they lack college level skill application that would be provided through the AP curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). Georgia has 180 public school systems. Sixty-four percent of the school districts are understaffed. There is a need for highly qualified teachers and some school districts are too small. As a result of a lack of highly qualified teachers, the schools have to limit their course selection offerings. Thirty-seven of Georgia's high schools have fewer than 500 learners enrolled. Many learners want to have a greater course selection, take advanced courses, get ahead, repeat a failed course, and manage their schedule. Learners may have transferred from another state or private school setting and require additional coursework to meet Georgia's graduation requirement (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

GaVS learners have said:

> "I'm taking Mandarin Chinese. It's always been a dream of mine to travel to Asia and be an English as second or other language teacher," Sierra said. "I feel that Mandarin would help me in a way securing my place at that job." (Benton, 2010, para. 5)

> It's really different. It's very exciting, and it's a new way to challenge yourself. (Benton, 2010, para. 6)

GaVS provides accommodations for learners with disabilities. GaVS has to receive a compliant Individualized Education Program or 504 plan each semester the learner enrolls. Online courses are not for everyone, but may be the correct place for individuals with disabilities.

A mother of a GaVS learner with disabilities said:

> "We have been so pleased with our experience. Kelly Walker, his special needs consultant, has been very professional and easy to communicate with," said CeCe, the mother of a 10th Grade GaVS learner. "I am impressed with his teachers and their kindness and nature to reach out to our son when he needs more time or more understanding of a lesson." (Houck, 2013, para. 4)

Virtual learning can allow learners with disabilities the opportunity to learn at their pace without anxiety (Shah, 2011). Some learners with disabilities accommodations are already incorporated into the format of an online course. Some of the learners accommodations requires a copy of notes, frequent use of modeling which could be demonstrated through the video component of the course, repeat directions that the learner could replay the audio, and information differentiated (Houck, 2013). However, not all accommodations are conducive to an online learning environment (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

The Digital Learning Act, Senate Bill 289, focused on the essence of digital and virtual learning, requires learners entering ninth grade during 2013-2014 school year to complete at least one online class. The bill requires that all end of year core subject assessments to be offered online (Senate Press, 2011).

GaVS Courses

Course Development

Each course is designed to contain content aligned to the Georgia Performance Standards as mandated by the Georgia Department of Education. Courses are being redesigned to align to Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. Courses are developed in two phases by a development team. A development team consists of authors, test writers, content development specialists, development coordinator, and an instructional designer. The instructional designer is an employee of Georgia Public Broadcasting Company. During Phase 1, the development team creates a course outline. The content development specialist completes a detailed development plan and timeline that has to be completed by the development coordinator. The authors will create course materials that are assessed for special education and copyright issues. In Phase 2, it is considered the testing phase (Georgia Virtual School, n.d.). The courses typically take 9 months to design (J. Cozart, personal communication, July 29, 2013).

GaVS offers Advanced Placement Courses, which are courses that will allow high school learners to be awarded college credit if they pass the College Board Advanced Placement Test (Georgia Virtual School, Course Information Advanced Placement, 2010). In addition to AP Courses, GaVS offers career and technical education, world languages, math, language arts, science, social studies, health and physical education, fine arts, and test preparation.

GaVS Course Recovery Program

Georgia Virtual School Course Recovery Program is a free chance that will allow high school learners who were not able to successfully pass a course to have an opportunity to retake courses. The learners have mastered the time requirement but not the course standard requirements (Georgia Virtual School, 2010).

GaVS Accreditation and Evaluation

GaVS is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). SACS evaluates the middle and high school courses (Hawkins, 2013). GaVS is evaluated through multiple evaluative tools. GaVS receives an occasional audit from Georgia's auditor's office. GaVS reports the virtual learners End of Course scores versus state average (J. Cozart, personal communication, July 29, 2013). *Digital Learning Now!* (2012), evaluated

GaVS and found the following strengths and weaknesses.

The strengths of GaVS include:

- learners have customized learning;
- learner access to high quality digital content;
- learners have access to high quality providers; and
- learner learning assessment and accountability.

The weaknesses of GaVS include:

- the infrastructure does not support digital learning;
- GaVS funding creates incentives;
- the learner progress based on demonstrated complexity; and
- all learners are not digital learners.

GaVS adopted the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) standards for quality online courses to establish if courses are meeting standards. The standards for quality online courses are as follows (SREB, 2006, pp. 3-8):

1. The course provides online learners with engaging learning experiences that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state content standards or nationally accepted content.
2. The course uses learning activities that engage learners in active learning; provides learners with multiple learning paths to master the content based on learner needs; reflects multicultural education and is accurate, current and free of bias; and provides ample opportunities for interaction and communication learner to learner, learner to instructor and instructor to learner.
3. The course uses multiple strategies and activities to assess learner readiness for and progress in course content and provides learners with feedback on their progress.
4. The course takes full advantage of a variety of technology tools, has a user-friendly interface and meets accessibility standards for interoperability and access for learners with special needs.
5. The course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness, using a variety of assessment strategies, and the findings are used as a basis for improvement. The course is kept up to date, both in content and in the application of new research on course design and technologies.

GaVS End of Course Policy

During fall and spring semesters public school learners will take the End of Course Test (EOCT) at their local school at a scheduled time. Home school, private school, and out-of-state learners will take the EOCT at an assigned Educational Technology Center (ETC). During the summer semester all learners will take the EOCT at their designated Educational Technology Center (Georgia Virtual School, 2010). The following courses require the EOCT: ninth-grade literature composition, American literature composition, biology, physical science, accelerated mathematics I and II, Accelerated CCPG coordinate mathematics I and II, Accelerated CCPG algebra, analytic geometry A, CCPS coordinate algebra, GPS algebra, GPS geometry, mathematics I & II, U.S. history, and economics (Georgia Virtual Schools, 2011). The learner must have a minimum score of 70 for all subjects. For learners who were ninth grade for the first time before July 1, 2011, the EOCT counts for 15% for the learner's final grade and 20% for learners who were enrolled after the date (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

GaVS Teacher

Teacher Certification

Online teachers must obtain a valid Georgia teaching certificate in subject area

from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (Hawkins, 2013). Teachers must complete online learning for an add-on endorsement (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). The virtual add-on endorsement requires that the teacher demonstrate competency in three areas (standards): online teaching and learning methodology, instructional technology concepts, and online assessments (Hawkins, 2012).

The online teaching and learning standard makes sure that the teacher will be able to provide a meaningful online environment with proper communication and transparent objectives while modeling good digital citizenship in a diverse setting. When teaching in a traditional face-to-face class instructors are accustom to "reading" the body language and facial cues of the learners. Therefore in an online course, it must be assumed that the learners display the same body language (Ko & Rossen, 2012).

The online assessment standards examine the effectiveness of the assessments. Teachers will create reliable assessment tools that are valid for an online environment. The instructional technology concept standard tackles the teachers' instructional technology competency. The teacher must demonstrate knowledge, skills, and understanding of instructional technology.

GaVS Adjunct Teacher Salary

The adjunct teachers' salaries are paid through Georgia Department of Education. The teachers are paid per learner each semester. The payments are the following: $130 for half Carnegie Unit Course, $155 for half Carnegie AP Unit Course, $260 for one block Carnegie Unit, $310 for one block AP Carnegie Unit (Georgia Virtual School, 2010).

Leadership

Organizational management style influences the decision making and the implementation of tasks. The top-down approach is when all guidelines, objectives, funding, and other information come from the top of the organization. A leader communicates the expectations to be achieved by the organization (Filev, 2008). The advantage of the top down approach includes clarity of expectations. The disadvantages of the top down approach includes bureaucracy, inflexibility, lack of moral motivation, and dominant control (Finzel, 2000).

In a bureaucratic organization, all tasks are divided into specialized jobs that are performed based on technical qualifications and uniform rules (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly, & Konopaske, 2006). Managers with expert knowledge hold an authoritative role because it is delegated from the top of the leadership hierarchy rules (Gibson et al., 2006). GaVS is a program of the Georgia Department of Education's Office of Technology Services. GaVS' organizational structure is reflective of bureaucratic organization. All of the decisions are based on federal mandates. The federal government passes laws that the state department of education must implement and monitor. Georgia Department of Education created standards and rules for GaVS to implement and follow. GaVS' staff hires, trains, and supervises teachers.

Instructional Technology

Desire2Learn is the learning management system that Georgia Virtual School uses to host instructional content modules (J. Cozart, personal communication, July 29, 2013). The technical requirements for GaVS are essential to learners' success:

- Internet service provider with java script enabled browser plug-ins (Internet Explorer 8 not supported);

- Computer access with productivity software (Microsoft Office) and media players;
- E-mail account: learners need a valid e-mail account. After registration they will be assigned an e-mail; and
- Software downloads: Some AP classes require software downloads.

Diffusion of Innovation

Diffusion of innovation theory has four elements innovation, communication, time, and social system. Getting an idea adopted can be difficult although there are several advantages. Many innovative ideas take time to become available (Rogers, 2003).

Effective communication is essential for an innovation to be accepted by others. In 2005, Governor Sonny Perdue signed the Georgia Virtual School bill via live Internet broadcast. He answered questions about GaVS in a virtual chat room and Internet video stream (Georgia Virtual School, 2010). In 2001, the Georgia State Board of Education approved the virtual learning program in October 2001, Georgia Virtual Learning program was transferred to technology services as information about the AP Nexus program began to spread, more schools contacted the Department of Education to ask how they could participate (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). There was a need for more course offerings for learners. Opinion leaders from 13 school systems with virtual learning initiatives experience gathered in Atlanta, Georgia to express their desires to have a state sponsored virtual school (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). The opinion leaders represented a social system. Opinion leaders are influential leaders that can help spread new ideas (Rogers, 2003). Governor Perdue was also an opinion leader who used his leadership position to initiate change in Georgia's educational system.

Conclusion

Online learning has become an important part of the progression of K-12 education. It is no longer considered novel (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013). Georgia has recognized the importance and has passed legislative bills to ensure that Georgia's learners are ready to compete with their global counterparts and that they receive high quality content (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013).

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ONLINE LEARNING HAS BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PROGRESSION OF K-12 EDUCATION. IT IS NO LONGER CONSIDERED NOVEL BUT CONSIDERED AS A RECOGNIZED METHOD OF COURSE DELIVERY. GEORGIA HAS RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE AND HAS PASSED LEGISLATIVE BILLS TO ENSURE THAT GEORGIA'S LEARNERS ARE READY TO COMPETE WITH THEIR GLOBAL COUNTERPARTS AND THAT THEY RECEIVE HIGHLY QUALIFIED CONTENT.

Distance Learning With Tutor Universe

Meaza Stewart

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to discuss the background and current state of Tutor Universe, an organization that provides an online learning platform to its users. The paper also discusses how this platform works as a learning tool and how distance educators are utilizing it. Projected growth and future development are also covered. First, this article will define private tutoring and distance education and discuss online tutoring as a whole. It will then cover the specifics of Tutor Universe.

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Private Tutoring

Tutoring is best defined as "a method of instruction in which one or a small group of students receive personalized and individualized education from a tutor. Tutoring is widely used with students of all ages and all levels of ability" (Tutoring, 2007, p. 1). Global Industry Analysts, a marketing firm, projected that by 2018 the international private tutoring market will be over a $102.8 billion industry and 90% of the tutoring market will be located in the United States, Asia-Pacific, and Europe (Crotty, 2012).

Distance Education

Simonson (2013) defines distance education as an "institutionally based formal education where the learning group is separated and where interactive communications technologies are used to connect students, teachers, and resources for learning" (p. vii). Vasquez and Slocum (2012) state that there has been a large growth in distance education programs in the K-12 setting. The 2010 International Association for K-12 Online Learning Fast Facts about Online Learning report indicates a tremendous growth in the PK-12 setting. In 2000, 50,000 K-12 students were enrolled in online learning programs and by 2009 this number increased to 320,000 (as cited in Smaldino, Lowther, & Russell, 2012).

Further research shows that this growth is also happening in the higher education setting (Bollinger & Inan, 2012; Driscoll, Jicha, Hunt, Tichavsky, & Thompson,

2012). This growth may be due to the benefits of learning at a distance. Benefits such as convenience, flexibility, and the ability to participate in the learning transfer process from teachers across the globe (Chih-Yuan Sun & Rueda, 2012; Shriram & Warner, 2010). "The Web offers powerful opportunities for resource utilization, collaboration, and communication" (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p. 136).

Online Tutoring

It was just a matter of time before the two emerging worlds of private tutoring and distance education united. Vasquez and Slocum (2012) state that in the online tutoring environment, "tutors can be as flexible in their instruction as with face to face instruction" (p. 222). This study goes on to state that this can be accomplished through text, whiteboards, video, audio, and print materials. According to Smaldino, Lowther, and Russell (2012), students have the ability to learn from various resources including live videoconferences with individuals who are separated geographically.

Tutors, learners and parents all want their student to succeed and reach the ultimate goal; which is obtaining a degree. This is the goal for K-12 and higher education students. Online tutoring is another way for all parties to ensure this can happen for all students. Comas-Quinn, Arcos, and Mardomingo (2012) state that the online tutoring environment must be focused on the learner, be flexible, be dynamic, promote interaction, and allow students to be able to share knowledge with the peer or tutor. Evans and Moore (2013) discussed online peer tutoring and state that student-student interaction in the face-to-face environment has proven to be valuable; however, there is a shortage of student-student interaction in the online setting. At the conclusion of this study, the students reported an increase in learning due to the online peer tutoring provided.

Tutor Universe

Background

Tutor Universe, an Iowa-based company, is a social marketplace for online tutoring that allows tutors and students to collaborate worldwide. The focus of Tutor Universe is to provide a platform that brings "students and tutors together in a more convenient and cost-effective manner than the existing traditional intermediaries and available alternatives. We are creating a global community for tutoring that is driven by social interactions" (M. Morrison, personal communication, August 16, 2013).

The founders consist of individuals from different backgrounds who determined that there was a gap in the tutoring industry. Hung Tran and Thomas Hornbeck, cofounders, identified the need for a better-quality online tutoring platform while studying as PhD students at the University of Iowa and working as tutors. These two joined forces with Michael Morrison, a veteran entrepreneur, John Garber, a seasoned business executive, and Jim Cremer, professor of computer science at the University of Iowa (Bannister, 2012; M. Morrison, personal communication, August 16, 2013).

These five individuals agreed that the gap in the tutoring market was due not only to the lack of tutors who were available for students but also the insufficient technologies being provided for tutoring purposes. The supply and demand of tutoring had an obvious inconsistency throughout departments at the University of Iowa and Hornbeck and Tran soon noticed it. Therefore, it was determined that in order to balance out the supply and demand of the tutoring industry, there was a need for a tool that would connect students and tutors across the world. Also,

Tutor Universe focused on providing concepts and a level of interaction that was not being offered with other online tutoring platforms. Therefore, functions such as web chat, document sharing and editing, mathematical formula and graphing capabilities, and tutor reviews and ratings were added. This free online tool was developed to be an open market where tutors create their own profile and set their own rates (Bannister, 2012).

According to Morrison (personal communication, August 16, 2013) Tutor Universe founders are passionate about their business concept because Tutor Universe has been able to provide tutoring services to students and parents who otherwise would not have been able to conveniently and cost effectively get the needed help. The tutoring industry remains dominated by face-to-face delivery and despite other online tutoring solutions it is highly inefficient because there are millions of students who cannot receive needed help. The current models for delivering tutoring are not efficient or scalable. Within Google alone Tutor Universe has tracked 48,000,000 tutor-related searches per month. Tutor Universe set out to develop a distance-learning tool that would promote product fit and address the tremendous need for tutoring and coaching (M. Morrison, personal communication, August 16, 2013).

The virtual study room of Tutor Universe was officially launched November 1, 2012. At the time of the launch, the online platform had over 300 registered tutors and students (Bannister, 2012). Within the first 2 months the number of users increased to nearly 1,300 and by May of 2013 the company of five grew to 12 with more than 6,000 registered users (Bannister, 2013). According to the cofounder and chief executive officer, as of August 15, 2013, Tutor Universe had 18,767 users in over 50 countries, that is more than a 100% increase in 3 months (M. Morrison, personal communication, August 16, 2013).

In February of 2013 at the Hawkeye Innovation Summit, Tutor Universe was awarded the 2012 University of Iowa Startup of the year. The organization is putting more focus on social and collaborative enhancements and plans to see even more growth in the near future (Bannister, 2013).

Tutors

Tutor Universe tutors are individuals who consider themselves experts in the subject area in which they are providing services. Anyone can create a profile as a tutor. Tutors select their own subject areas and rates. They also market their services. Tutor Universe simply provides the tutors with a distance education platform to be utilized as a delivery method. Currently, tutors are located around the world.

What Tutors Are Saying

Tutors of Tutor Universe have shared the following testimonials regarding their experience with the distance-learning tool.

> I teach mathematics at all levels, and I find Tutor Universe to be an excellent tool for working with students online. It combines a webcam interface with a virtual whiteboard that has the capacity for drawing pictures, free-hand writing, typing, high quality mathematical typesetting, and file sharing. It also has a built-in scheduling and accounting system that automatically tracks and bills your services. In short, it does everything but take out the garbage. In addition, the technical staff are prompt and courteous in responding to questions. (Testimonials, 2013, p. 1)

> Tutor Universe is a great tool for holding remote office hours. I used to use Skype or the telephone, but Tutor Universe is a more interactive environment, enabling me to easily share files, websites and notes with students. It's fast and easy to use and takes no time to set up. It's a great tool for distance education. I'd

> highly recommend it. (Testimonials, 2013, p. 1)
>
> Tutor Universe made finding students and scheduling sessions effortless for me as a tutor. The convenience of tutoring from home plus finding students needing help with a variety of math subjects made my experience fulfilling and exciting. And the virtual classroom is so user friendly, anyone can use it! (Testimonials, 2013, p. 1)
>
> Tutor Universe has made tutoring much easier. I simply make appointment slots in the calendar and TU does the rest. Finding students is far easier than it is on campus so I never have unproductive downtime. Tutor Universe eliminates the hassle of reserving study rooms, too. Ultimately, I still get to earn some cash while doing what I enjoy and it always works into my busy schedule. (Testimonials, 2013, p. 1)

Learners

Any student can create a profile on Tutor Universe. Tutor Universe currently has students from the K-12 level as well as from higher education. These individuals are also located around the world. Students can search for and utilize the tutor of their choice. The online tool allows learners to filter search results by price and ratings.

What Learners Are Saying

Learners of Tutor Universe have shared the following testimonials regarding their experience with utilizing the distance learning tool and their experience with tutors within the platform.

> Tutor Universe has opened various channels for myself in my path to graduation because it not only offers a variety of expert assistance with an easy to use system that can conform to anyone's learning style, but it is also set up in a way that allows sessions to work around a busy student's schedule. I highly recommend Tutor Universe to any and all students all over the world. Tutor Universe will open up a new and easy way of learning for anyone. (Testimonials, 2013, p. 1)
>
> Tutor Universe has been my savior multiple times for my Computer Science class. My tutor has helped answer my questions from the comfort of my house, when I needed him the most. The website was easy to use and the virtual classroom had great tools to make our sessions a good learning environment. Never will I go back to regular tutoring again! (Testimonials, 2013, p. 1)

Tutoring Sessions

The online platform provided by Tutor Universe allows users to create a profile similar to other social networking sites such as Facebook (Bannister, 2012). Tutors can share their qualifications, rates, ratings, and availability when creating their profile. Once the profile has been created, students throughout the world can locate the tutor. Communication to schedule a tutoring session can be conducted via messages or through the tutor's calendar. If the tutor is online and available, the learner can start the session instantly. This convenient option has proven to be the most popular choice. It would be more difficult to replicate this in a face-to-face environment.

Each booked tutoring session occurs in the Virtual Study Room located within the platform. This technology allows the tutor and the learner to utilize audio, video, and text for collaborative communication. The Virtual Study Room is also equipped with an interactive whiteboard that allows the users shared access. Both the tutor and learner can draw, select, share documents and images, markup and edit documents, insert formulas and graphing equations, insert shapes, insert color, and erase fields. Both parties can also save the information shared during the session for future reference.

Once a session is complete, the learner has the opportunity to fill out a question-

naire regarding the tutor and the session that just occurred. This information will be visible on the tutors profile and can be viewed by other learners who are searching for a tutor. It will directly impact the tutor rating located on the public profile. In an interview with Bannister (2012) cofounder Thomas Hornbeck states, "There are no more blind dates in tutoring. You're not just tearing a number off a sheet of paper and hoping you get a good tutor," (p. 1). This feature empowers learners to be more involved in the tutoring process.

Payments

Tutors are paid within the Tutor Universe website. Learners must add money to their account prior to a tutoring session. This money is converted to "tutor bucks." One U.S. dollar is equivalent to one tutor buck. Once a tutor has set their rate the system automatically ensures that any learner who books a session with that tutor has the available funds in his or her Tutor Universe account. Once the session is completed the funds are automatically transferred from one account to the other. Tutor Universe also collects a percentage based on the amount of sessions booked by the tutor.

Social Networking

Tutor Universe allows users to link social networking sites to their Tutor Universe profile. All users can link their profile to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. This not only allows tutors to market their offered services, it also helps Tutor Universe obtain more users. This feature promotes interaction among users.

Support Provided

The Tutor Universe technical support team is available to users via a chat icon within the platform. This icon ensures that Tutor Universe receives all issues immediately. Also, within the platform there is a question and answer section where users can post questions at any time. Any Tutor Universe user can answer these questions. This allows for added support and increased collaboration. Tutor Universe also provides blogs as an added resource for its users. Tutor Universe tutors as well as other experts in the tutoring field create these blogs. About three blogs are published weekly and each topic is suitable for both tutors and learners.

Programs Offered

In addition to being a free open market for users, Tutor Universe also provides Tutor Universe Academy, an academic program for users. The founders of Tutor Universe determined that a major problem with today's higher education system is that many students acquire debt without obtaining a degree. Of the 3 million college freshmen that begin annually only 35% will earn their degree in 4 years and 40% will drop out. The purpose of Tutor Universe Academy is to provide online coaching and tutoring in order to build long-term skills, confidence, and parent involvement (Tutor Universe Academy, 2013).

How it Works

Tutor Universe conducts a needs analysis to understand the learner's needs and set individualized goals. Next, the student completes an academic assessment to identify the student's strength and weaknesses. An individualized plan is then developed based on the student's specific need. The student then receives tutoring and coaching services at a distance on a regular basis. An evaluation is performed to review progress and assess outcomes (Tutor Universe Academy, 2013).

Lessons Learned

Throughout the development, launch, and growth of Tutor Universe there have been valuable lessons learned. The team

within this organization has determined a need to focus on the supply side of the marketplace first; which are the tutors. Also, when marketing, parents are just as significant as the students. Some parents need to be educated on the need for tutoring and coaching because it is perceived as a deficiency rather than standard practice, especially in the United States (M. Morrison, personal communication, August 16, 2013).

Projections

Tutor Universe plans to acquire 50,000 users by December 31, 2013. The organization is currently ahead of schedule in attaining this goal. Based on current growth, by 2015 Tutor Universe projects to acquire 273,879 students and 30,334 tutors. By 2017 the organization projects 974,035 students and 113,048 tutors. Finally, by 2018 Tutor Universe projects to acquire 1,409,368 students and 168,328 tutors. According to these projections, Tutor Universe will be at 1,577,696 users in 5 years. This is obtainable based on the addressable market size being 150,000,000 college students and 388,000,000 high school students worldwide. This includes all subject areas including life, academic, and career coaching (M. Morrison, personal communication, August 16, 2013).

Conclusion

The world of distance education is ever-evolving. The growing use of the Internet has empowered learners even more. Online tutoring is allowing learners to expand their choice of tutors across borders. Tutor Universe is making a significant impact in the tutoring and distance learning markets. This organization has successfully blended online learning, social networking and collaboration to produce a cost-effective, convenient option for learners. Tutor Universe has grown considerably since launching in 2012. This organization expects to grow tremendously within the next 5 years and plans to assist many more students and parents throughout their educational journey.

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ONLINE TUTORING IS ALLOWING LEARNERS TO EXPAND THEIR CHOICE OF TUTORS ACROSS BORDERS. TUTOR UNIVERSE IS MAKING A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN THE TUTORING AND DISTANCE LEARNING MARKETS.

Jamaica's e-Learning High School Project

Patricia Georgia Daley

Introduction

E-learning (electronic learning) is a form of online learning (Smaldino, Lowther, & Russell, 2012). With e-learning the learning materials are conveyed through electronic media such as the computer (Smaldino et al.). Instructional materials are usually web-based and learners can access them through networks (Smaldino et al.). E-learning offers teachers and students the opportunity to target specific learning outcome or concepts and the teachers have the added opportunity to monitor the progress of the learners and possibly design corrective measures (Smaldino et al.).

Over the years Jamaica's telecommunications system was a monopoly and a great portion of the island was without telecommunication services. Only the main street in the rural sections of Jamaica had access to landline telephone system. Internet service was unknown to many Jamaicans; mobile telephone was a luxury that only a select few could afford. In the early 2000s the government of began the deregulation of the island's telecommunications system and more players were brought in. This resulted in the rapid diffusion of mobile cell phones, and a steady increase in the adoption and diffusion of Internet service. Today there are five Internet service providers and most of the island has Internet access, which is made possible by one or two of the new players. Wireless Internet access is possible for majority if not all of the island's schools. Although Jamaica's economic condition is not on par with its neighbors or other countries in the Western Hemisphere, the government of Jamaica is investing in the future of its workforce.

In 2005, the government of Jamaica approved US$50 million to undertake the first phase of Jamaica's e-Learning Project (e-Learn Jamaica Overview, 2013). This project is spearheaded by the Ministry of Education and Youth and the Ministry of Industry, Technology, Energy, and Commerce. These two ministries have embarked on a mission to ensure that Jamaican learners are prepared to effec-

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tively compete in the 21st century. It is hoped that the e-learning initiative will equip Jamaica's younger generation with necessary tools to compete effectively in the global market, thereby uplifting the economic condition of the country. The project encompasses preprimary through high school (K-12 in the American school system) (e-Learn Jamaica Overview). It also includes teachers' colleges that prepare teachers in the five subjects: information technology, science, English, mathematics, and social studies. The kindergarten and primary phase of the project will see the learners at these stages benefitting from tablets and other equipment that will be installed in these institutions (e-Learn Jamaica Overview).

The High School Project was initially implemented in a pilot program in 28 high schools and three teachers' colleges across the island (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013). The pilot was implemented in Grades 10 and 11 in the high schools; necessary equipment such as desktop computers and printers were installed (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013). Local area networks were also installed to interconnect the computer laboratories, AV centers, and resource rooms with all the other departments in these institutions; wireless Internet access broad band technologies was provided (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013). To date, all high schools across the island are equipped with e-learning facilities and e-learning has been implemented from Grade 7 through Grade 11.

Aims of High School E-learning Project

The high school e-learning project is aimed at improving the level of education in Jamaica's high schools through the utilization of various information and communication technologies (High School Project, 2013). Three major goals have been identified for this phase of the e-learning project. Given the usually low academic performance of Jamaican high school learners in recent years, the government of Jamaica, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Youth and Ministry of Industry, Technology, Energy, and Commerce, established innovative means to develop the quality of education to which the high school learners are exposed (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013). The project also seeks to enrich the learning process through the use of information and communication technology equipment and to increase the performance of the learners in the Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013). Online learning is becoming more prevalent; no longer do learners have to rely on textbooks because they now have access to large volumes of educational materials from all over the globe (Smaldino et al., 2012). Instructors and learners can benefit from the presence of experts in numerous fields without actually leaving the classrooms—they do this through the use of advance telecommunications technologies (Smaldino et al., 2012). Jamaica's high school e-learning project is also aimed at facilitating self-paced learning and this will be especially beneficial to the slow learners who do not grasp concepts as quickly as some of their counterparts. Naidu (2008) explained that self-paced learning is well suited for learners who require a different time and pace from the other learners. The Jamaican high school learners are presented with a plethora of informal and interesting approaches to stimulate their desire for learning and motivate them as they embark on their educational journey (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013).

Technology Infrastructure

A number of the island's public schools were without up-to-date computer laboratories; consequently, before the e-learning project could be integrated the technological infrastructure had to be addressed. Each high school was outfitted with the

basic technology equipment that is necessary to promote effective facilitation of digital instructional materials. Additionally the schools were wired using 12 MB fiber optic cables to accommodate Local Area Network for interconnectivity among the computer labs, resource rooms, libraries, administrative offices, Grades 10 and 11 classrooms, as well as the staff rooms (Technology Infrastructure, 2013). The three major Internet service providers in the island—Digicel, Lime, and Flow—assist with the provision of broadband Internet service.

All grades are involved. Selected rooms were also wired to facilitate online access in case wireless service was not available. The MOE hosts a Central Repository for Educational Materials. These educational materials are available in the form of clip art galleries, discussion forums, chat rooms, and question banks and they may be accessed through a web portal (Technology Infrastructure, 2013). While the introduction of this technology updated existing technology in the schools, they are now outdated. This is why e-learning is suggesting the introduction tablets to all students starting with selected primary and secondary schools.

Each school was equipped with a minimum of:

- 57 desktop computers and 26 laptop computers;
- 3 laser printers;
- 1 computer server;
- 16 multimedia projectors and screens;
- 4 document cameras;
- Two digital video cameras;
- 5 DVD players;
- 2 televisions;
- 2 document scanners;
- 2 interactive whiteboards;
- 95 network access points;
- Uninterruptible power supplies; and
- Air conditioning for labs (Technology Infrastructure, 2013).

The personnel for the e-learning company were responsible for contracting private contractors for the installation process and an independent organization (Jamaica Computer Society) to confirm installation of the equipment and technologies.

Training of Teachers

This phase of the project was aimed at training approximately 11,000 instructors at both the secondary and the tertiary level. These instructors received training in basic computer and information and communication technology skills regarding the delivery of instruction and the integration of technology in the teaching and learning process. They were taught how to use and integrate the various equipment and technologies in the delivery of instruction. A number of lecturers from tertiary institutions across the island were selected and given master's level training at the University of British Colombia. These instructors are now regarded as the Jamaica's e-learning specialists. They are responsible for e-learning matters at the respective institution. They now have the responsibility of integrating technology in their institutions as well informing the community of such matters. They ensure that the teaching staff is properly trained in the use, handling, and care of the various equipment and technologies in the institution. The writing of projects to access funds from government agencies or private foundations regarding the improvement of e-learning matters also falls under their portfolio as well as the sustainability of the project.

HEART Trust/NTA, a vocational institution that was established by the government to provide high quality skills training to Jamaica's workforce, is primarily responsible for the training of the teachers. Mico University was also involved in the original teacher training. HEART Trust is currently training the island's teachers on the use of tablets. System administrators

were also trained regarding the maintenance of the local area network and "for professional development of teacher's College lecturers in collaboration with the Joint Board of Teacher Education and the Caribbean Knowledge Network" (Teacher Training, 2013, para. 5).

Instructional Materials

Instructional materials were developed to promote the use of technology in the school system. The materials are available in multiple formats such as texts, CD-ROM, DVD, as well as web formats (e-Learning Jamaica Project, 2013). There exist teacher instructional materials and student instructional materials. Materials were developed that target 11 Caribbean Secondary Examination Council subject areas: mathematics, English language, social studies, resource and technology/information technology, geography, Spanish, integrated science, physics, chemistry, biology, and building technology (Instructional Materials, 2013). Some of these subjects have a practical component and manuals were developed to address this issue as well as discovery, pace-work, and learners' assignments (Instructional Materials, 2013). The materials include interactive educational software, an item bank with more than 15,000 multiple choice and short-answer questions along with solutions, and lecture series in video format (10 Things You Should Know About e-Learning Jamaica). These instructional materials may be accessed through virtual classrooms, chat forums, on cable television, or on other electronic media format (10 Things You Should Know About e-Learning Jamaica).

Teacher instructional materials and student instructional materials have been customized to fit a stated standard across schools and curriculum. These materials include teachers' lesson plans, students' projects, and assignments that are related to the various subject areas. There are lecture series that are available in video format and the learners can access them on DVDs and cable television. The series are prepared to address all eleven targeted subject areas. They focus on challenging topics and attempt to make the lesson more interesting to facilitate better learning. Videos can be quite beneficial in the classrooms. Nugent (2005) mentioned various ways that instructors can incorporate videos in the classroom. Nugent stated that instructors can use videos in various ways such as the introduction of a new topic, for revision, to provide remedial assistance, or simply to make the class or a particular topic more interesting. Videos may also be used in different types of instructional environment, various class sizes including individual learners, and they can be used to provide virtual learning experiences for learners who are not afforded the opportunity to travel and experience the actual reality (Smaldino et al., 2012).

The resource bank is often referred to as item bank. It is a reservoir that contains a vast number of questions and solutions. The targeted number of items is 25,000. Items include multiple choice, open ended questions, and essays. The solutions are provided to assist the learners with fast paced preparation outside of the classroom. The solutions assist them in correcting their work and knowing what areas they need to spend more time focusing. The solutions also facilitate continuous self-assessment thereby making the learners aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers attend item bank workshops that are geared towards improved item writing and development skills. Learners have the privilege of utilizing educational software to assist them with mastering challenging concepts. Educational software has numerous benefits for the learners. They can provide the learners with a wide range of virtual or vicarious experience, they promote and enhance the level of interaction among learners and with the software itself, and it results in the learners taking responsibility

for their learning (McDougall & Squires, 1995). McDougall et al. further stated that educational software can provide a wide range of experience for the learners consequently broadening their learning experience. It encourages learners to be become more deeply involved in the learning process and encourage them to keep educational journal (McDougall & Squires, 1995). Additionally, educational software fosters collaboration and cooperation (McDougall & Squires, 1995).

Assessment

Assessment is a major phase in all instructional processes. It is used to determine whether the instructional goals and objectives were achieved and to provide information to the instructional designer as to what aspect of the program or instruction worked well and which aspects need to be revised (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2009). Assessment evaluates the learners as well as the quality of the instruction (Dick et al., 2009). It determines whether the learners can competently demonstrate the outcomes of the stated goals and objectives (Smaldino et al., 2013). Jamaica's e-learning high school project has incorporated assessment as a significant element. The program is designed to have the learners assessed annually at the end of each academic year (Assessment, 2012). Learners from Grade 7-11 are required to take an assessment to determine any improvement in their level of performance during the academic year. The tests are marked using a magnetic ink character reader. A group of individuals is responsible for developing and directing the standardized examination for each subject area throughout the high schools across the island (Assessment, 2013). The Grade 9 Diagnostic Tests are pre-Caribbean Secondary Examination Council Tests that are composed of an internal assessment tasks and a multiple choice test paper (Assessment, 2013). These tests span four subject areas: mathematics, English language, science, and social studies. The first part of the tests will be carried over a 4-month period beginning January and the second part will be done May (Assessment, 2013). The Grades 10 students will take the CCSC and the Grade 11 will sit the Caribbean Secondary Examination Council.

Remedial

The need for remediation in the e-learning high school project is quite real. From experience, there is a great need for remedial programs in the Jamaican high schools because a number of students at this level are unable to read. The government is aware of this grave issue and is implementing a program to train literacy specialists with the aim to improve the country's literacy level. It is a general belief that literacy is a major issue at all levels of the Jamaican education system (Lambert & Down, n.d.). This issue needs to be taken into consideration if the e-learning project is going to be a success. If learners are unable to read it is practically impossible for them to perform well in the targeted 11 subject areas of the e-learning high school project. The project intends to integrate the existing remedial programs that are in the education system into the e-learning project (Remedial, 2013). Remediation will be provided in a web-based and other electronic formats that, it is hoped, will provide a variety of methodologies that may motivate the learner (Remedial, 2013).

The instructional designers of these remedial programs need to consider that media do not significantly affect the learning outcome or achievement of the learners (Clark, 2001). Clark stated, "that media do not influence learning under any condition" (p. 2); Clark further stated that "media are mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement" (p. 2). It is the content and methods used in that are incorporated in the media that actually influence the learn-

ing achievement of students (Clark, 2001). Those responsible for coordinating and implementing the e-learning project in Jamaica need to study media in teaching in light of Clark's words, that "there is a historically recurring expectation that student motivation and performance may be enhanced by them" (p. 38). One reason for Clark's focus on media in teaching is the interest and investment that educators, are placing on media. Other media comparison studies exist which support Clark's perspective, that media are simply "delivery instruments" and do not have a positive influence on learning outcome.

Milestones

The infusion of technology integration in the Jamaican school system appears to be getting some positive results. Students' learning experience is expanding; instructors in different institutions are collaborating and sharing methodologies and experiences with the new system (What's Happening in our High Schools, 2013). In a number of high schools across the island the e-learning technologies are being utilized in multiple subject areas and students are given the opportunity to manipulate the equipment (What's Happening in our High Schools, 2013).

A number of milestones have been reached; approximately 203 educational institutions across the island are enjoying the benefits of a plethora of instructional equipment and other e-learning technologies, and over 11,500 teachers received basic computer training in the use of the equipment and software (Overview, 2013). At the launched of the e-learning project, the introduction of robotics for incorporation in the program was made (Milestones, 2013).

What's Next for e-Learning Jamaica Project?

The primary school project is poised and ready for takeoff. More than 800 primary schools across the island are expected to benefit from project (Primary School Project, 2013). The original plan for the e-learning has been modified to the use of tablets, not desktops, perhaps because a number of primary schools will not have appropriate infrastructure to accommodate the equipment that will be necessary for the accommodation of the original plan. The goals of the project include identifying and integrating appropriate technology solutions to counter the issues of literacy and numeracy among learners at this level (Primary School Project). Additionally the project will assist in the preparation of teachers at this level regarding the use technology in the instructional process at this level (Primary School Project). It will also assist with diagnostic and assessment of these learners thereby identifying learning issues so that appropriate corrective measures can be implemented (Primary School Project). Computer technologies along with different types of learning equipment will be installed in the schools and the buildings will be wires to accommodate wireless Internet (Primary School Project, 2013). Various types of educational resources will be supplied, teachers will be trained, and a support and monitoring system will be implemented to keep account of the equipment and resources and ensure that they remain functional (Primary School Project).

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THE INFUSION OF TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN THE JAMAICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM APPEARS TO BE GETTING SOME POSITIVE RESULTS.

UMassOnline

Online Education at the University of Massachusetts

Eileen B. Perez

Introduction

This article presents an overview of UMassOnline, the online learning organization within the University of Massachusetts. The article begins with an overview of three distance education models commonly found in higher education. Next a brief history of the University of Massachusetts system sets the stage for the introduction of UMassOnline. The organizational and reporting structures of both the university system and UMassOnline follow. A discussion of enrollment figures, programs, and degrees offered online is covered. Once an understanding of the online learning program has been established, the findings of a 2012 online education report requested by the president of the university are detailed. The article concludes with a discussion of the potential future direction of UMassOnline based on the report's findings.

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Distance Education Models

Online learning programs in higher education tend to follow one of three models: standalone, integrated, or consortium. Standalone programs are those programs only offering online courses such as Westerner Governors University (Eastmond, 2013). An integrated online learning program is one where online is embedded alongside an institute's traditional campus based programs, for example Nova Southeastern University. A consortium-based model is formed from an association of institutes that share resources to deliver online programs. UMassOnline is a consortium-based online learning program bringing together the vast resources on each of the University of Massachusetts campuses under the state's Department of Higher Education. A history of the evolution of the university systems precedes the introduction of UMassOnline.

University of Massachusetts History

The University of Massachusetts was founded in 1863 with 56 students and four faculty members as a land-grant agricul-

tural college named Massachusetts Agricultural College. The college was set in Amherst, a town located in the western, rural region of the state (UMass Amherst History, n.d.; Office of the Chancellor, n.d.). Due to growth in both programs and size, in 1931 the state renamed the institution Massachusetts State College. With more growth fueled by the influx of GI Bill funded soldier-students after World War II the institution achieved University status in 1947. Growth continued with the baby-boomers generation during the 1960s and 1970s. The focus of the university shifted to research, the academic standing improved, program offerings increased, admissions standards rose, and prestigious faculty arrived, all leading to the designation of the Amherst site as the Research University and the flagship campus of the UMASS system in 2003. Enrollment over time grew from 1,263 in 1941, to 7,600 in 1963; by 1993 there were over 18,000 students, and nearly 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students as of 2013.

The Boston campus was formed in 1964 by an act of the state legislature to meet the growing needs of the urban and commuter student (UMass Boston History, n.d.). The college relocated to the present Dorchester campus in 1974. Boston State College, founded in 1852 as a teacher's normal school, was incorporated into University of Massachusetts Boston in 1982. Today the Boston campus serves over 16,000 students across its eight colleges.

The Worcester campus was established by act of the state legislature in 1962 to create the only public medical school in the state (UMass Worcester History, n.d.). The first class of 16 medical students entered the accredited program in 1970. The teaching hospital was established in 1976. Today the educational campus includes the School of Medicine, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, and the Graduate School of Nursing. The campus has expanded to include dozens of buildings, a large teaching hospital serving the central region of the state, and a research complex. The Medical School consistently ranks in the top 10% of medical schools, and a 2006 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine was won by a researcher at the affiliated research center, demonstrating the prestige of the site.

The Lowell campus has its roots in two institutions (UMass Lowell History n.d.). First, the Lowell Normal School, founded in 1894 to train teachers and later known as Lowell State. The second, the Lowell Textile School, which trained technicians and managers for industry and was later known as Lowell Tech. Lowell State and Lowell Tech merged in 1975, forming the University of Lowell which subsequently joined the UMass System in 1991. Today the University of Massachusetts Lowell campus serves over 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students, offers 120 undergraduate, 39 master's, and 33 doctoral degrees across its six colleges. The Lowell campus today focuses on high technology.

The Dartmouth campus also grew from two earlier institutes, the New Bedford Textile School and the Bradford Durfee Textile School in Fall River (UMass Dartmouth History, n.d.). As textile manufacturing left the area, the institutes expanded to serve the needs of students under the GI Bill. In 1962 the state legislator joined these two institutes to form the Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute and began building the centrally located Dartmouth campus. Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute expanded and was renamed Southeastern Massachusetts University in 1969 to reflect expanded program offerings. Southeastern Massachusetts University joined the UMass Family in 1991 and became known as University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Today the campus serves over 9,000 students and is home to the new and only public law school in the state.

In 2001 the University of Massachusetts welcomed its newest member, UMassOnline (UMassOnline About, n.d.). The divi-

sion began with the dual goals of meeting the needs of online learners in higher education through accredited programs and giving the University of Massachusetts a presence in the growing field of online learning. An objective was to leverage the reputation of the university system as an outstanding public research focused university system for the newly formed online branch.

Online Learning at the University of Massachusetts

Reporting Structure

Before discussing UMassOnline in detail, an understanding of the multilayered reporting structure within the state educational system is beneficial. Two state level departments reporting to the governor are responsible for education, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DOE) and the Department of Higher Education (DOHE) (DOE, n.d.; DOHE, n.d.). The Board of Higher Education governs higher education and the DOHE and consists of members appointed by the governor. Staff of DOHE report to a commissioner and are charged with implementing the policies of the Board of Higher Education and the day-to-day administration of higher education. Three divisions fall under the Board of Higher Education and the DOHE. The 15 community colleges, nine state universities, and the University of Massachusetts are each a division. A board of directors oversees each of the community colleges and state universities, but not the University of Massachusetts campuses.

The administration of the entire University of Massachusetts system resides with the president and a common board of directors overseeing the entire university system. The board of directors, comprised of lay trustees, governs the system and sets policy on matters including budget and tuition, while the president and his office are responsible for operations (BOT, n.d.). In addition, each of the five University of Massachusetts campuses has a local Chancellor and an administration overseeing local operations (UMass System, n.d.). Unlike the University of Massachusetts campuses, which are led by individual chancellors, UMassOnline is led by a chief executive officer who reports to the office of the President of the University of Massachusetts. This reporting structure had caused conflict with the campuses regarding the autonomy and role of UMassOnline (Mellenbrook Policy Advisors, 2012).

UMassOnline Organizational Structure and Funding

Being a consortium means UMassOnline has a small staff supporting marketing and technology (UMass Online Team, n.d.). In 2013 the staff numbered less than a dozen full time members. The organizational staff remains small because all teaching staff reside on one of the five campuses and reports to their campus.

Financial obligations include covering the operational budget, repaying a loan for startup costs to the Trustee's Loan Pool, and returning net revenues to the five campuses (Mellenbrook Policy Advisors, 2012). For fiscal year (FY) 2010 major expense categories were marketing and business development, technology, and administration. Funding for the organization comes from three sources: an assessment for each of the five campuses, technology hosting for third parties, and the University of Massachusetts President's Office. The contribution from the President's Office covers expenses related to state funded programs within the system. Up until 2007 UMassOnline ran a budget deficit. Annual budget details can be found in Table 1. The data shows a profit of over $1.2 million for FY 2010, but this figure needs to be regarded with caution due to $680,000 in FY 20110 expenses deferred to FY 2011. The organization has paid off its loans and completed on time several tech-

Table 1. Annual Budget

Fiscal Year	Revenue	President's Contribution
2007	45,000	1,150,000
2008	13,900	1,150,000
2009	4,000	850,000
2010	1,256,724	700,000
2011	Not available*	500,000

Note: *Data from early 2012.

nology related one-time payments, putting the organization in position for continued profitability from FY 2011 on.

Online Learning Funding

Online learning on each of the five physical campuses falls within the continuing education division (Mellenbrook Policy Advisors, 2012). Having online learning within continuing education has financial implications due to the way the state educational budget operates. For day classes, tuition at all of the institutions of higher education is retained by the state, while fees are kept by each institution. This distinction often leads to fee increases while keeping tuition constant. This structure leads to confusion on actual cost of courses for students. Unlike day courses, both tuition and fees are retained locally within continuing education divisions, which are seen as self-supporting and an area of financial growth on campus. For this reason online learning was placed in continuing education when the decision was made to expand online learning with the introduction of UMassOnline in 2001.

UMassOnline Enrollment, Programs, and Degree Offerings

UMassOnline enrollment grew from 5,009 in its first year, 2001, to about 59,000 in its 10th year, 2011-2012 (About UMassOnline, n.d.; Facts 2012-2013, 2013). Details for annual enrollment can be found in Figure 1. Program offerings have expanded to included 113 online programs as of 2011, including degrees from the associate level to the doctoral level. Several certificate and professional development programs are also offered. A detailed breakdown of programs by campus can be found in Table 2. In FY 2011 online learning within the University of Massachusetts System brought in over $65 million in tuition while serving 51,097 students (President's Office, n.d.).

Online Education at the University of Massachusetts Reviewed

In 2012 the president of the University of Massachusetts engaged Mellenbrook Policy Advisors to review online education (Mellenbrook Policy Advisors, 2012). The goal of the Mellenbrook study was to provide a complete overview of the opportunities for online education within the system. To do this the study discussed the political, educational, financial, and institutional settings that influence online learning in the state system. The evaluation was to explore online learning at each of the five campuses and UMassOnline. Interviews were conducted, documents reviewed, and comparisons with online models at others schools made. The relationship between the five campuses and UMassOnline was explored, as was the validity of UMassOnline as implemented.

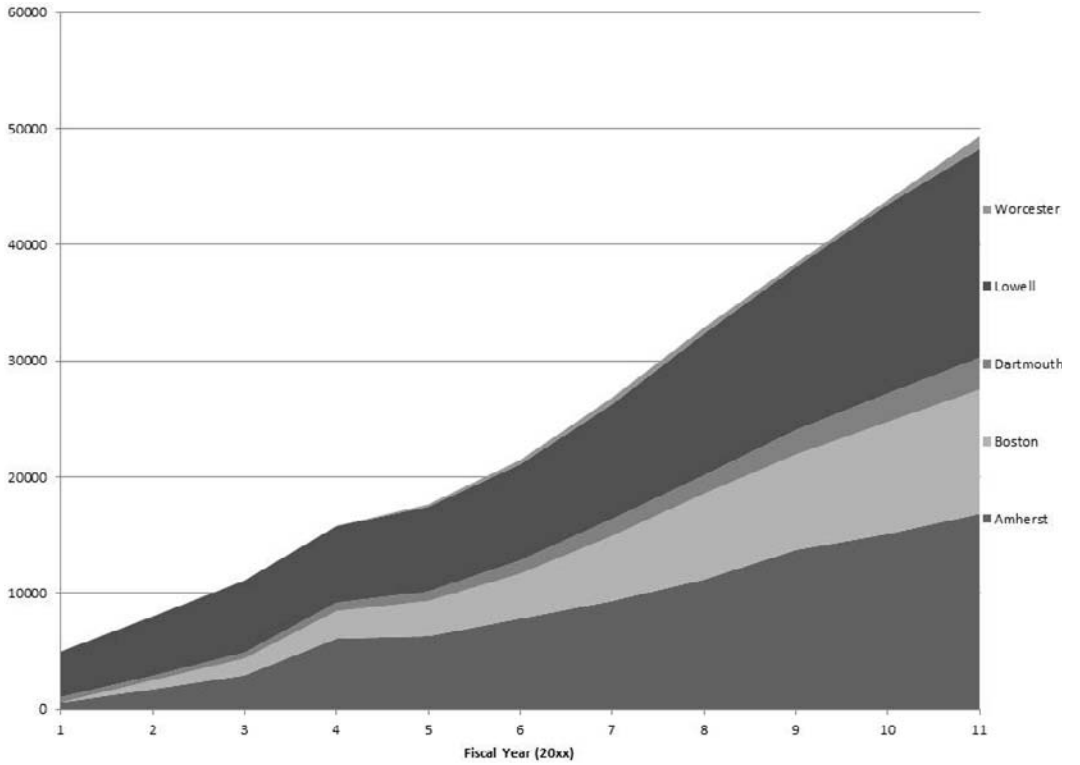

Figure 1. Online enrollment.

Table 2. Programs by Campus

Program Type	Amherst	Boston	Dartmouth	Lowell	Worcester
Noncredit Certificate	3	0	1	0	0
Certificate	5	13	10	23	1
Bachelor's	12	2	3	5	0
Master's	5	10	1	9	0
Doctoral	1	1	0	0	0
Professional	1	5	0	0	0
Continuing Ed Units	0	0	0	0	1
Total	27	31	15	37	2

Online Learning and the Five Campuses

In exploring online learning at each of the campuses, the reviewers found two campuses, Amherst and Lowell, fully engaged in online learning with strong faculty support. Boston showed small but growing online offerings and further growth is anticipated due to the creation of the online-centered University College within the Boston campus. Dartmouth and Worcester were nearly absent in online learning, according to the study. Additionally, the program offerings at the Amherst

campus were concentrated in one area, business administration and the Isenberg School of Management. The offerings at Lowell concentrated on more fields, including technology, psychology, and business. The study also found more faculty support and engagement for online learning at Amherst and Lowell. This finding was attributed to funding and support. Faculty fellows from Amherst developed a handbook called *Teaching and Learning Online: Communications, Community, and Assessment* to help faculty transition to online teaching (Feldman & Zucker, 2011). The creation of the handbook received funding from the office of the President of the University of Massachusetts and is public.

UMassOnline

The goals for UMassOnline when founded were to meet the needs of online learners in higher education through accredited programs and giving the University of Massachusetts a presence in the expanding field of online education. The three roles originally defined to meet these goals for UMassOnline were (a) technology leadership for online learning including learning management system (LMS), (b) marketing and branding of online learning for the university system, and (c) to identify programs areas with a demand for online learning and possibly develop online programs.

The role of technology leadership was evident in the selection of a new LMS. According to UMassOnline leadership the process of evaluation and selection was open and transparent, although some of the campuses do not concur. According to Mellenbrook (2012), the selection of a single LMS for the university system achieves significant cost savings, including support costs. Additionally, having a common LMS enables cross campus collaboration. Generally campuses are pleased with the technology leadership role UMassOnline has achieved, but there is some dissention. With the recent selection of a new LMS issues arose. Some campuses report having little input to the decision process, that the decision was predetermined, and that the review period was just a formality.

Regarding marketing and branding, the study findings report mixed results. A strong brand has been established and achieved name recognition. UMassOnline markets to create awareness of all online educational offering at the five campuses, while individual programs are not directly marketed by UMassOnline. A portal containing all programs at all campuses allows students to look at the offerings collectively and select the program that best meets their needs. Widespread confusion exists with much misunderstanding of the distinction between the marketing of online learning collectively versus the marketing of individual programs. Additionally, too many marketing efforts exist, including those of UMassOnline, campus continuing education offices, departments, and schools within campuses. The report found coordination among the existing efforts lacking. In fact, these organizations were found to operate as vertical silos with little communication and few joint efforts.

The third role of the organization was to identify programs areas with a high demand for online learning and possibly develop online programs. According to the report this goal has not been met. Early discussions of UMassOnline becoming another campus have been abandoned.

Another area found lacking was data reporting in several key areas. First, the study found data related to the use of the LMS for blended courses difficult to obtain. Additionally, data for the role of the LMS in face-to-face course were not available. Without these data it was difficult to assess the value added by both UMassOnline and the LMS. Another area lacking data collection was the tracking of student leads. Feedback on UMassOnline-generated

leads is limited and hampers measuring the effectiveness of UMassOnline.

UMassOnline and the Five Campuses

The report found the relationship between UMassOnline and the five campuses often fraught with conflict. UMassOnline staff reported experiencing open hostility from some on the five campuses. Communication channels are lacking or broken. UMassOnline reporting directly to the President's Office, but with less oversight than any other organization with a similar reporting structure, has caused concern. Additionally, the lack of a well-defined governance structure generates concern. No formal service agreements or communication channels exist between the five campuses and UMassOnline leading to conflicts and misunderstandings.

Recommendations of the Reviewers

In order to address the issues discussed in the study, the reviewers made the following recommendations

- establish formal governing structures for UMassOnline;
- make online education a priority at all campuses;
- expansion of online offerings by the five campuses;
- development of online programs addressing the needs of state workforce and economic development;
- update and improve communication methods between all parties;
- increase cooperative marketing efforts and the development of strategic marketing plans;
- continue and expand the role of UMassOnline in technology selection;
- create a clear delineation of technology support roles;
- do not expand the mission of UMassOnline to include the development of standalone programs;
- improve data systems for better tracking and reporting;
- address financial issues regarding faculty compensation for blended and online; and
- resolve issues with the UMassOnline funding model.

Conclusion

In the last 12 years, the new organization UMassOnline succeeded in increasing online enrollment, program and course offerings, and created a brand that capitalized on the strengths of the University of Massachusetts system. As outlined in the assessment of the program, to continue to have a strong presence in online learning requires organizational and fiscal changes for UMassOnline, and continued growth in online learning offerings at each of the five campuses. Continued prioritization of online learning by higher education leaders in the state of Massachusetts is critical to continued success.

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IN THE LAST 12 YEARS, THE NEW ORGANIZATION UMASSONLINE SUCCEEDED IN INCREASING ONLINE ENROLLMENT, PROGRAM AND COURSE OFFERINGS, AND CREATED A BRAND THAT CAPITALIZED ON THE STRENGTHS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS SYSTEM.

Tribal Colleges and Universities

Rebuilding Culture and Education Through Distance Education

Ayasia Hampton

Introduction

Today the phenomenal excitement about education is learning at a distance. Distance education is making revolutionary changes to the pedagogical processes of learning and teaching at a distance. Distance education bridges the instructional gap between teacher and student when various technologies are used for teaching and learning. Historically, education has changed based on new technologies; more than ever it is steadily providing a new direction for many higher institutions such as tribal colleges and universities (TCU).

In 1998, Sanchez, Stuckey, and Morris noted that distance education is a promising phenomenon that is preserving, maintaining, and revitalizing traditional native languages and cultures. In addition, Moore (2007) reminds that distance education has many elemental parts such as distributed learning, tele-learning, e-learning, open learning, blended learning, and flexi-learning. Each of these applications hold true to allowing many tribal colleges and universities to offer distance education programs. These motivated programs create opportunities for those who find it impossible to attend traditional colleges and universities because of family obligations. Tribal colleges and universities and community programs are collectively encouraging sustainable adoption of broadband use and services so that underserved American Indians can learn how to become digital citizens.

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Brief History of American Indian Education

Let's take ride on an imaginary time machine that takes us back centuries before colonial settlements, and the beginnings of formal education in America. Here we will

find American Indians who relied on the nature, morals, and values of their culture to educate their children. American Indians' educational methods were historically family based, and learning was not as traditional as we know it today. Legacies of inspiration came from nontraditional classrooms that were operated by observing and respecting tribal elders (Rifkin, 1992). According to Reyhner and Elder (2004), and Oesch (1996), American Indians used stories, ceremonies, and apprenticeships as educational tools. The accumulating purpose of these tools were to guide the student "to that indescribable moment when information and insight clash, and the proverbial 'light bulb' [was] illumined" (Oesch, 1996, p. 3). Through these educational tools, American Indians made self-discoveries that opened doors to understanding.

However, as the government emerged and mandated new policies, their way of life started to diminish. Various tribes sent their children to government-funded Indian boarding schools with the promises that their children would have a new, better vision of the world through education, and their success would echo across America for their cultures' greater good (Osech, 1996). The way they lived was their educational journey, and as their livelihood changed at the boarding schools their education did also. This was just the beginning of the American Indian culture being ripped away from them, and the powerful weapon the "new" Americans were using against them were their own children. Parental influences ceased when American Indian children attended boarding schools. Overall, the ideology of the American society was to uplift the natives to "civilization from a savage state" (Stokes, 1997, p. 576). Researchers agree that the "blinding confusion" of the American Indians contributed to the genocide of their culture (Oesch, 1996, p. 6). Moreover, the struggles the American Indians endured over the centuries are evident in the history of their education. For years, American Indians have had the highest dropout rates, and are the poorest among other minority groups in America today (Bowker, 1992). However, distance education is starting a chain reaction that is helping American Indians crystallize an identity once lost survive the ages to come.

TCU, Culture, and Distance Education

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (1999) reminds us that tribal colleges and universities were created to meet the higher educational needs of American Indians. In response, Dine College (originally Navajo Community College) became the foundational start of tribal colleges and universities when it was founded in 1968 by the Navajo Nation (Dine College, 2013). The American Indian College Fund (2013) states that there are 34 fully accredited tribal colleges and universities throughout the United States. Since the beginning of the first TCU, an array of organizations and policies has been established to create conditions of opportunity for American Indians. For instance, the Tribal Controlled Community College Act of 1968 was authorized to federally fund community colleges operated by tribes located on reservations. This created a domino effect, which brought into existence more tribal colleges and universities. Moreover, in 1989 the American Indian College Fund was created to raise money for scholarships (American Indian College Fund, 2013). Tribal colleges and universities are mostly centralized in the middle of the United States. They are nestled in Alaska, Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin with each ranging from 1-7 TCU respectively. Most Indian Americans attending college are the first generations to enroll, and most of those are single mothers in their early thirties (American Indian Higher Education

Consortium, 1999). Tribal colleges and universities are seeing enrollments increase, especially in their distance education programs.

Tribal colleges and universities are significantly regenerating tribal culture and education through the use distance learning services. Culture and education are two priorities for American Indians. Through the prodigious efforts of tribal leaders grew the tribal college movement, and from there tribal colleges and universities are adhering to strengthening tribal culture and education without assimilation, but through the importance of regaining a cultural identity (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999).

The Importance of Culture

Culture is defined as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. With that in mind, only through education can culture be preserved for future generations, but historically the mentoring system of tribal communities have dissolved. So, how is distance education rebooting American Indian culture and education?

Culture allows individuals to feel a connection with those who are familiar; hence, social awareness is recognized. Gentry and Fugate (2012) outline the importance of cultural elements that need to be embedded in American Indian education so that cultural integration is experienced in classrooms. The methodology of this approach signifies the survival of American Indian culture and language, which is essential to rejuvenating the feeling of belonging for American Indians. Opportunities are put in place so that cultural perspectives and experiences are catalysts to increasing American Indian graduation rates. Ambler (1999) of the *Tribal College Journal* states that Haskell Indian Nations University is offering telecourses through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium telecommunications project. One course allows students to communicate with native elders who are relics of American Indian history. Providing ideal avenues such as this emphasizes the critical connection between culture and distance education. Sanchez et al. (1998) insists that through distance education

> The tribe can maintain cultural sensitivity by deciding who will be teaching, and what they will be teaching. Given the severe shortage of American Indian teachers, this technology can be used to increase the numbers of American Indian students who are taught by people who share their cultural and tribal values. (para. 25)

Many tribal colleges and universities educational philosophies are grounded in their cultural traditions. The importance of culture is echoed throughout tribal colleges and universities distance education courses.

A Glance at Distance Education at Work

Distance education brings with it opportunity. There are at least 29 tribal colleges and universities that offer some form of distance education (Ambler, 2004). Gerald "Carty" Monette, Lori Lambert, and Mark Trebian are noted as being pioneers of distance education for tribal colleges (Ambler, 2004). Each of them has brought inspiration to thousands who have entered and graduated from tribal colleges and universities. There are many challenges that come with learning at a distance such as cultural sensitivities, but tribal colleges and universities and tribal leaders are taking the challenge head-on so that precautions are taken to protect precious tribal information (Sanchez et al., 1998). Tribal colleges and universities recognize authentic identities of the American Indian, which

allows students to define themselves in a positive manner.

United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) is just one of many tribal colleges that is participating in the forthcomings of what distance education has to offer by partaking in the North Dakota interactive video network system. In 1990, the North Dakota interactive videoconferencing system was established to provide higher education opportunities for those who are underserved (Williston State College, 2010). Today tribally controlled colleges and universities located in North Dakota are using the interactive video network. Through this system United Tribes Technical College was the first tribal college to offer full online degree programs. Today, United Tribes Technical College offers eight associate of applied science degrees through their distance education division (United Tribes Technical College, 2013). Although 6% of the American Indian population has completed four or more years of college, distance education is reaching more American Indians than ever.

Northwest Indian College is located in Washington, but has eight campuses that serve not only Washington but also tribes from Idaho and Oregon. As of 2011, 75% of Northwest Indian College's students were served via distance education (Northwest Indian College, 2011). Salish Kooten College (SKC) is another TCU that is has had a successful run with distance education by designing and implementing its own distance learning program. Today, SKC offers over 125 courses and is continuing to design more courses. Stein and Jetty (2002) mention that the success of the SKC distance education program lies in the constant training of faculty members; in addition, the interaction the faculty is building with students. With the help of the Native American Higher Education Initiative, SKC has "built a strong, high quality" distance education program (Stein & Jetty, 2002, para. 28). SKC is also connecting with communities by being the first to offer a degree in Tribal Historic Preservation.

Mobile technologies like tablets and smartphones are offline technological tools that distance education students can take advantage of when Internet access is not available. Bates (2012) explains these "smart" gadgets can extend distance learning beyond Internet access by allowing students to preserve their native languages through recording applications originally placed or downloaded on the device. In other words, "previously limited access to language and the cultural stories and related contexts that contribute to the unique learning styles of many tribal communities is being captured and shared throughout a variety of communities and learning environments" (Bates, 2012, para. 26).

Broadband Connecting and Transforming American Indians

Broadband refers to high-speed Internet access that is faster than dial-up. There are many advantages to having broadband access, for broadband can help promote economic develop, facilitate medical care to those who are underserved, help promote pubic safety, and break geographical barriers so that individuals can have access to educational and cultural opportunities (Broadband, n.d.). The government is working hard to bring the nation up to date. Broadband is unlocking new possibilities for many, but for tribal colleges and universities it is redefining the tribal nation. Broadband "accelerates online learning by enabling the creation of digital content and learning systems, and removes regulatory barriers and promotes digital literacy" (Broadband, para. 12). The government's National Broadband Plan, in conjunction with the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program, is maximizing all efforts to set standards to optimize the innovative richness broadband has to offer.

The Digital Divide and the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program (BTOP)

It is true that American Indians are among those who are engulfed by the digital divide. The ambiguous and influential parameters of the digital divide revolve around the aspects of access, skills, economic opportunity, and democratic avenues (Choemprayong, 2006). Therefore, not only are tribal colleges and universities stepping up to loosen the constraints of the great divide, tribal community programs are being governmentally funded to bring American Indians closer to digital citizenship. The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration heads BTOP (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, n.d.). BTOP's overall objective is to provide and support the development of broadband infrastructure, provide public computer centers, and encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service and use (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, n.d.). Through these measures the program has awarded millions of dollars to projects so that they can expand and extend broadband access to individuals and organizations. The College of Menominee Nation and ZeroDivide Tribal are just two examples of programs using BTOP funds to further tribal communities broadband access and connection.

The College of Menominee Nation (CMN)

The CMN has two campus locations in Wisconsin: the Keshena campus and the Green Bay/Oneida campus each offering numerous educational opportunities through distance education. The college is going beyond campus grounds, and is expanding its computer services to the public, especially for the Menominee Indian Tribe. The comprehensive computer center will provide high speed Internet access so that the disadvantaged and rural area receive public Internet use, technology based community education, and job training (BTOP, 2010a). CMN documents that 15% of enrolled CMN participants have Internet access. Consequently, many of them have never used social networks to communicate with family and friends, done online banking, or ever used the Internet at all. Barriers such as these put restrictions on individuals who live in limited and underserved niches. The CMN computer center provides various training programs ranging from video game design to Menominee language. General equivalency degree preparation programs are also set in place to help boost graduation rates. The ongoing efforts of the program will rejuvenate the Menominee Indian Tribe.

ZeroDivide Tribal

ZeroDivide Tribal represents the Tribal Digital Village (TDV) Broadband Adoption Program, which is another BTOP participant that is leapfrogging the digital divide in 19 tribal communities across Southeastern California by providing digital literacy training (BTOP, 2010b). The purpose of TDV is to raise the current 17% baseline of tribal residents that have access to broadband, training, and awareness up to 70% of the 8,900 tribal community members living in the southern California area (BTOP, 2010b). Based on a 2007 survey by the United States census, TDV reports that American Indians and Native Alaskans had the lowest broadband adoption rate. Consequently, TDV is working hard to bring broadband access to the Southern California Tribal Chairman's Association tribal communities. TDV has also established a platform called the Tribal Digital Shadow Project called the Young Native Story Tellers to mentor and train the local youth in the TDV infrastructure and technology; 15 of the participants will be graduating from the program this year. Since their start TDV has calculated that 1,236 individuals has accessed broadband

through subscriptions to the TDV services with Southern California Tribal Chairman's Association (BTOP, 2010b). TDV is a representation of a program that is developing skills and knowledge by recognizing individuals of minority groups need to learn how to function successfully in a digitized global society.

Conclusion

From the early efforts to eradicate tribal culture and education, tribal leaders and the government have had an unstable relationship that has suppressed American Indians over the years. The 21st century brings about change and new innovations; therefore, distance education is illuminating the readiness and motivation of American Indians as they embrace cultural traditions in a modernized and evolving society. The ideology of tribal education involves both societal and tribal colleges and universities' goals that comprise of cultural pluralism and equal opportunity. According to Sleeter and Grant (2007) cultural pluralism "includes the maintenance of diversity, a respect for difference, and the right to participate actively in all aspects of society without having to give up ones unique identity" (p. 152). American Indians are modifying stereotypes and misconceptions about their culture and education by embracing cultural identities. The government is building new relationships with tribal leaders by not only improving educational opportunities, but also promoting sustainable economic development and touching issues of healthcare and public safety within tribal communities. The bruises are slowly healing, but these monumental steps that tribal colleges, distance education, and community programs are revitalizing American Indian education and culture.

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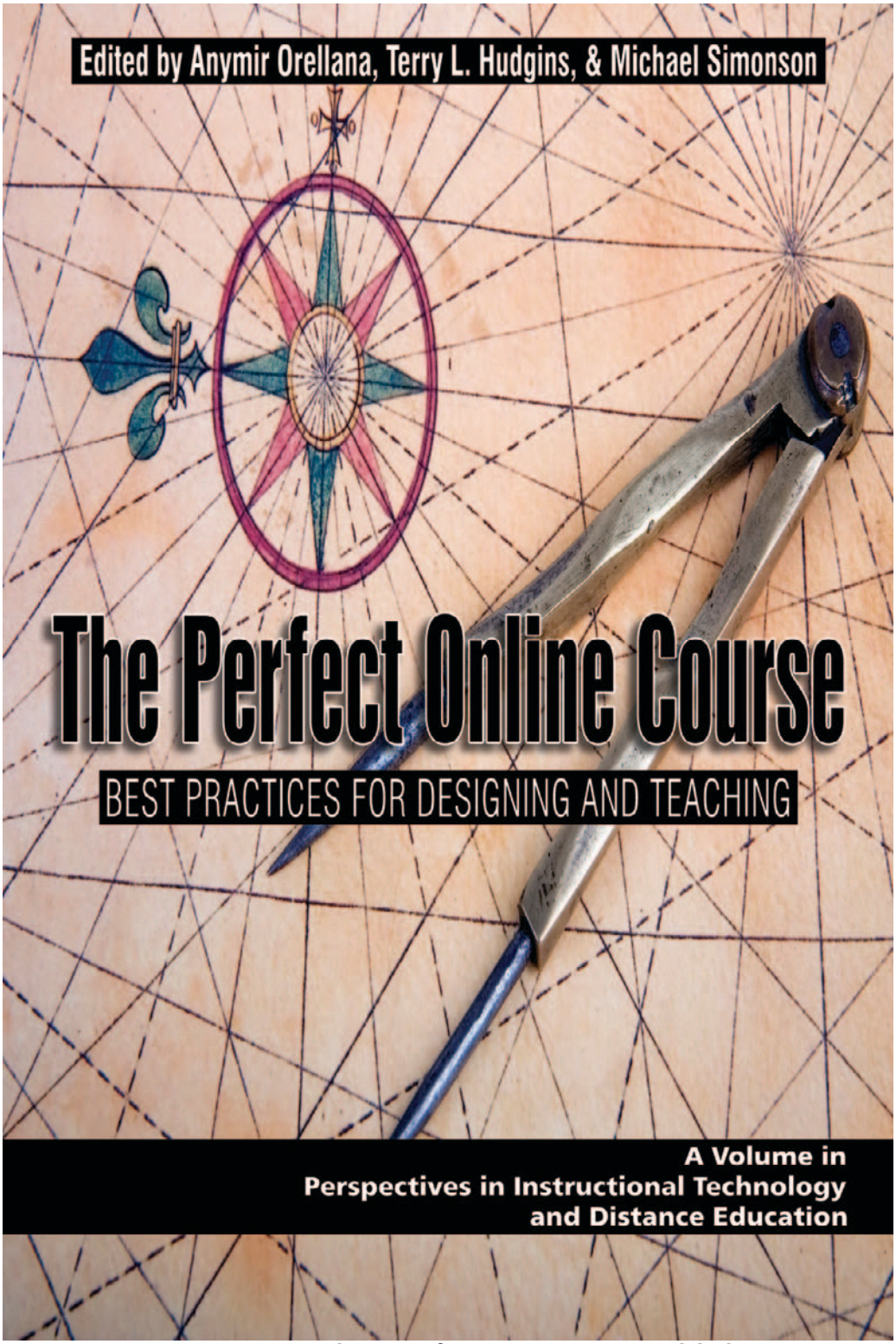
DISTANCE EDUCATION BRIDGES THE INSTRUCTIONAL GAP BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT WHEN VARIOUS TECHNOLOGIES ARE USED FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING. HISTORICALLY, EDUCATION HAS CHANGED BASED ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES; MORE THAN EVER IT IS STEADILY PROVIDING A NEW DIRECTION FOR MANY HIGHER INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.



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Maximizing HR Professionals' Leadership Role in e-Learning for Organizational Effectiveness

Jane Waweru

Introduction

According to Cornish (2004), technology has become the "great transformation of human life" (p. 9). Our society's increasing dependence on technology has affected all facets of our lives to include the human resource management function. Lockwood (2006) predicted that human resources (HR) leaders will be the personnel who will do most to focus efforts on innovative and creative learning in their organizations. E-learning methods have been proposed as a key means of accomplishing the goal of fostering effective, ongoing learning within these organizations. However, it has been reported that due to a variety of barriers, HR professionals are not taking the lead in promoting the use of e-learning. More information is needed to confirm whether or not this problem exists by assessing current levels of e-learning leadership by HR professionals.

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Perceptions of Innovation Attributes

Rogers (2003) discussed five characteristics that help predict how an innovation is adopted. According to Rogers, the relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trial-

ability, and observability are characteristics of innovations that can help predict the overall rate and extent of adoption. A study of HR professionals may help show innovative attributes that are desirable for HR professionals. Organizations may be able to use this information to hire HR professionals with competencies that would help enhance e-learning effectiveness. In addition, results from the study will help readers understand why HR professionals adopt or fail to adopt e-learning.

Society for Human Resource Management (2009) said practitioners in the HR industry reported that learning in "organizations not only promotes retention and career development, but also supports the organization's ability to innovate and remain competitive" (Advocating for Education section, para. 4). Researchers and practitioners stated that HR professionals should be cognizant of the need to lead in creating a learning environment to help meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Society for Human Resource Management, 2009). Saghafian (2011) said that technology is associated with excellence and advancement; consequently, various stakeholders that include the management expect technology to be implemented in the training programs. Hence, there is an increase in popularity in the use of e-learning (Bell, Lee, Yeung, 2006; Forum Corporation, 2003; Long, DuBuois, & Faley, 2008). The reasons for this increase include reduced costs, the ability to manage the changes in the courseware, increased content in the course, and because employees do not have to miss work when participating in e-learning because they can take the course anywhere and at any time.

Hall (2005) supported the same perspective when he stated that every HR professional needs to know the case for e-learning, which includes cost benefits, an increase in the competitive advantage, adaptability to change, attracting and retaining the workforce, training in a new product, and increased advantage with mergers. Hence, the increased pressure for HR professionals to produce training that meets the demands of the organizations is required by the management (Saghafian, 2011).

Implications of Limited e-Learning

Because HR workers play such a key role in promoting e-learning within organizations, lack of e-learning use by HR professionals may result in a failure by organizations to take advantage of the benefits associated with e-learning. The consequences of this failure may be organizations with employees who lack the skills and insights that can contribute to innovations to make the organization more competitive. According to Lawler and Mohrman (2003), "Many companies in the knowledge economy rely on the processing of knowledge by skilled knowledge workers—on its development and utilization of human capital" (p. 4). Thus, e-learning may be a key to whether or not organizations survive in an increasingly competitive economic environment.

Most important is organizations will fail to take advantage of the convenience of learning that can be conducted at anytime and anyplace. Organizations may also fail to take advantage of the reduced costs associated with e-learning and course materials that can be edited and produced instantly. In addition, organizations may fail to take advantage of consistent and reliable data and standardized information among other e-learning advantages, all of which may contribute in the failure of organizations to compete in the global market.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (2008), e-learning is not only useful for delivering high-quality and timely instruction and assessment of skills in formal courses, better employee performance is also supported in less for-

Table 1. e-Learning Opportunities for HR Professionals

Human Resource Management Function	e-Learning Opportunities
Recruiting and hiring	HR professionals can utilize e-learning to educate the applicants on the organization's mission, vision, and organizational values being sought.
Benefits administration	e-Learning can be utilized to educate employees on company benefits such as the Flexible Spending Account or the Family Medical Leave, not only as new hires but also on an ongoing basis.
Compensation administration	Educating employees on equal pay and Lilly Ledbetter among other pay acts through e-learning would help save the organization time while ensuring all employees are receiving similar information through e-learning (Phillips & Phillips, 2009).
Compliance and policy development	e-Learning provides an organization with the opportunity to communicate state, local, and federal regulations at the same time.
Employee relations	Managers can utilize e-learning to engage their employees on several organizational fronts, which includes educating the staff on the latest product development.
Organizational and employee development	e-Learning can also be utilized to help build effective teams.
Performance management	Performance management is enhanced by e-learning based on the fact that it enhances (a) collaboration among various stakeholders; (b) communication; (c) knowledge function by having the capability of providing analytical results; and (d) task function, which makes it possible to sieve data from various sources (Hsiao-Ya, Chieh-Chung, & An-Pin, 2008).
Safety and security	E-learning can be utilized to educate employees on a company's safety and security.

mal ways by supplying reference tools and job aids and by facilitating ongoing communications among instructors, experts, and colleagues from which they learn. These formal and informal strategies provide valuable information in a number of areas that affect organizational performance, including recruiting and hiring, benefits administration, compensation, compliance, employee relations, organizational and employee development, and safety and security.

Researchers said that the utilization of e-learning can help organizations focus more on the strategic role of HR, thereby increasing the opportunity to grow the organization (Panayotopoulou, Vakola, & Galanaki, 2005). Most importantly, organizations would fail to obtain benefits associated with e-learning as it relates to benefits administration, compensation, compliance, employee relations, and safety and security as issues from these areas of the human resource management may arise on a day to day. Failing to take advantage of such benefits would decrease learning opportunities, thereby affecting the organization's performance and production.

Focus Group Qualitative Data

In an effort to establish HR professionals' use or nonuse or e-learning and the barriers as perceived by HR professionals to the adoption of e-learning, qualitative data was collected using a pilot study and three focus groups to help better understand HR professions views and attitudes on e-learn-

ing (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Gay et al. stated that qualitative data helps in the understanding of a "deep and holistic or complex understanding of a particular phenomenon" (p. 399). According to Fink, qualitative data "collect information on the meanings that people attach to their experiences and on the ways they express themselves" (p. 61).

Targeted HR professionals worked in various industries that included retail, technology, manufacturing, nonprofit, government, health, finance, research, education, marketing, consulting, and international. All industries were expected to be represented. Only willing HR professionals volunteered to participate. A total of 22 HR professionals participated and provided their rationale on why they do or do not participate in e-learning.

Reasons for Use or Nonuse of e-Learning

Common themes for HR participation in e-learning included the following:

1. Professional/personal development. Most HR professionals stated they participated in e-learning for their own professional or personal development. On professional development, participants indicated they utilized e-learning resources to recertify their credentials and take classes online, among others. Participants indicated they utilized e-learning for exploratory learning and for self-knowledge.
2. Convenience. Participants generally perceived that e-learning provides easy access to learning. Consequently, distance from a training site or even time of day was not an obstacle when training was done through e-learning. One participant stated she enjoyed the convenience of being able to be "trained at 2 A.M." Other participants cited the ability to use multiple locations for learning.
3. Compliance. Participants stated they were able to educate employees on mandated courses such as code of ethics and harassment policies among others through e-learning.
4. Facilitate/instruct/intervention. Several participants indicated they had been exposed to e-learning as facilitators or instructors or utilized e-learning as an intervention.
5. Customized training. Participants stated that e-learning provided the ability to provide customized training to employees with special needs. A HR professional stated that "different learners require unique needs which may not be met through e-learning."

Potential Barriers

HR professionals provided their rationale on barriers and challenges that contributed to their nonuse of e-learning. Five of the leading themes cited included the following:

1. Lack of face-to-face interaction. Participants stated that a lack of face-to-face interaction or engagement does create a barrier to e-learning. A participant was of the view that online interaction "can be strange." The participant added by stating, "I do not learn well learning on software, it is not my format." Another participant stated that "in person, one can tell a person story which is lost in e-learning, and would probably not learn very well if instruction was all online" while another stated "some people need motivation for structure to take classes online. There is need for a face-to-face to expand the network. 'You can't fax a handshake'." Another HR professional stated that although one is forced to take some certifications classes online, she preferred face to face because she "belongs to that era."

2. Accessibility and usability. Some participants were of the view that technical challenges can create a barrier to e-learning. Participants stated that, sometimes, e-learning may not be easy to use because of "terrible technology." An HR professional stated that "web-based e-learning the system is sometimes down and you cannot do anything until Information Technology team is ready to resolve the problem." Participants believed there is need for better designed e-learning content.
3. Cost. Participants stated that cost of e-learning can be a barrier to e-learning because finances are needed to support the software, people, developers, and designers of the innovation. Some believed that due to hard economic challenges, compliance issues were on the back burner. Others were of the view that capital was needed to develop and maintain e-learning. Some HR professionals said that financial cost associated with e-learning can be a challenge when trying to promote the innovation to the top management.
4. Effectiveness. Participants believed that the inability to measure the effectiveness of e-learning was a barrier to learning.
5. Lack of time. HR professionals stated they were sometimes busy and may not have had time for e-learning on the job. One participant stated that not having enough time at work made e-learning "a bother at work." Others felt that interruptions on the job presented a barrier to e-learning because they were not able to concentrate.

Interpretation of the Focus Group Results on the Use or Nonuse of e-Learning

Findings of this study showed that focus group members identify mainly advantages of e-learning, rather than disadvantages, thereby confirming that at least some HR professionals were aware of the advantages of e-learning. Taking advantage of professional/personal development through e-learning is a clear indication that HR professionals recognize the advantages of e-learning methods. HR professionals seem to realize that e-learning has conveniences to their professional life and that e-learning can help them assist their organization on compliance issues.

However, because these focus group participants mainly focused only on what they liked about e-learning, it seems likely the group contained only e-learning advocates/leaders. Findings indicated that given the right environment, these particular HR professionals would take charge and lead the e-learning process. However, they may not be characteristic of all HR professionals.

Interpretation of Results for the Barriers of e-Learning

Previous studies showed that attitudes about innovation attributes contributed to HR decisions on whether or not to adopt, and this study was not an exception (Martin & Reddington, 2009; Vaughan & MacVicar, 2004). As an example, one focus group participant stated that taking into account that HR professionals' style is generally one that prefers face-to-face interaction, many may tend to be resistant to e-learning. This rationale was shared by Martin and Reddington (2009) who stated, "HR staff have been resistant to technology mediation because it conflicts with their view of HR as best carried out through face-to-face relationships with clients" (p. 529). Lack of a face-to-face interaction had the highest number of frequency (22) of comments on barriers to e-learning. Another participant stated that given her generation, she preferred face-to-face learning because it provides interaction. Her comments were supported by another

participant who stated that a lot of people prefer face-to-face training. Another participant stated she did not want to sit at the computer all day learning. A need for a human face was cited as critical in the learning process because some employees would like someone to assist them throughout the process.

A few comments cannot be used to reflect the perception of the entire HR population but the examples provide an opportunity to show a possible connection between e-learning barriers and the perceptions of compatibility. HR professionals would like to ensure that e-learning is compatible with their personal and organizational values prior to trying it. Hassan (2007) defined *organizational values* as "beliefs and attitudes that go deep inside and constitute a collective understanding regarding norms and standards of behavior acceptable in the organization" (p. 437). Hassan reported that organizational values "set the tone" (p. 437) for how members of the organization ought to behave. Consequently, organizational values help employees bond towards a common purpose with the goal of achieving business goals (Hassan, 2007). HR professionals can use e-learning to help educate the applicants and employees of the organization's values by modeling these uses in their own work.

This study confirmed that real problems exist that may be contributing to lack of e-learning leadership by HR professionals. These include difficulties with accessibility and usability of e-learning, the cost of e-learning, challenges in measuring e-learning effectiveness, and the quality of the learning information. This indicates that HR professionals, like any people who choose to adopt a given innovation, need to see the relative advantage of the innovation (in this case, e-learning) prior to adopting it. Most importantly, HR professionals would like to ensure that e-learning is compatible with their personal and organizational values prior to trying it.

Implications for Practice

This study's results indicate that much work remains to be done to demonstrate the value of e-learning for HR purposes and ensure that e-learning methods are more adopted. Suggestions for future practice include (a) publication of this research for awareness raising, (b) workshops, (c) technical support, (d) training that focuses on innovative attributes, (e) organizational synergy, and (f) communication within the organization.

Publication of the Research

This study provides updated information on the current state of e-learning leadership on HR Professionals. Publishing this research on e-learning leadership in relevant HR professional publications could help create awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning.

The publication of the study could help provide an important body of knowledge to HR professionals as it would introduce them to Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory and illustrate how it applies to their situation. Bauck (2002) stated that "professional development is most effective when it includes theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching" (p. iv).

Offering Workshops

Study findings suggested that e-learning advocates should do more to increase acceptance and use of e-learning. In HR, e-learning advocates could be HR professionals themselves or the management within the organization. If workshops on e-learning benefits were offered in HR-related conferences, they could provide professional development with the assistance of opinion leaders.

Opinion leaders who advocate increased use of e-learning could help educate the HR professionals on its benefits. Consequently, conference-learning work-

shops could help confront and address the barriers to adoption of e-learning while emphasizing the benefits. The workshop could emphasize the relative advantage and compatibility attributes of e-learning, because HR professionals prefer seeing the advantage of e-learning, and that innovation aligns with their values and that of the organization. Opinion leaders could emphasize that using e-learning is the modern way to do things.

Offering Technical Support

Organizations could do much to encourage e-learning acceptance by providing increased technical support to HR professionals to help minimize challenges that were cited in the focus groups. When possible, the management could designate a technical support person in every department to help address issues related to usability of e-learning. Researchers stated that a support system and adequate support resources are needed to ensure successful diffusion of an innovation (Demuth, 2010).

Most importantly, Dublin (2007) stated that an effective integration of e-learning solutions often requires a shift in roles, responsibilities, and jobs within the organization. This means there is a need for HR professionals to wear a training hat that will enable them to take advantage of every available opportunity to educate employees on any task in the human resource management cycle. As educators, HR professionals will serve the role of being information and resource providers to the employees.

As organizational educators of e-learning, HR professionals will serve the critical role of launching new ideas within the organization and make others within the system aware of it (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) said this can best be achieved if HR professionals understand the diffusion of innovation as a "process by which (1) an innovation (2) is communicated through certain channels (3) over time (4) among the members of a social system" (p. 11). Researchers stated that a trainer's desire to want to learn more and discover knowledge can result in an increase in the trainer's skill level (Boyatzis, 2008). This would eventually help improve the learning outcomes toward a desired state.

Enhancing Organizational Synergy

Researchers stated that the human resource management function is best achieved when evaluated as a whole (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003). The human resource management function is better placed to understand the complex and intricate organizational dynamics and ways that human capital can be used to help achieve the organization's strategic goals. Being able to see an opportunity to educate or train employees in the use of e-learning can help accelerate its use. A coordinated and systematic approach to innovative advances is needed in order to address organizational problems.

Organizational problems can best be addressed with management support. Input received from the focus group participants indicated that managerial, organizational, and technological barriers do contribute to or prevent the adoption of e-learning. According to Hung et al. (2009), "Managerial and organizational variables were all found to have a positive influence on the adoption decision, whereas technological variables were all found to have a negative influence on a hospital's decision to adopt" e-learning (p. 250). Most importantly, managerial support was found to be indispensable in the adoption of e-learning. Consequently, Hung et al. stated that for a successful adoption of e-learning, the top management would need to be educated on the benefits.

The management can help reduce the lack of adoption by providing HR professionals with the resources they need to

make e-learning part of the organizational learning culture. In exchange, the management can hold HR professionals accountable, through performance management, to ensure that they provide well-designed training. Most importantly, management can set criteria that metrics be provided to link organizational strategic goals and the effectiveness of e-learning.

Enhancing Communication Within the Organization

The open-ended comments from focus groups in this study represented advantages, disadvantages, barriers, and challenges of e-learning in the workforce. Failure to lead in an e-learning initiative is an area of improvement for HR professionals. They should ensure they actually have had the opportunity to lead an e-learning initiative if it is available to them as an option. This opportunity might arise if HR professionals communicated this concern with the stakeholders and helped them understand the role of HR and the importance of being able to lead e-learning initiatives.

Implications for Future Research

The section recommends possible research studies that could shed more light on e-learning leadership and provide information to build on the results.

Conducting Studies in Specific Companies

Respondents from this study were HR professionals from various industries. Further studies of this research could be conducted in specific companies with the goal of obtaining specific data on e-learning leadership and challenges experienced by HR professionals within such firms. If organizations were to conduct their own exploration of e-learning leadership on the part of HR professionals, they could obtain internal data that could help enhance organizational and employee development. Consequently, the organizations would conduct the study and report them to a larger population. Grgurovic (2010) recommended further studies in a specific organization, as a unit of analysis, in order to build on the diffusion of innovation study on technology-enhanced blended language learning in an English as a second language class. This view was supported by Tyan (2004), who stated that the size of the organization may not be issue; consequently, there is need to obtain data from specific companies in order to understand the challenges that are faced by corporations.

Research on Specific HR Management Functions

The focus group in this study focused on barriers and challenges of e-learning as a whole in the organization. There is need for further research to help understand the challenges and barriers faced by HR professionals when advocating e-learning for specific HRM job functions such as recruiting and hiring, benefits administration, compensation, employee relations, performance management, organizational and employee development, and safety and security. Research could be conducted in specific organizations with the goal of obtaining specific data on e-learning leadership on HR responsibilities and challenges that are experienced by HR professionals. Researchers recommended the need to conduct diffusion of innovation research in specific organizations (Grgurovic, 2010; Tyan, 2004). Research in this diffusion of innovation could be done in companies where they could obtain direct feedback on HR on specific area of concerns.

Summary

Although it seems important that HR professionals take a leadership role in helping organizations maximize the advantages of e-learning, there were few studies that indicated how much this was happening. This study helped provide this evidence by exploring e-learning leadership among HR professionals, obstacles to adoption, and possible ways to promote higher rates of adoption.

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Blending and Flipping Distance Education

Katrina Keene

Introduction

In the second decade of 21st century teaching and learning, it is not a surprise to educators and students that classrooms come equipped with Internet enabled devices. Students in schools are either provided with or asked to bring some type of technology, whether it be a laptop, tablet, iPod, or similar device. According to a recent survey of 500 students in the United States, "some 90% of college students say they save time studying with technology such as mobile devices, digital textbooks, eReaders, and tablets" (Violino, 2012, p. 40). The author goes on to say that "nearly all college students (98%) who own a device have used it for school, and a majority of those students (53%) read e-textbooks frequently" (p. 40).

Everyone is connected within this environment. Learning does not stop when the student leaves the classroom or campus, and teachers do not stop teaching at the end of the school day. A change has taken place over the past decade and students, parents, and educators, are pushing education to a new level.

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Virtual Schools

Research in best practices continues to reveal that students learn at different rates and in different ways. This has brought on new challenges not only for educators, but for parents and students as well. These challenges were recognized by many states throughout the United States and addressed through developments of distance education programs.

As early as 1992, states across America saw the need to begin connecting their schools, libraries, and universities together in an effort to create synchronous video distance learning classes. With this, came the push for new developments of online "virtual" schools. Florida, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, South Dakota, and Arkansas were just a few of the early adopters of statewide virtual and connected schools (Simonson, 2013). According to Barth (2013), "more than one half of U.S. school districts (55%) have some students enrolled in online distance education

courses" (p. 34). Best practices in education support the adoption of virtual schools and online courses for students. A recent study comparing the performance of students in the Arkansas Virtual Academy School with that of their counterparts has astounding results. According to Barth (2013), the "[Arkansas Virtual Academy School] students in Grades 3-8 produced higher gains over 2 years than did their traditionally schooled peers: an average of 9.6 percentile points in math and 3.6 points in literacy" (p. 35).

Best Practices

In the case of a recent distance education adoption in Kansas City Missouri School District, it was suggested that "distance learning should enable students to achieve their educational goals by delivering academically sound courses and educational support services that are flexible, responsive and innovative" (Cooper, 2013, p. 111). Given this suggestion of what distance learning should look like for a student, it has been changed and developed into other forms that support best practices in the classroom. Educators are beginning to merge the best of virtual school learning with "traditional" classroom learning and infusing them into the classroom.

Blended Learning

While online learning meets the needs of some students, research in best practices also supports the need for blended or hybrid learning courses for students. According to McGee and Reis (2012), "a blended course is the integration of online with face-to-face instruction in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner; and not just a combination of online with face-to-face but a trade-off of face-to-face time with online activity" (p. 9). The authors go on to say, "a blended course integrates the best of face-to-face and online learning while significantly reducing traditional class contact hours. When the strengths of each approach are integrated in an appropriate and creative manner, the possibility to become fully engaged in a sustained manner is increased exponentially" (p. 9).

Design

Blended learning is not an all or nothing component to education. It can take on different forms and look different ways to various educators. Tucker (2013) advocates for "a teacher-designed blended learning model, in which teachers determine the combination that's right for them and their students" (p. 57). There is not one way to incorporate blended learning. Teachers must find what works for the entire classroom.

Misconceptions

Hesitations and misconceptions often arise when the concept of blended learning comes into play. Teachers often believe they will have to give up their home and social lives to be available 24/7 for students. If a blended learning model is prepared correctly, the online environment will be set up to welcome comments and connections from peers. Students will begin to enjoy and value one another as a resource for learning. Teachers also hesitate and shy away from blended learning due to a lack of technological skills. If online resources are not enough to jump start a blended classroom, there is usually another teacher or administrator in the school or district that can help teachers begin. Once the class is set up and organized online, it then becomes a matter of content, maintenance, monitoring, and participating. Tucker (2013) recommends, "when you first attempt to weave tradition and technology into a practical, durable education fabric, take small steps" (p. 59). Often teachers get scared of the bigger picture of blended learning rather than taking it piece by piece. As blended learning took shape over the past decade, teachers began asking

more questions about how to reach their students. While blended learning supported best practices, educators were looking on to new ways to enhance the model.

Flipping Blended Learning

The term "flipped classroom" was coined in 2007 when teachers Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams (Figure 1) at Woodland Park High School in Woodland Park, CO, discovered software to record PowerPoint presentations. They recorded and posted their live lectures online for students who missed class. The online lectures began to spread student to student and school to school. Flipped learning was born and so began a new way of thinking about teaching and learning.

According to Gore (2013), "the flipped classroom inverts traditional teaching methods delivering instruction online outside of class and moving 'homework' into the classroom" (para. 3). In simpler terms, a flipped classroom model allows students to watch lectures at home at their own pace, communicating with peers and teachers via online discussions, and also allows for concept engagement to take place in the classroom with the help of the instructor.

According to Bergmann and Sams (2012),

> When you walk into our classrooms, you will see students engaged in a variety of activities using different digital devices. Students are working on our (obsolete) class computers, they are using their Ipods, they are working together, they are experimenting, and they are interacting with their teacher. We encourage our students to bring in their own electronic equipment because, frankly, it is better than our school's antiquated technology. (p. 21)

Misconceptions and Truths

Parents often ask teachers how a flipped classroom is any different than having their child sit home and watch videos. Bergman and Sams support the model by looking at positive ways to address questions from parents, students, teachers, and administrators.

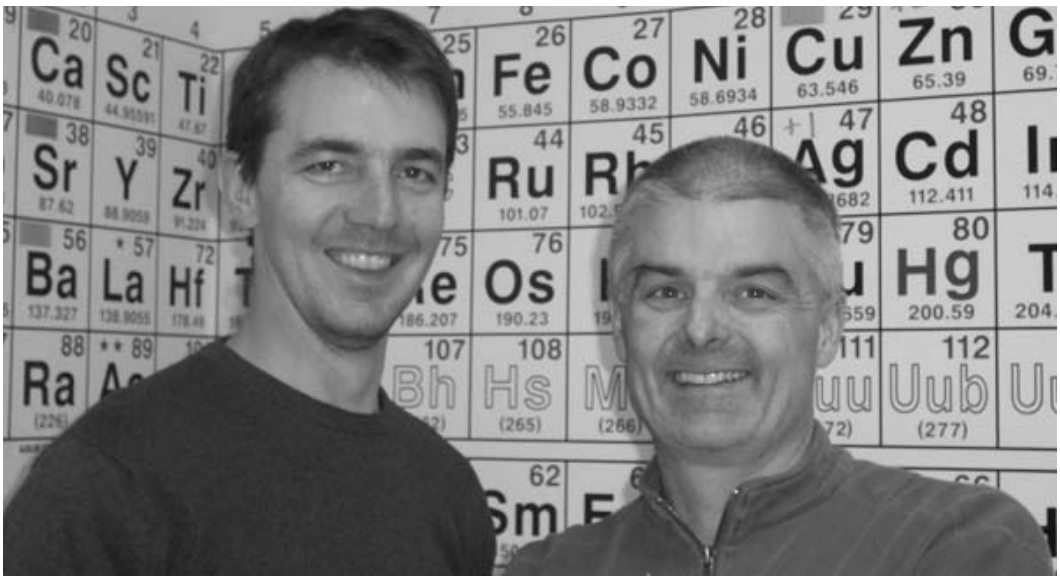


Figure 1. Bergmann and Sams.

1. Flipping helps busy students. Students can choose to work ahead.
2. Flipping helps struggling students. The teacher's role becomes one of a facilitator enabling educators with more time for students in need.
3. Flipping helps students of all abilities to excel. All notes, concepts, and class materials are online for students who need extra time or help
4. Flipping allows students to pause and rewind their teacher. Those students who understand the material can move on but those students who need to rewatch material can rewind or pause videos for deeper understanding
5. Flipping increases student-teacher interaction. Educators become facilitators, which allows for one on one time with students. Students also see their teacher in an online "virtual" format as well as in person.
6. Flipping allows teachers to know their students better. Relationships are built in person and online.
7. Flipping increases student-to-student interaction. In the online world of flipping, students have access to peers through discussion boards. Material can be discussed prior to the next school day and upon return to the classroom, student have an in depth understanding of the material.
8. Flipping allows for real differentiation. In a flipped classroom, the teacher's time is not spent lecturing and using classroom time on teaching; rather the teacher becomes the facilitator allowing for differentiation of material for students.
9. Flipping changes classroom management. Learning becomes small group based and students therefore feel less threatened by classroom participation.
10. Flipping changes conversations with parents. The focus is no longer on behavior in the classroom. Instruction is focused therefore lessening or eliminating the "behavior" conversations with parents.
11. Flipping educates parents. Parents begin getting involved in their child's education as videos are viewed together. Parents can learn the content along with their child.
12. Flipping makes your classroom transparent. Parents, students, and teachers can see online what is being taught. No longer are there questions about what is expected of a student or what is in the curriculum.

Various Forms

Flipping a classroom can take on many different forms. Videos do not always need to be produced by the instructor. Many teachers use videos made by other teachers or even students as part of the online component to their classroom. According to Bergmann and Sams (2013), "if you're truly overwhelmed by the idea of creating videos, you can use videos that other teachers have created, search for good ones online, or pair up with a teacher to do a video together in a conversational format" (p. 20). For an extra challenge, teachers can make their own videos using screen capture apps such as Camtasia, Explain Everything, and Educreations to draw and explain lessons. These videos can then be uploaded to a learning management system such as Edmodo, Schoology, Haiku, or Blackboard. According to Strayer (2009),

> it might be preferable for some teachers to structure a less radical flipped classroom that gives students an opportunity to view course content outside the classroom in a number of different formats, but still include regular lectures followed by a learning activity with homework from a book. (p. 129)

The author goes on to say, "other teachers might envision a radical flipped classroom that includes only learning activities in class and the introduction to course con-

tent only outside class" (Strayer, 2009, p. 192). Regardless the form that the flipped classroom takes on, the goal is to bring a blended learning model of instruction to the students that allows for differentiated instruction for students.

Khan Academy

Khan Academy (Figure 2) has struck a chord with many schools with their informative and interactive online lessons. Founded by Salman Khan (Figure 3) in 2006, Khan academy has reached over 6 million students and is growing in popularity. In 2004, Khan began teaching his cousin, Nadia, remotely in order for her to understand math. Once Nadia began to excel in math using these lessons, Khan began teaching his brothers online as well. More and more requests came in for tutoring and when time became an issue, Khan turned to recording videos to tutor his family and friends. After posting these instructional videos on YouTube, thousands of people tuned in to the instruction and began requesting more. Schools enjoy Khan Academy for its support in student led instruction and learning. According to Schaffhauser (2013),

> It may also be one of the reasons why Khan is so intent on helping students discover their own motivations. "We want them to take ownership of their learning," he says. "A lot of schools are focused on almost spoon-feeding students so that they can get to college. And then they pat themselves on their back: 'Look! All of our students went to college,' or 'We have a really high graduation rate,' or whatever it might be. But then the students go to college and they struggle because college is very self-directed." A big part of that struggle, he says, is that they didn't have ownership of their own learning. (p. 20)

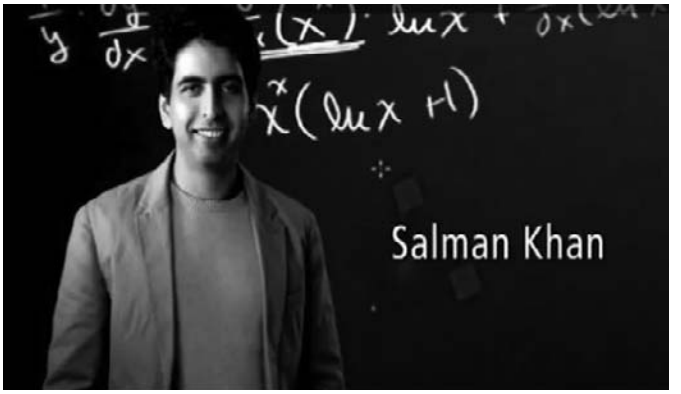
And thus, Khan Academy was born. According to Parslow (2012), "Khan does not use a script for his lectures and spontaneity is part of what makes them so effective." The author goes on to say, "a student can hear Khan thinking things through aloud, using intuition and solving the problem with his viewers rather than for them" (p. 337).

Khan in the Flipped Classroom

In a flipped classroom, the educator can use resources such as Khan academy to support and give students an insight to what they will be learning. After watching

Source: Trikeapps (2013).

Figure 2. Khan Academy.



Source: Engenharia (2013).

Figure 3.

the videos and using the interactive portions of them, they can then use a learning management system to talk to other classmates and answer questions about the topic at hand. Through the chosen learning management system, educators and students alike can collaborate through the discussion boards and further discuss and educate one another on the topic. Both the educator and the student can then post additional information such as videos, podcasts, or supporting documents. When students return to class, the teacher is there to help facilitate further instruction or questions about the lesson. This allows for a deeper, more differentiated model of facilitation and instruction. According to Parslow (2012), "in Khan's view, there is no need for students to be divided into grades by age but instead learn at their own page, moving on to the next lesson only when they have mastered the concept before it" (p. 337).

In support of the flipped classroom, Khan Academy does not stop at simple videos. They also house a workspace for practice as well as class data for teachers.

The Los Altos school district found that "Khan Academy fits nicely with the blended model of instruction" (Schaffhauser, 2013, p. 25). The district recognized that Khan Academy was one piece to the puzzle of blended learning as they also have textbooks, projects, and different tools to use.

Conclusion

As technology grows, distance education is taking on new roles in schools and is moving forward to support best practices. From virtual schools, online classes, blended learning and now to flipped learning, distance education remains prevalent in schools today. How a school or district chooses to go about adopting online classes depends on the needs of the school, teachers, parents, and students. If the school wants to remain current, differentiate instruction, support best practices, and increase student achievement, blended learning in the form of a flipped model may be a good option. Resources such as Khan Academy allow teachers who lack the necessary tools to create their own instructional videos and access a bank of thousands of instructional videos for students. Students who interact with Khan's online activities along with the LMS discussion boards will be primed and ready to return to school the next day for further facilitation of instruction with the teacher.

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The Distance Learning Leader Certificate Program
at
Nova Southeastern University, North Miami Beach, Florida
February 7- 8, 2014

The *Distance Learning Leader Certificate Program* will be held in North Miami Beach, FL with face to face sessions scheduled for February 7 – 8, 2014 followed by six weeks of online sessions.

The *Distance Learning Leader Certificate Program* is sponsored by the Fischler School of Education at Nova Southeastern University, the Florida Distance Learning Association, and the U.S. Distance Learning Association. This executive-level program is designed for managers, directors, and leaders who are moving into distance education, e'learning, and virtual schooling.

The day and one-half of on-site sessions will be held in the board room of the Fischler School of Education in North Miami Beach. Online sessions will be conducted for six weeks after face-to face sessions and will utilize the Blackboard course management system. Attendees will receive reference books, learning materials, and access to the DLLCP web site.

The *Distance Learning Leader Certificate Program* will be led by Dr. Michael Simonson, professor of Instructional Technology and Distance Education. Dr. Simonson has over 35 years of experience in distance education. Other leaders will join sessions using telecommunications systems.

For more information, contact Dr. Karen Bowser, Executive Director, Professional Development
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http://www.fischlerschool.nova.edu/dll

Out With MOOCs and in With SPOcs?

Not So Fast

Natalie B. Milman

Just as most major universities across the United States have joined, tabled, are in the process of joining, or have already abandoned the massive open online course (MOOC) bandwagon, a "new" form of online course offering—and acronym—are sparking questions and making some scratch their heads as to what is "new" about them. The courses are small, private, online courses, also known as "SPOCs."

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The interest surrounding SPOCs started when HarvardX announced it would be offering these types of courses during the fall of 2013, "intended only for enrolled students" (Rutter, 2013, para. 5). Yet, this is not a new idea. These types of courses have been offered for free and for a fee by many organizations, corporations, institutions, universities, and more—for years. Additionally, many institutions, including George Washington University (see http://tlc.provost.gwu.edu/online-learning-initiative), are involved in online learning initiatives that seek to transform brick-and-mortar courses to online offerings for their students. Similarly, there is Semester Online (see http://semesteronline.org/), which consists of a consortium of universities offering small for-credit online courses. Semester Online consortium school students are billed by their school, whereas nonconsortia students are billed directly by Semester Online. It seems the only new aspect of SPOCs is that more courses will be offered to students at a particular institution, and potentially later to select groups of stu-

dents who are not enrolled there. Also, what might be considered unique is that while anyone can register, there is some type of selective process for enrolling.

As interest about SPOCs grows, it is important to review some of the MOOC challenges that have occurred in the past year, such as:

- A mathematics MOOC course was canceled due to low quality (Young, 2012);
- A MOOC folded due to design flaws and technical glitches (Jaschik, 2013);
- A professor quit teaching a MOOC due to concerns regarding student engagement and learning (Kolowich, 2013);
- A university suspended its online courses offered by a MOOC provider after half of its students failed (Murphy, 2013); and
- A California MOOC bill that would have provided low cost online courses to public colleges within the state died (Rivard, 2013).

These are important lessons for those involved in online education considering one rationale for providing MOOCs is to improve online education through research.

Oremus (2013) contends that SPOCs "hold more promise than pure MOOCs when it comes to delivering students a full educational experience" (para. 12). Similarly, Shimabukuro (2013) asserts that SPOCs are MOOC game changers. Yet, there is already a well-established teaching, delivery, and research base on "what works" in online education that has traditionally been small, private, and online—restricted to registered students. Therefore, just as MOOCs have not realized predictions to "revolutionize higher education" (Webley, 2012), it is questionable whether or not SPOCs will, especially when what drives many of these "innovations" is not always the students or their needs, but other factors such as lack of space, outside pressures to "innovate," the perception that the return on investment is higher in online courses, et cetera.

No matter the number of students, method employed, delivery medium, etc., it is important to design learning experience using effective instructional design principles, media, and teaching models. SPOCs are not new—perhaps they are just a catchphrase to market better what a lot of folks have been doing for years. And, even if they are, it would be great if those offering SPOCs might pool researchers together to study what works best across institutions and organizations, and with different audiences. Although there is a solid research base about online education, there is much more to be learned and there is always room for improvement!

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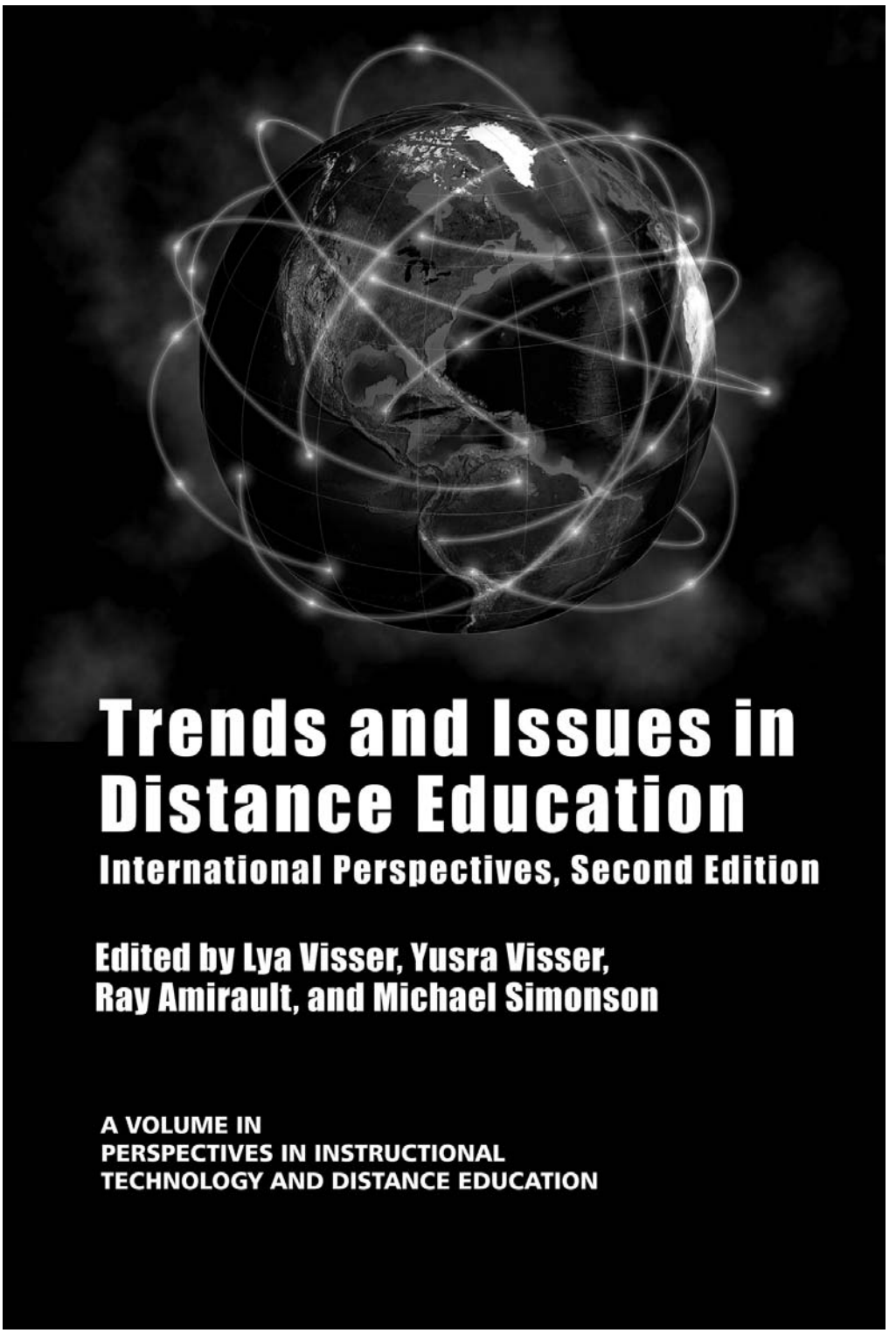
SPOCs are small, private, online courses.



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Small Things Can Make the Difference Between a Good or Great Distance Educator

Errol Craig Sull

Much space has been taken up in my previous columns, as well as other folks' writings, on the instructor's efforts in the distance learning classroom. His or her personality, strategies, demeanor, organization, etc. have been—rightfully so—discussed in nearly every way possible. But it is important to remember the students see the course before they have daily and weekly interactions with the online instructor, and often students have access to the course days before the course officially begins. What the students find waiting for them in the course—prior to having ongoing connections with the instructor—establishes an initial bar for what students can expect throughout the course. Thus, much effort and time must be put into creating a Day One course that will result in the most positive reaction from students. Here's how …

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Have a Welcome Message That Is Inviting, Specific, and Thorough

The "welcome to the course!" posting in class is de rigueur in any online course—it is that one essential piece of info that sets the tone for the course while offering students important course-related info. But too often these are posted as quick "must-dos" with little thought given to the reader—and this can be dangerous to the course. The message must suggest the instructor is interested in the students, enjoys teaching the course, and is always available—this begins a nice bond with the

students, and offers more reasons for them to become engaged in the course. Too, as more students will read this posting than any other in the course it is important to include crucial information so students know what is expected of them. (Many instructors will post—and some schools insist instructors post—additional Day 1 announcements, each covering one specific task, tip, or requirement of the course, again knowing these Day 1 postings receive the most student readings.) Put care and thought into this posting (or these postings): it becomes the springboard for the rest of the course.

Be Sure All Initial Discussion Questions Are Set Up

Discussion becomes the heartbeat of any online course, as it is 24/7 alive, with faculty and students posting whenever they'd like. Thus, it is important directions are clear and all is done to keep discussion on postings flowing in the right direction—and often. Although most online schools have discussion threads with an initial question or situation for the students to discuss, instructors should also post a first comment and Socratic-style question to the students for each discussion question of Week 1 (and continue this throughout the coursed). Three items are immediately established here: the instructor's hands-on involvement in the course, an additional post to pull in more student postings, and extra info on a subject that takes the course wider and deeper. This suggestion is so often overlooked by online instructors, yet it goes a long way in beginning a fruitful and rewarding discussion experience for the students.

Check Links, Dates, Directions, and Syllabus

Take as much time as necessary prior to a course start to check out all of these. One of the most frustrating experiences a student can have in a course is when a link does not work; pages in a text don't match up with pages in a syllabus or online lecture; dates for assignment submissions, Discussion postings, readings, and other items are missing, old, or not the same as appear between two postings of the dates; directions are confusing, out of date, or wrong; and a syllabus has not been updated. Any of these can put a student on guard with questions about how much time the instructor spent setting up the course. And be sure to check all written info for proofreading, grammar, spelling, and punctuation—no matter the course subject these writing foundation basics matter greatly, and when off reflect on the instructor and the school.

Send a Welcoming E-Mail to All Students

Different from the welcoming message posted in the class, an email sent to the students sends a personal message: the instructor is very interested in the student doing well in the course, he or she is an active instructor, and the course is an important one. A neat little trick is to send at least one attachment with a helpful resource (also posted in the course) that will assist students with the subject matter, their navigation through the course, and/or with your expectations. Again, this is a step many online instructors do not take — it takes more time, of course—but it goes a long way in setting a positive, engaging tone for the course.

Use Multimedia to Initially Engage and Inform Students

It's time for the 21st century to be used at its fullest in the online course: written words are fine, and they have been the standard and pretty much the only means of communicating with students since the first online course was launched in 1984. But more students are becoming used to

technology, and thus we can implement such (free) software of Jing (audio/visual), Voicethread (audio/visual), .mp3 (audio), Go Animate (visual), PowerPoint (visual), and Prezi (visual) to introduce the anything and everything of an online course. (These can also be used throughout a course for assignment feedback, details on coming weeks, extra info on course subjects, and discussion inserts.) In combination with the written text, these technological sabers bring a sharpness and up-to-date feeling to any online course while also helping to clarify any course info and engage more students.

Scatter Helpful Resources and Et Ceteras Throughout the Course

Students enter a course, and they find the shell of the course, that is, what the web developer and the school decided on should be included for a complete online learning experience. But to keep this fresh, to help students stay focused on the material, and keep participants excited about learning the material it is important new resources be added by the instructor. Always related to the course subject, these can be articles, essays, videos, puzzles, cartoons, or blogs—they become much-needed spices that add a bit of zest, interesting learning, and perhaps some fun to the distance learning course.

Post Class-Specific Information for Easy and Ongoing Access

There are basics in a course that we can assume students know, but they do not; and issues from previous courses that have caused student problems. From knowing how to attach a document to contact info for tech problems to a clarified rundown on discussion requirements and more, one-page docs in one file and pointed out to the students on Day 1 will get more use than you might expect. It is so much better to overprepare a course than underprepare one—I have yet to teach a course in my 20 years of teaching online where some piece of helpful info I posted in the course was not used.

Set Up an "Office" for Questions, Concerns, and Suggestions

Although students can send instructor questions by e-mail, as well as often finding a "Q&A" thread in each weekly discussion and sometimes a private message link preset in the course, setting up an instructor office where students can go throughout the course to post queries and concerns is extremely helpful. It not only shows the instructor is very interested in assisting his or students but also gives a more casual and intimate feel to the course—and students can post their items here where all students in the course can read them, and see your responses to each. This is a big plus in an online class; it will get much use and goes a long way in keeping confusion and frustration at bay for the students.

Make Certain Students See What You See in the Class

Instructors often forget the view they have of the distance learning course may not be the same view the students see. There are more tools at the instructor's reach for changing and manipulating the course, and often names and locations of features in the instructor's platform delivery system (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle, WebTycho, etc.) are different from those in the student version. Before a course begins make certain you have access to the student view—it can be confusing for a student and catch an instructor off guard when the student posts something that says, "Uh, excuse me, but I don't see what you are seeing." Bottom line: thoroughness is crucial in teaching an online course.

Share Your Bio With Students

This may seem like the most unimportant of tools to have available in a class, but it is important for several reasons. The online instructor's bio lets the student into part of the instructor's life, making the instructor seem more "real," not simply a name on a course; it lets the student know of the instructor's qualifications to teach a course, an important factor so students feel they have the "real deal" in course subject expertise and teaching foundation; and it helps in establishing the all-important student-online instructor bonding process simply because of the sharing component. A suggestion: ask the students to write you with any questions they have regarding your bio—it immediately gets students more involved with you and the course.

Remember: Arriving at a party where the host is still setting it up, with no ice available, lacking a good supply of forks, and finding dirty dishes scattered about, can quickly send the partygoer home—how uncool for that to happen!

Ask Errol!

Errol Craig Sull

Between each column I receive a few dozen requests for assistance, and usually these are each different. This demonstrates the continued complexities involved in teaching online, and as distance education becomes more sophisticated and more software packages are created to assist in the teaching, additional questions will pop up. Below are some of the latest, each touching on important concerns of many online educators. This column's selection …

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I want to stay current in my class, and I know that means using some of the many software packages available that deliver audio/visual materials. My school provides some of this, and I've seen other examples, from other schools online and, quite frankly, I'm jealous. But I don't know where to start, and once I do what guidelines I should follow. Can you help me?

Your question and dilemma are more common that you might think, as many folks teaching online—the number is in the hundreds of thousands—are faced with incorporating new software into their courses. These have the potential, of course, to highlight, explain, or clarify various portions of the course. Of the many new ones around there are five especially worth noting—four free: Jing (URL: http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html), which combines audio and visual to allow for either snapshots of or a 5-minute (max) video of anything online … VoiceThread (URL: http://voicethread.com/), an interactive audio/video program, allows the user to post a visual and others to offer voice comments on the posting … Go Animate (URL: http://goanimate.com/) is a video-creating program that offers thousands of icons, faces, etc. to assist in the development … Prezi (URL: http://prezi.com/) is a presentation and storytelling tool … PowerPoint (URL: http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/powerpoint/; part of Microsoft Office, thus not for free) is the venerable

granddaddy of visual presentation tools, and offers an easy way to create a slideshow.

Having these is one thing, but properly incorporating them into the online classroom quite another. The best suggestion: each offers tutorials, some videos and some as slideshows, so be sure to use these before launching any of the programs in your course. Also, some software is better suited for one type or approach or subject matter of a course, while others perform more effectively for different course situations—the only way to find the best one is to experiment with each. Two other points: (1) Be sure you post instructions for students on how to access and implement the software; (2) Check over your presentation before it goes public—you want to be sure it is error-free, its visual layout is clean and easy to read, the audio is crisp and loud, and it runs smoothly. One or more of these programs will definitely enhance your online teaching efforts!

First, thanks for some great suggestions in your previous columns! These have helped me become a better online educator, and I'm hoping you can again point me in the right direction. In one of your previous columns you suggested the creation of an online office for students to post questions and concerns, and I've done this, to much success. But recently I had a student post a complaint—the problem is not only was his complaint unfounded but it was also due to the student's error. Since all students in the class can see any posting in my "office" how do I best respond to this student?

Thanks for the nice words, and I'll do my best to help out! The problem you detail can certainly have negative ramifications for the online instructor if handled incorrectly, both in immediate class reaction and in possible poor evaluations of the instructor by the students. Most important in responding: never get on the defensive, as this immediately shows you as weak and less than professional. Always begin by thanking the student for his or her comment. From here there are two approaches you should take; combined these usually result in a most positive outcome. First, discuss the problem in general—whether grading, late points deducted, et cetera—by offering clarification on a policy or information of which all students were previously made aware. It's important that no blame be placed on the student in this public forum.

The second step is to end the posting by asking the student to please check his or her e-mail for more specifics. And because you do not want to appear evasive—i.e., that you are hiding something negative from the class—add a bit of humor, such as, "Okay—there is so much more specific to your concern I don't want to take up any more of the class's time, so please see these details in an e-mail from me." Then, in the e-mail, go on to explain the student's error, ending on an upbeat note, including asking if the student would like to talk further via a call. The combination of you taking the time, your thoroughness, and your positive tone almost always result in a student who is more than satisfied with your efforts.

I'm beginning to think there must be something wrong in what I'm doing as a distance learning teacher! No matter how many reminders I give students, and I do this in written and audio form, again and again students leave out requirements of an assignment or don't follow all the directions of an assignment. Any suggestions would be gratefully appreciated. Thank you.

The #1 reason why students lose points on a college assignment—no matter the course subject and no matter if an online or face-to-face course—is what you mention: leaving out requirements of an assignment or not following all the directions of an assignment. In a meeting of online educators a few years ago this problem was discussed, and the consensus reason students do this is because they simply want to get

the assignment done, paying more attention to content of the assignment than to the requirements/directions. When students receive grades on these assignments they can become quite angry at frustrated (especially if the content of their assignments was, overall, good)—even though it was their own fault.

While never guaranteeing 100%, there are a few approaches than can be added that will reduce the incidents of this problem: (1) In addition to a general reminder posted at the beginning of the week also post class reminders—with follow-up class e-mails—throughout the week; (2) Create an assignment checklist, listing the requirements of/directions for an assignment; post this in class, and remind students to use it. (I created one several years ago—if you would like a copy just drop me an e-mail.) (3) For students who continually err write then individual reminders; (4) Post a Jing explanation (see first question in this column) of the requirements and directions and/or use an audio, such as Voice Thread or an .mp3, to go over the specifics of each assignment. Combined, these will result in more students following the directions and including all requirements.

My question may seem like a simple one, but it does worry me: how do I take time off from online teaching without fear of losing my teaching spots? I'll be getting married next summer, and my fiancé and I are planning a camping honeymoon that would take place over a month. I'd like to know I can take off time from my online teaching gig, and be welcomed back with an immediate teaching assignment. Any thoughts?

I assume you are in good standing with your supervisor, and thus are valued as a member of your department's teaching team. If this is true, contact your supervisor—by phone is best, for a more personal conversation—early; it immediately creates a problem if you spring this on your supervisor only a month before you plan on taking off. This early request shows your professionalism and your concern for making certain all in the department runs smoothly regarding your classes. Your reason for wanting time off is certainly an acceptable one, but it's still important to stress how important your classes are to you, how much you enjoy teaching for X school, and that you certainly would like to immediately be placed back in the teaching queue upon your return.

Additional suggestions: be especially careful that all goes as well with your current courses and all that follow before you leave: you want the best possible evaluations, no complaints from students, and courses that simply looks great if your supervisor should decide to stop in and look around … add at least one additional software tool to show your increased interest in teaching … look for more professional presence—whether through taking a course, publishing an article, attending a conference, or giving a lecture—to indicate an active involvement in your area of expertise. All of these approaches combined translate into giving your supervisor a picture of an online educator who is valuable to the students, and thus to the school.

Remember: *A LEGO brick by itself is fairly innocuous, but combined with many other LEGO bricks—wow, what an effective structure can be created!*

no discussion of media, little of technologies, and almost nothing readers for who are not in higher education. Obviously, writing about practical issues and current events was not a goal of this edition.

The first and second editions of the HRECT are landmark publications that should be on every serious educational technology scholar's bookshelf. The third and fourth editions should be reviewed if not owned. One can hope that when the fifth edition is planned, editors will return to the framework used by the editors of the first two handbooks and provide theory and research that guides practice, rather than theory only.

And finally, but then I didn't like *Rocky IV*, either.

References

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Let's Get Practical

Michael Simonson

The massive (1,000 pages) fourth edition of the *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* (HRECT4) has been published, with online access free to members of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology. Its 74 chapters build on the excellent scholarship of the previous three editions of the handbook, and provide summaries of many interesting, even important, topics. The analogous reference in the field of distance education is Moore's *Handbook of Distance Education* (3rd ed.), released last year.

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A summary of Moore's work was published in the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* (volume 14, number 1) with the title "Let's Get Practical!" That serves equally well as the title for the following review of HRECT4.

Certainly, the editors of HRECT4 are to be commended. The chapter authors have provided valuable information about the topic of their chapters, and have done so as scholars. Academic scholarship, such as writing handbook chapters, is unique in the landscape of intellectual property. Scholars write for impact, not for money.

However, those interested in distance education may be left a little disappointed as HRECT4 almost completely ignores distance education. There are minor references to our field, but generally the literature of distance education is missing, and in at least one instance what is published in HRECT4 is misleading (the reference to the U.S. Department of Education's meta-analysis about online learning). Additionally, there is little that readers will find that is practical in the 74 chapters of the HRECT—no best practices, no best science, no design guidelines: few recommendations at all.

It is likely that those with long careers in educational technology will not recognize much of the contents in HRECT4. There is

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