An Official Publication of the United States Distance Learning Association



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- ▲ Information Technologies and Women
- ▲ Global Perspectives in Distance and Open Learning and Open Educational Resources
- ▲ Interviewing as a Learning Tool
- ▲ An Interview With Evgeny Patarakin
- ▲ An Interview With Muriel Visser
- ▲ An Interview With Jeroen J. G. van Merriënboer
- ▲ An Interview With Peter Mortimer
- ▲ An Interview With Wolfram Laaser
- ▲ Book Review: The Challenges for Marketing Distance Education in Online Environment: An Integrated Approach, by Ugur Demiray and N. Serdar Sever
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#### EDITOR

Michael Simonson simsmich@nsu.nova.edu

MANAGING EDITOR Charles Schlosser cschloss@nsu.nova.edu

#### Assistant Editor

Anymir Orellana orellana@nsu.nova.edu

#### EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Khitam Azaiza azaiza@nova.edu

COPY EDITOR Margaret Crawford mec@netins.net

#### **Association Editor**

John G. Flores jflores@usdla.org

#### PUBLISHER

Information Age Publishing 1600 North Community House Road, Ste. 250 Charlotte, NC 28277 (704) 752-9125 (704) 752-9113 Fax www.infoagepub.com

#### Advertising

United States Distance Learning Association 8 Winter Street, Suite 508 Boston MA 02108 800-275-5162 x11

#### **EDITORIAL OFFICES**

Fischler School of Education and Human Services Nova Southeastern University 1750 NE 167<sup>th</sup> St. North Miami Beach, FL 33162 954-262-8563 FAX 954-262-3905 simsmich@nova.edu

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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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# Information Technologies and Women

# **Emine Demiray**

#### INTRODUCTION

emininity and masculinity are the main categories in human relations. Everywhere and in every culture, people categorize the people they encounter as a man or woman. The perceived normal features of masculinity and femininity and how these features affect individuals, their relationships, and society in general change according to time and place (Salzman, Matathia, & O'Reilly, 2006).



Emine Demiray, Open Education Faculty, Anadolu University Yunusemre Campus, 26470 Eskisehir, Turkey. Telephone: +90 222 335 0581, ext. 2336. E-mail: edemiray@anadolu.edu.tr Web: http://home.anadolu.edu.tr/~edemiray

The role of man and woman in social life, the field in which they exist, and especially manipulation of the labor force according to social gender is closely related with how this relationship is socially formed. It is a general belief that men and women have different relations with technology. This relationship, which is accepted as universal, begins with the birth of a child and becomes a part of his or her social identity. This relationship that begins in family with socialization continues through educational institutions and is reinforced by mass media. For instance, a girl plays with a doll and a boy plays with a toy car. A girl has a home economics course at school, while a boy has a repair and maintenance course. In ads, while the girl plays with a Barbie, the boy plays in front of a computer. These countless examples reveal that there is a different relationship between social gender and technology. While women are considered to be related to the domestic use of technology, men are believed to be the producer of it (Timisi, 1996).

It is well known that women's opportunities of using recent information technologies are limited compared to men. Besides, if women use these technologies, they use them in order to do jobs that are considered suitable for their feminine roles, such as entering data and typing text. In short, computers are presented as advanced typewriters for women; in this way, the uses of a new technology are

restrained. Technologies are not unbiased instruments as they are claimed to be. On the contrary, technologies are the instruments that regenerate the dominant social structure and relations. The woman who is considered not predisposed nor close to technology, female culture, and the feminine information produced in this culture are trivialized by dominant sexist ideology. For example, while the subject of technology history is the contributions of men to the improvement of science and technique, women's relationship with the tools and devices in terms of domestic work process in daily life and the meaning and usage value they ascribe to these devices are neglected as well as their original designs and practice. Their genuine designs about cleaning, saving, hiding and protecting are ignored (Gencel Bek & Binark, 2000). However, the field of information technology is full of opportunities for self-realization and liberty for women. Information technologies also have the potential to be used in favor of women. Thus, detecting by whom and for which purposes these recent technologies, also called new media information and communication technologies or information technologies, are used is important in order to generalize the use of these technologies for women, to detect the usage problems, and to determine whether there is a gender-related difference in use.

#### SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL GENDER

Most human behaviors are learned behaviors. Learning certain things in a certain society happens in a formation called the socialization process. The process of learning humanistic behaviors is called socialization (Özkalp, 2000).

Socialization is the process of individuals learning the rules, norms, attitudes, and behaviors of society, and acting in line with this learning, and, therefore, gaining a personality and individuality in the society. Socialization begins with the birth of an individual and continues throughout life. Socialization is a learning process. In this process, there is a learner-teacher interaction. The teacher is society and the learner is the individual who goes through the socialization process (İçli, 2002).

Identity shows the individual's characteristics, which separate him or her from other individuals. The questions of who is the individual, what are the characteristics and roles of the individual, and what the individual can do are all related to identity. Identity is the expression of an individual's defining and positioning of himself or herself. In other words, it reflects how individuals define and position themselves in their own social world. It is a response related to who they are and where they stand. Sexual identity is an important part of one's self. A person's defining himself as a woman or a man is the inner personal connotation of femininity and masculinity revealed as personality and behavior. The cultural meanings of sexuality are considered social gender roles. After children are labeled as a girl and a boy, they start to learn and acquire the cultural meanings of sexuality. Social gender role is a group of expectations fulfilled by individuals (Dökmen, 2004).

The concept of social gender is based on the behavior patterns learned in a society and men's and women's social form of selfexpression. That is, social gender is a cultural concept. It establishes the distinction between man and woman in terms of roles, behaviors, and mental and emotional features. Social gender is the sum of the differences that are set socially between man and woman and that can change according to time and cultures. The roles and responsibilities of social gender include a tense learning process that takes place in socialization (Giddens, 2000).

A newborn baby has a biological sex. It does not have a social sex yet. While growing up, society puts a series of behavioral patterns and rules appropriate for his gender in front of the child. Certain socialization factors, especially family, media, peer groups, and school, embody these expectations and models and creates environments in which the child can own them. In addition, various learning mechanisms such as conditioning, training, taking someone as a model, and identification intervene in this process (Kaypakoğlu, 2004).

We learn most of our behaviors and values from social conditioning and examples. Initially, the examples and models acquired from family and the immediate area form future behaviors and attitudes of individuals. Mostly, the man acquires his shape from the first male model, the father. Similarly, the woman acquires hers from the mother, the first female model. Like it or not, the attitudes of our fathers and mothers have affected our identities and they formed both our sexual roles and our perception of the opposite sex. The conceptual and behavioral expectations of the society from man and woman are quite different. According to the generalized results of research, men display sexual roles complying mostly with success, power, autonomy, aggression, and self-realization, while women display sexual roles of supporting, relationship, help, respect, and sacrifice. It has been detected that men mostly display behaviors about practical and functional subjects (doing a job to finish work, autonomy, and self-protection). On the other hand, women display behaviors about the subjects of expression and relationship (sensitivity to others' needs, supporting, and dependency) (Navaro, 1997).

#### **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES**

New media have begun to develop by adoption of improvements in computer and information processing to communication technologies since the 1970s. Therefore, the new media have been called information and communication technologies (Törenli, 2005).

Use of the computer increased markedly in the last decade of the twentieth century. Information technology is a field that emerged as a result of improvements in the computer sector. It includes the technology of computer hardware and software that are used to save, transmit, and process the data. However, today, information technology (IT) is not a field that is limited to configuration of software and installation of systems. With a more contemporary look, information technology has a number of components such as computer hardware, software, networks, communication technologies, workforce trained in the field, procedures, the Internet, Intranets, and communication tools. Information technology is a sector that has existed for 50 years and has the utmost importance today (Bilişim Teknolojileri Alanın Mevcut Durumu ve Geleceği, 2009).

Information technology comprises all the technologies, including communication and computers, used in gathering, storing, processing, and transmitting information via computers and putting it into service for users. Information technology is used for all of the information services that are connected to communication and computer services. It helps us do all kind of work in every part of our life and saves us from drudgery. That is, it gives us the opportunity to spare the time for ourselves. Information technology is related to all other technologies and, as a result, by being used in many different forms, it offers seemingly unlimited impact and improvement. Information technologies enable us to obtain information, which is the raw material of information society, at any time and any place. In addition to this, it acts as an intermediary in producing new information. With the help of these technologies, society is being reshaped (Bilişim Teknolojileri, 2009).

The actions, which take place in virtual extent, such as corresponding via e-mail, chatting on MSN, searching information on websites, e-shopping, playing digital games online or offline, using ogo mobile messenger, and the iPod, and so on, have been taking hold of the time and the place traditional media occupies in our daily life and have become a natural part of our lives. Information technologies, which are also called the new media, are used and exist in all part of life such as communication between people, commerce, politics, health, career, and games (Binark, 2007).

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND WOMEN

New information technologies were neither developed by women not they have been used in favor of women. Women's uses of new information technologies are mostly at the level of passive use and consumption. When producing a new appliance, an ideal user is decided. The identity of this ideal user is important. The ideal users of the appliances that are considered to be highly prestigious to use are thought to be men. Using these appliances is believed to be in men's interest and skill area, especially in terms of new information technologies. Therefore, the existing inequalities between man and woman are reinforced in the use of new information appliances. A great deal of research related to the use of information technologies by men and women suggests that these technologies maintain the sexism and power relations between men and women in daily life. Women cannot become free from the dominant sexist regime because of the problems they encounter in obtaining the technology, because they are technology illiterate and because of the dominant reflection of patriarchal culture in information technologies (Binark & Gencel Bek, 2007).

Girls and boys are directed in a different way from the beginning of their lives. Family, school, and almost all of the social mechanisms in which girls take place, trivialize women's experience and produce and design practices of technology by repeating that women are not "close" and "predisposed" to technology and they are "away from it" in many ways. Generally speaking, women represent "predisposed to the nature" and "emotional," and men represent "mind" and "technical-scientific." This categorization is a result of regeneration of patriarchal social gender ideology in every part of society. With the development and spread of information technologies, the ethnic, class, regional, and gender inequalities in obtaining and using these technologies have created the rich and the poor (Göker, 2009).

The socialization formed by new technologies is not unbiased in terms of gender. Females get little support to internalize these new technologies. There are very few female models and experts related to these new technologies. Economic- and time-related limitations cause women to not connect with these technologies. The expenses of purchasing and operating these technologies become a greater burden for women's income compared to men's. Further women have many responsibilities at home and in family that limit their available time. Women rarely have a personal computer of their own. They share them with husbands or fathers. The internalization and use of information technologies are limited for women in terms of place and time (Birke & Henry, 1997; Dorer, 2006).

The aim of the study "Information Technologies and Women" is to detect the position of women in possessing information technologies, which have a patriarchal structure, how they reach these technologies, usage rates, frequency and aim, the personal gains of women as a result of using these technologies and the difference in these gains between men and women. In order to fulfill this aim, the subjects of socialization, social gender, information technologies, and women were dealt with. The relationship of women with information technologies and the differences in these relationships compared to men were examined and the findings were analyzed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the study "Information Technologies and Women," in which the relationship between women and information technologies are questioned, the subject group was composed of 1,100 people, 550 women and 550 men between the ages of 16 and 64 living in Eskisehir. The subjects completed a questionnaire of 25 questions by interview method and the following results have been acquired. The questionnaire was prepared based upon the questions in the survey "2008 Information Technologies Use of Residents" conducted by Turkey Statistics Institute. The sample was selected homogeneously among the people using computers and the Internet at home, at work, or in Internet cafés who are at least high or junior high school graduates and between the ages of 16 and 64. The data were analyzed by using cross and frequency charts. The data were evaluated under the main titles of: the profiles of the people who took the questionnaire (IT possession status, duration of IT use, frequency of use and access type), purpose of the Internet and computer use, the websites they enter, users' relationship with IT, and personal gains after IT use. Under these titles, the sexual differences were analyzed and some suggestions that can be in favor of women are opened to discussion in line with the results.

As indicated in Table 1, 40.9% of the people who were randomly picked as sampling and took the questionnaire are between the ages of 25-34, 20% of them are between 45-54, 17.3% of them are between 16-24 and 35-44, and 4.5% of them are between the ages of 55-64. The rate of the university or college graduates is 73.6%, and 26.4% of them are graduates of high school or equivalent. Nearly 61% (60.9%) of the people are married and the remaining 39.1% were single. The overwhelming

majority (84.5%) were employed, while the remaining 15.5% were unemployed.

Regarding ownership of information technologies, all of the women and men who took the questionnaire have cell phones. DVD-VCD players are owned in nearly equal numbers by women (81%) and men (80%). Nearly three quarters (74%) of the women and 69% of the men own a digital camera. Seventy percent of the women own desktop computer, compared to 80% of men. Similarly, 34% of women own a laptop computer, as compared to 47% of men. Differences in game console ownership were more dramatic: 0.7% of woment and 16% of men.

When the question of "who bought your personal computer?" was asked, 32.7% women responded "I bought it myself," compared to 61.8% of men; 30.9% of the women responded "My spouse or partner bought it," compared to 7.3% for men. The responses for the question "Where do you use your computer most?" were "at work" (54.5% for women and 50.9% for men), "at home" (45.5% for women and 49.1% for men), and "at the Internet café" (12.7% for men and 1.8% for women). The responses for the question "Where do you use the Internet most?" were "at home" (50.9% for women and 66% for men), "at work" (43.6% for women and 34% for men), and "at the Internet café" (13.2% for men and 3.6% for women).

The responses for the question "How long have you been using your computer?" were "for more than one year" (96.4% for women and 94.5% for men), "every day" (87.3% for women and 90.9% for men), and "once a week" (9.1% for both women and men). Just over half (50.9 %) of women stated that they learned their computer skills by trial error, while slightly more than two thirds (67.3%) of men responded similarly. Twenty percent of women responded that they learned computer skills in an official course, while as many men (10.9%) about half responded similarly. The rate of the people

Profiles	Criteria	Women	Men	Total
Age	16-24	70	120	190
		12.7%	21.8%	17.3%
	25-34	220	230	450
		40%	41.8%	40.9%
	35-44	110	80	190
		20%	14.5%	17.3%
	45-54	140	80	220
		25.5%	14.5%	20%
	55-64	10	40	50
		1.8%	7.3%	4.5%
	Total	550	550	1,100
		100%	100%	100%
Education Level	High school	80	210	290
		13.5%	38.2%	26.4%
	College-University	470	340	810
	and above	85.5%	61.8%	73.6%
	Total	550	550	1,100
		100%	100%	100%
Marital status	Married	370	300	670
		67.3%	54.5%	60.9%
	Single	180	250	430
		32.7%	45.5%	39.1%
	Total	550	550	1,100
		100%	100%	100%
Work status	Yes	460	470	930
		83.6%	85.5%	84.5%
	No	90	80	170
		16.4%	14.5%	15.5%
	Total	550	550	1,100
		100%	100%	100%

Table 1.Profiles of the Respondents

who learned their computer skills at an adult learning center was 14.5% for women and 9.1% for men. Lastly, the percentage of the women who have received help from a friend or a relative while learning her computer skills is 12.7%, and that of men is 10.9%.

As indicated in Table 2, among the people who took the questionnaire, women defined their purpose of using computer as communication (MSN, e-mail, chat) with the rate of 78.2%, as a part of their job with the rate of 72.2%, doing research with a rate of 71%, surfing on the Internet with the rate of 63.7%, and typing with the rate of 47.3%. Men defined their purpose of using computer as surfing on the net with a rate of 79.9%, communication (MSN, e-mail, chat) with a rate of 76.3%, as a part of their job with a rate of 61.7%, playing games with the rate of 54.4%, and doing research with 50.9%.

As indicated in Table 3, for the statements of "I don't share my computer" and "I cannot take my turn to use computer because of the others at home," which render the use status of the people who took the questionnaire, women and men said "yes" at the same rate. However, for the statement of "I don't have time to use computer at home," they said "yes" with a rate of 17.3% for women and 11.3% for men. As

Purpose	Women	Purpose	Men
Communication (MSN, e-mail, chat)	430 78.2%	Internet (surfing)	440 79.9%
As a part of your job	400 72.7%	Communication (MSN, e-mail, chat)	420 76.3%
Research	390 71%	Work	340 61.7%
Internet (surfing)	350 63.7%	Playing games	300 54.4%
Typing	260 47.3%	Research	280 50.9%
Playing games	200 36.4%	Listening to music	210 38.3%
Listening to music	150 31%	Watching movies	160 29.1%
Watching movies	140 23.7%	Typing	90 16.4%

#### Table 2.Purpose of Computer Use

*Note:* \*The sum of the columns is not equal to 100% as more than one item can be checked.

	Women		Ν	len
 Use Status	Yes	No	Yes	No
I do not share my computer	110	410	110	420
	21.2%	78.8%	20.8%	79.2%
I cannot take my turn to use the computer because of the others at home	40	480	40	490
	7.7%	92.3%	7.5%	92.5%
I don't have time to use computer at home	90	430	60	470
	17.3%	82.7%	11.3%	88.7%
The computer at home belongs to me	190	330	350	180
	36.5%	63.5%	66%	34%
I cannot use the computer at home comfortably as it doesn't belong to me	60	460	10	520
	11.5%	88.5%	1.9%	98.1%
Using computer is a waste of time	90	430	120	410
	17.3%	82.7%	22.6%	77.4%
I don't like to use computer at home	100	420	140	390
	19.2%	80.8%	26.4%	73.6%
The computer has an important pace at home	300	220	330	200
	57.7%	42.3%	62.3%	37.7%

#### Table 3. Use Status of Respondents

\*30 women and 20 men have computer at home.

\* The sum of the columns is not equal to 100% as more than one item can be checked.

for the possessing the computer at home, they said that the computer belongs to them with rate of 36.5% for women and 66% for men. They said "yes" for the statement of "I cannot use the computer at home comfortably as it doesn't belong to me" with a rate of 11.5% for women and 1.9% for men, and for "Using computer is a waste of time" with a rate of 17.3% for women and 22.6% for men, and for "I don't like to use computer at home" with a rate of 19.2% for women and 26.4% for

Reading online newspapers and magazines, downloading news400 72.8%Reading online newspapers and magazines, downloading news390 70.8%Receiving-sending e-mail390 70.9%Receiving-sending e-mail 67.2%370 67.2%Using the Internet as a source of information300 54.5%Using the Internet as a source of 167.2%220 10%Instant messaging (MSN, Chat)250 45.4%Instant messaging (MSN, Chat)210 38.1%
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Kesearching on health issues 250 Downloading and listening to music 180
$\frac{41.0}{0}$
video chat via the internet 150 video chat via the internet 170
21.5% $51%$
25.4% services 27.3%
Finding information about goods and 100 Online banking 130
services 18.2% 23.6%
Searching for information about 100 Researching on health issues 100
educational activities 18.2% 18.2%
Using travel and accommodation services 80 Downloading and updating computer and 80
14.6% video games 14.6%
Online banking 80 Playing games online with other players 60
14.6% 10.8%
Watching and downloading movie, short60Using travel and accommodation services60
movie and video files (except for web TV) 10.9% 10.8%
Looking for and applying to jobs40Sharing the text or video that you have50
7.2% created yourself with a website 9%
Other information searching and online 40 Searching for information about 50
services 7.2% educational activities 9%
Sharing the text or video that you have40Watching and downloading movie, short30
created yourself with a website 7.2% movie and video files (except for web TV) 5.4%
Downloading software20Looking for and applying to jobs30
3.6% 5.4%
Making online phone calls 20 Listening to web radio and watching web 30
3.6% IV 5.4%
Downloading and updating computer and $20$ Other information searching and online $30$
Video games 5.6% services 5.4%
TV 3.6% Downloading software 20
$J_{v}$ $J_{v}$ $J_{v}$ $J_{v}$ $J_{v}$ $J_{v}$
0%

#### Table 4. Purposes of Using the Internet

\*The sum of the columns is not equal to 100% as more than one item can be checked.

men, and finally for "The computer has an important place at home" with a rate of 57.7% for women and 62.3% for men.

As indicated in Table 4, the top four purposes of men and women for using the Internet are reading newspapers and magazines, sending-receiving e-mail, using the Internet as a source of information, and instant messaging. There is little difference between men and women in the top four purposes of using the Internet. While the fifth rank for women was to research

The Web Sites	Women	The Websites	Men	
Search engines	330 60%	Search engines	350 63.6%	
Educational sites	300 54. 5%	Mass media sites	330 60%	
Mass media sites	290 52.7%	Sports sites	290 52.7%	
Health sites	280 50.9%	E-mail sites	220 39.9%	
E-mail sites	210 38.2%	Sites containing technical information	210 38.2%	
Banking sites	180 32.8%	Game-entertainment sites	190 34.5%	
Sites about culture-art	170 30.9%	Educational sites	150 27.3%	
Game-entertainment sites	120 21.8%	Banking sites	150 27.3%	
Shopping sites	80 14.5%	Sites about culture-art	110 20%	
Children sites	70 12.7%	Shopping sites	100 18.2%	
Law sites	70 12.7%	Financial sites	60 10.9%	
Sites containing technical information	40 7.3%	Asking about dept	50 9.1%	
Sites about Turkey	40 7.3%	Health sites	50 9.1%	
Sports sites	30 5.5%	Sites about Turkey	30 5.5%	
Asking about dept	20 3.6%	Law sites	30 5.5%	
Sites about other countries	10 1.8%	Children sites	20 3.6%	
Financial sites	0 0%	Sites about other countries 10 1.8%		

Table 5. Web Sites Entered by Respondents

\*The sum of the columns is not equal to 100% as more than one item can be checked.

health issues, for men it was downloading and listening to music. Playing games online with other players is in the 11th rank for men with a rate of 10.8%, while it is not one of the purposes of using the Internet for women.

As indicated in Table 5, when the people who took the questionnaire were asked what websites they entered, the top five answers of the women were 60% search engines (60%), educational sites (54.5%), mass media (52.7%), health sites (50.9%),

and e-mail sites (38.2%). On the other hand, the top five answers of the men were search engines (63.6%), mass media (60%), sports sites (52.7%), e-mail sites (39.9%), and sites containing technical information (38.2%). When asked about the goods and services that they ordered or bought via the Internet, the top two answers of women were book-magazine and educational material, and reservations for holidays or trips; the third rank belongs to health-beauty and personal care prod-

Relationship With	Women		Men	
Information Technologies	Yes	No	Yes	No
Information technologies hold	420	130	470	80
an important place in my life	76.4%	23.6%	85.5%	14.5%
I do not like IT products but I need to use them	220	330	100	450
	40%	60%	18.2%	81.8%
I feel myself distant from information technologies	140	410	50	500
	25.5%	74.5%	9.1%	90.9%
I hesitate to use IT products	120	430	40	510
	21.8%	78.2%	7.3%	92.7%
My IT usage is limited because	$220 \\ 40\%$	330	130	420
I do not know enough		60%	23.6%	76.4%
I do not hesitate to examine IT products and I seize all of its opportunities	310 56.4%	240 43.6%	440 80%	110 20%
I follow new information technologies closely	210	340	340	210
	38.2%	61.8%	61.8%	38.2%
I always buy new IT products	190	360	270	280
	34.5%	65.5%	49.1%	50.9%

 Table 6.
 Relationship Between Respondents and Information Technologies

\*The sum of the columns is not equal to 100% as more than one item can be checked.

ucts, with a rate of 18.2%. On the other hand, the top three answers of men were electronic tools, with 34.6%, additional hardware for computers and video games, with a rate of 32.7%, and household goods with 27.4%. Nearly half (47.3%) of the women and somewhat fewer (45.5%) of the men noted that they do not use the Internet for online shopping. For the question "For what purpose do you use the Internet while communicating with the governmental offices and institutions?", the rate of "to get information from their websites" was 65.5% for women and 54.5% for men. The second was "to fill out and send a form," with a rate of 40% for women and 27.3% for men. The rate of the women's response "I do not use the Internet while communicating with government offices and institutions" is 29.1%, while the rate of men's is 40%.

As indicated in Table 6, when the relationship between the participants and IT was questioned, they said "yes" for the statement "information technologies hold an important part in my life" with a rate of 76.4% for women and 85.5% for men. For the statement "I do not like IT products but I need to use them," the response was "yes" with a rate 40% for women and 18.2% for men. In addition, the response was "yes" for the statement "I feel myself distant from information technologies," with a rate of 25.5% for women and 9.1% for men. The rate of the "yes" response for the statement "I hesitate to use IT products" was 21.8% for women and 7.3% for men. For the statement "My IT usage is limited because I do not know enough," the response was "yes" with a rate 40% for women and 23.6% for men. The rate of the "yes" response for the statement "I do not hesitate to examine IT products and I seize all of its opportunities" was 56.4% for women and 80% for men. Moreover, the response was "yes" for the statement "I follow new information technologies closely" with a rate of 38.2% for women and 61.8%

	Women		Men	
Personal Gains	Yes	No	Yes	No
It made my life easier	490	60	470	80
	89.1%	10.9%	85.5%	14.5%
It saved time	480	70	470	80
	87.3%	12.7%	85.5%	14.5%
It enabled me to have a job	110	440	110	440
and profession	20%	80%	20%	80%
It was a good free time activity	460	90	430	120
	83.6%	16.4%	78.2%	21.8%
It eased my access to information	490	60	470	80
	89.1%	10.9%	85.5%	14.5%
It enabled me to	360	190	270	280
communicate	65.5%	34.5%	49.1%	50.9%
It had contributions to my education	340	210	330	220
	61.8%	38.2%	60%	40%
It enhanced my vocational	420	130	350	200
knowledge	76.4%	23.6%	63.6%	36.4%
It made my housework	160	390	80	470
easier	29.1%	70.9%	14.5%	85.5%
It helped me find a partner and friends	70	480	110	440
	12.7%	87.3%	20%	80%
It improved my communication and language skills	230 41.8%	320 58.2%	300 54.5%	250 45.5%
It helped me know	280	270	330	220
different cultures.	50.9%	49.1%	60%	40%

 Table 7.
 Personal Gains of Respondents After Using Computer and Internet

\*The sum of the columns is not equal to 100% as more than one item can be checked.

for men. And finally, for the statement "I always buy new IT products," the response was "yes" with a rate 34.5% for women and 49.1% for men.

As indicated in Table 7, when the personal gains of the people were questioned, they said "yes" for the statement "It made my life easier," with a rate of 89.1% for women and 85.5% for men. For the statement "It saved time," the response was "yes" with a rate of 87.3% for women and 85.5%% for men. In addition, the response was "yes" for the statement "It enabled me to have a job and profession," with a rate of 20% for both women and men. The rate of the "yes" response for the statement "It

was a good free time activity" was 83.6% for women and 78.2% for men. For the statement "It eased my access to information," the response was "yes" with a rate 89.1% for women and 85.5% for men. The rate of the "yes" response for the statement "It enabled me to communicate" was 65.5% for women and 49.1% for men. Moreover. the response was "yes" for the statement "It had contributions to my education," with a rate of 61.8% for women and 60% for men. For the statement "It enhanced my vocational knowledge," the response was "yes" with a rate 76.4% for women and 63.6% for men. In addition, the response was "yes" for the statement "It made my

housework easier," with a rate of 29.1% for women and 14.5% for men. For the statement "It helped me find a partner and friends," the response was "yes" with a rate of 12.7% for women and 20% for men. Moreover, the response was "yes" for the statement "It improved my communication and language skills," with a rate of 41.8% for women and 54.5% for men. And finally, for the statement "It helped me know different cultures," the response was "yes" with a rate 50.9% for women and 60% for men.

# CONCLUSION

In the study "Information Technologies and Women," in which the relationship between women and information technologies was examined, the subject group was composed of 1,100 people, 550 women and 550 men between the ages of 16-64 living in Eskisehir, Turkey. They responded to a questionnaire of 25 questions by interview method.

All of the participants who took the questionnaire had cell phones. Many also possess DVD-VCD players, digital cameras, desktop computers and laptop computers. There is no significant difference between men's and women's possession of IT products.

Nearly one third (32.7%) of the women and 61.8% of the men who took the questionnaire and have a personal computer at home stated that they bought their computer by themselves. However 30.9% of the women and 7.3% of the men noted that their spouses or partners bought their computer. The people in the subject group told that their primary use of computer is at work, then secondly at home, but they also stated that they use the Internet mostly at home and secondly at work. The people have been active users of the Internet and computer for more than a year and the frequency of use is "every day" for 87.3% of the women and 90.9% of the men. A majority of the participants have specified that they learned how to use the Internet and computer by themselves through trial and error. No gender difference was observed about the purchase of the computer except that one out of three women noted that their spouses or partners bought the computer.

Women's computer use tended to be for communication (MSN, e-mail, chat), work purposes, research, surfing on the Net, and typing, while men used computers mostly for surfing on the Internet, communication (MSN, e-mail, chat), work purposes, playing computer games, and research. If compared to earlier studies, these results indicate that women are getting used to information technologies and women have started to use technology for work or educational purposes in accordance with their education level. The results also show that they are closing the gap in using IT, and it is a positive result in terms of women.

men have Women and equally responded "Yes" to the statements "I do not share my computer" and "I cannot take my turn to use the computer because of others" to explain participants' computer use status. Women stated that they do not have time to use a computer and that they cannot use a computer comfortably because it does not belong to them with a higher rate compared to men. These results show that although women take roles in work life, they still keep their traditional roles at home and they allocate less time for their privacy.

The rate of men who own a computer at home is twice as high as the rate of women who own a computer at home. Even if not everyone has a personal computer, men and women participants all noted that information technologies have a very important part in their lives and that they need to use information technologies by responding as "yes" with a rate above 50% to the statement "computer holds an important place at home." In addition, they responded "yes" with a lower rate to the statements "I do not like using computer at home" and "I feel sorry for the time I spent on the computer."

When the purposes of women and men to use the Internet are taken into consideration, it can be seen that among most responses are reading an online newspaper or magazine, sending-reading e-mail, finding information, and instant messaging. There is not a major difference between men and women in terms of these primary purposes. However, according to women, the other purpose of use can be researching educational and health issues while men listed downloading music and video chat on the Internet as their other uses. Playing multiplayer games online is not a purpose of use for women, but it has a rate of 10.8% for men among their purposes of Internet use. These data denote that women who attend institutional and work life use the Internet for nearly the same purposes as men and that women have improved themselves. The data also indicates that women have shown positive improvement in using information technologies.

The top five websites that women visit are search engines, educational sites, online media, sites about health issues, and e-mail sites. Men, on the other hand, visit mostly search engines, online media, sports, e-mail and sites on technical information, respectively. When asked about the goods and services that they ordered or bought via the Internet, the top three answers of women were book-magazine and educational material, reservations for holidays or trips; and health-beauty and personal care products. On the other hand, the top three answers of men were electronic tools, additional hardware for computers and video games and household goods. No significant difference was noted between men and women in terms of the websites they entered, except that women entered educational and health sites and men entered sports sites and websites that include technical information. These data indicate that Internet technology maintains and continues the sexism in daily life and the discrimination between men and women as it was revealed in a great deal of previous research on Internet use of men and women (Güzel, 2007). Further, men preferred to buy electronic gadgets, additional computer hardware and video games, while women preferred booksmagazines and educational materials, online reservations for holidays, healthbeauty and personal care products via the Internet.

Considering the relationship between information technologies and the people who took the questionnaire, women stated that information technologies hold an important part in their lives. However, they also state that they do not like IT products but they need to use them, that they feel themselves distant from IT, that they hesitate to use IT products, and their use is limited as they do not know enough. These data suggest that women's technology phobia continues. That women responded "yes" and men "no" to the statements "I do not hesitate to examine IT products and I seize all of its opportunities" and "I follow new information technologies closely and buy new IT products" also supports this idea.

When the personal gains of the people were questioned, no gender difference was noted on the statements "it made my life easier," "it saved time," "it enabled me to have a job and a profession," "It eased my access to information," and "It had contributions to my education." However, women said "yes" with a higher rate compared to men for the statements "It was a good free time activity," "It enabled me to communicate," "It enhanced my vocational knowledge," and "It made my housework easier." On the other hand, men responded "yes" at a higher rate for the statements "It enabled me to find a partner and friends," "It improved my communication and language skills," and "It helped me know different cultures." These results points out that women use

information technologies, but they cannot get rid of their traditional roles while using them.

When the general findings of the study were evaluated, no obvious difference between men and women was recognized in terms of their age, education level, occupation, and marital status. However, it was observed that the use of information technologies increases in accordance with higher education levels and work status of both men and women. In conclusion, it was detected that women value information technologies as an important part of their lives, use them, and gradually are catching up with men on IT use, but they still feel hesitation and fear when using information technologies.

In this case, what women should do is to discover the opportunities that technologies offer in a way that goes beyond the sexist limitations and to use technologies to their advantage. In order to achieve this goal, the following steps should be taken:

Women's self-esteem when using the new communication technologies such as computer and computer networks should be reinforced and promoted.

- Women's prejudice that "new information technologies are only for men" should be broken.
- Some educational programs that have the principle of "teaching by doing and using" should be established and practiced for the purpose of increasing women's computer literacy.
- The differences in using new information technologies between men and women should be highlighted.
- The preferences of women related to communication types and tools should be revealed (Binark & Gencel Bek, 2007).

Women's use of information technology is beneficial for strengthening themselves. Women can take greater advantage of the opportunities of information technologies as they achieve a higher level of education, participate in work and public life more, as they shed their traditional roles, and gain self-confidence. They can make up for their differences from men in social life by improving themselves.

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# Global Perspectives in Open and Distance Learning and Open Learning Resources

#### lleana P. Gutierrez

T is widely recognized today that technology is playing a critical role in preparation of students in higher education, with significant moves towards globalization (Mason, 1998). And although availability of the technical means for distance education course delivery such as computers for web-based courses, video, and interactive television varies from one region to another in the world, it is com-



lleana P. Gutierrez, 15952 S.W. 64 Terr., Miami, FL 33193. Telephone: (786) 546-2387. E-mail: igutierr@nova.edu monly accepted that distance education is becoming a reality of the educational environment not only in the US but also worldwide

The higher education community is experiencing a change in the way they conduct business. Primarily, the globalization of the world marketplace, the growth of technology, the rapid way in which new information is flooding our minds, and changing the way we work, has increasingly caused higher education to offer a more convenient method of learning to its students. Increasingly, distance education seems to be apropos for the new change occurring in higher education throughout the world. More and more distance education classes are being offered worldwide to meet the needs of students globally, whose needs require flexibility in learning.

Some factors that have contributed to the success and expansion of distance education are technological advances (particularly the Internet and the Web); that have made it possible to teach more subjects at a distance the provision of increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment; improving the costeffectiveness of educational resources; improving the quality of existing educational services; harmonizing inequalities between age groups; offering access to education globally; and the provision of fast and efficient education and training for different target groups.

Global open learning is sustained by the sharing of courseware, theories, media, equipment, materials, and human capital not solely across borders, but across continents, with different cultures, languages and modes of interaction. The influx and union of new communications systems, different media formats, methods of publications, along with the flexible learning of distance education have made open learning a global reality.

There is a distinction between distance education and open learning. The development of e-education has enabled distance education to overcome the lack of interactivity inherent in earlier forms of distance education based on correspondence and mass media. Open learning places greater emphasis on the requirements of diverse learners in diverse settings-to which providers of learning opportunities need to respond. Distance education is mutating "into a complex open education organism" (Evans, Murphy, & Haughey, 1995 p. 256), and "the 'instructional industrialism' of distance education ... is evolving into the global instructional corporatism of open education" (Evans et al.). Global organizations such as the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) have directed their attention to the cultural differences and a better understanding of the relationships between different identities by the promotion of cross-border collaboration in distance education. It is the goal of these global organizations to use effective pedagogies in distance education that acknowledge these differences. Establishment of genuine democratic forms of social and educational programs serves the interests of developing countries. Organizations now collaborate internationally in order to enrich academic environments and programs for students. According to UNESCO (2009b),

Governments worldwide are promoting more and more the use of open and distance learning as a complementary approach to traditional educational structures in order to meet the new and changing demands for education and training in the 21st century and to limit as much as possible long-term effects caused by lack of resources, demographic trends, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and military conflicts. (para. 4)

# UNESCO

UNESCO's programs for open and distance learning are varied and include:

ICT-supported learning by co-operating with international and regional development banks, private and public sector partners and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations such as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), and the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP). (UNESCO, 2009a, para. 14)

Services include teacher training, the use of new technologies, television and radio broadcasting, the expansion of geographical areas in distance learning, addressing the needs of those with disabilities, supporting minority groups, and narrowing the knowledge gap to include those students in special circumstances who are impeded to learn by distance, poverty, and the lack of organized and available education (UNESCO, 2009a).

## INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) "serves as the Global Umbrella Membership Organization in Online, Flexible and Blended Learning, including e-learning and dis-

tance education" (Re.ViCa European Virtual Campuses, ¶1, 2009). ICDE is an international organization that represents distance-learning membership throughout the world. It is associated with UNESCO, the Organization of American States, (OAS), the South East Asian Minis-Education Organization ters of (SEAMEO), and has affiliated itself with the European Commission (EC) in various projects, and is also a World Bank partner (Re.ViCa, European Virtual Campuses 2009). The goal of the ICDE is to promote education through distance education around the world, wherever it is needed. The knowledge and experience of its members assures the continuity of multicultural learning and flexible distance education by working with institutions, governments, and professionals worldwide to ensure quality in distance learning initiatives and equity in learning for all who have the need for virtual learning. The ICDE since 1938 has hosted international conferences and has disseminated information through its journal Open Praxis. "ICDE only accepts as institutional members educational institutions that are recognized and in good standing in their own country or region, and that conduct their educational operations in accordance with codes of ethics in distance learning" (Re.ViCa, European Virtual Campuses, 2009, para. 5).

## Commonwealth of Learning and the Millennium Development Goals

World leaders, meeting at the United Nations in 2000, set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that aimed to transform the condition of humankind in the twenty-first century. "These goals break down into 21 quantifiable targets that are measured by sixty indicators and were adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN millennium Summit in Sept 2000 and are as follows:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development (United Nations Development Program, 2005, para. 2)

Goal 8 addressed a global partnership for development, and this includes education inclusive of the use of technology. These goals now guide the policies of governments and the priorities of development agencies. As its president, John Daniel, has noted (in Khan, 2005), "The Commonwealth of Learning is the only international intergovernmental agency that focuses exclusively on using technology to expand the scope and scale of human learning. It operates on the premise that knowledge is the key to individual freedom and to cultural, social and economic development" (para. 2).

The COL helps governments develop policies that make education sustainable and that expand learning and works in partnership with other international organizations working on the MDGs. The COL's achievements focus on technology and places special emphasis on open and distance learning (ODL) because of its demonstrated effectiveness in providing sustainable education to those at a distance and those that are at a disadvantage to an education and learning.

### COL AND THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

"The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is an initiative of the education ministers of the 32 small countries that account for two thirds of Commonwealth member states. They are coordinating the development of a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)" (COL, 2009). This initiative spans the world in providing for education in the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize. Botswana, Cyprus, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, The Bahamas, The Gambia, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Vanuatu (COL, 2009).

### **OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

The key to teaching more for less is the sharing of knowledge and resources. The following are open source initiatives that are making global open learning a success, paving the way for paradigm changes in how we learn and teach. Educational institutions in developing countries generally do not have the finances for large scale development of course materials, but if all the institutions contribute and share in the development of materials, then great strides can be made. This is the philosophy of open educational resources.

Open educational resources (OER) are digitized materials that are offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning, and research. OER are extremely important for assisting developing nations to get online programs up and running easily and quickly—and within the small budget that they are often working with. (Online and Distance Learning, 2009, para. 1) The use of ICT in online learning, the use of learning systems such as Moodle, and the socially interactive tools available by Web 2.0, aids the mission of distance learning.

### COL INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN TEMPLATE

COL has developed a template for instructional design that helps content developers convert their subject matter expertise into learning materials. It helps authors incorporate ODL instructional design techniques into their learning texts. Created in just over a year and tested in many countries and institutions with feedback from many instructional designers, this template is truly a collaborative effort. The techniques of open and distance learning give farmers the know-how to improve their livelihoods and rural women the knowledge to raise a healthy family. School nets create communities of practice among teachers and give students access to the best materials. E-learning and the knowledge media are gradually enriching the curriculum for all universities.

## COL AND WIKI EDUCATOR

The COL launched Wiki Educator in 2006 to aid in the task of creating instructional materials that are free and could help in the development of online classes at no cost to the students and the organization that would utilize them. Wiki educator is a community of learning, supported by members in remote locations offering free content and free working space to educators and students worldwide. Wiki Educators' growth has been very rapid, with 8,400 members (Wiki educator, 2009). "All materials submitted to Wiki Educator are licensed under the Creative Commons CC-BY-SA 2.5 copyright license, which permits copying, editing and free reuse of the materials, with attribution" (Wiki Educator and Floss4edu, para. 3, 2009).

# Wiki Educator's Learning4Content

This program is focusing on the development of free content instructional materials for learning and training and is a growing initiative among educators and instructors of distance education. Participants are asked to provide a lesson of free content, which is building a library of open source learning materials (Wikipedia, 2009).

# OPEN COURSEWARE CONSORTIUM

The Open Courseware Consortium is a collaboration of more than 200 higher education institutions and associated organizations from around the world creating a broad and deep body of open educational content using a shared model. (Open Courseware Consortium, ¶ 1, 2009)

The Open Courseware Consortium is an organization that aims to share resources in learning among instructors and teachers to promote the availability of resources and the collaboration of learning. This consortium focuses on the growth of the individual instructor and the learner by expanding educational information through new and knowledgeinfused materials that can be shared by many institutions and allow people worldwide a greater opportunity for learning at a reduced cost to all.

# CREATIVE COMMONS

Creative Commons (CC) is a nonprofit organization. Everything created, including the software, is free. CC allows the creation and use of materials to be remixed and reused freely and legally. "Creative Commons provides free tools that let authors, scientists, artists, and educators easily mark their creative work with the freedoms they want it to carry" (Kaufman Foundation, 2009, para. 8). CC can be used to change copyright terms from "All Rights Reserved" to Some Rights Reserved."

# GLOBAL LEARNING OBJECTS BROKER EXCHANGE (GLOBE)

GLOBE is a project of the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching, (Merlot). Its focus is to advance and sustain educational initiatives by developing a model of technology services and tools that will enhance learning by providing instructors, institutions, and students quality online services, resources, and materials that enhance learning through technology. GLOBE was created to provide a shared network of these quality resources that could be shared by all participants who are a member of the GLOBE alliance. Partnership benefits can reduce the cost of searching for online materials and resources through the pooling of this knowledge into a shared distributed network and federated searches. The founding members of the GLOBE alliance were: the ARIADNE Foundation in Europe, Education Network Australia, EduSource Canada, MERLOT (United States), and National Institute of Multimedia Education (Japan). These organizations have agreed to work collaboratively to improve education in K-12, vocational and higher learning throughout the world (Merlot, 2009).

## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT LEARNING NETWORK

The Global Development Learning network (GDLN) was created by the World Bank. "It is a partnership of over 120 recognized global institutions (Affiliates) in over 80 countries that collaborates in the design of customized learning solutions for individuals and organizations working in development" (GDLN, 2009). Some affiliates are the Asian Institute of Management, the Ethiopian Civil Service College, the Islamic Development Bank, and Pontifícia Universidad Católica of Peru.

GDLN specializes in the design of instruction and materials that are specific to the needs of each group regardless of their worldwide location. The pooling of expertise and knowledge as well as the sharing of these ideas through affiliate meetings and brainstorming sessions allows for more than 1,000 learning sessions a year. This educational endeavor, linking resources, knowledge, and materials, is what the future of distance education looks like. In many parts of the world this is the only way to achieve an equitable and sustainable education.

The Open Educational Resources movement has become a vital new area for individual and institutional collaboration. The availability and sharing of knowledge and materials among different nations, as well as the open transfer of educational technology, learning theories, and instructional design utilizing ICTs and ODLs, is transcending learning across borders. The collaborating efforts international of organizations, open access platforms, availability of open source materials, and programs to eradicate poverty are developing very rapidly and are paving the way for global education. Barriers to global education, such as disparity in economic and political development, different languages of instruction, time differences, credit transferability, mutual recognition of diplomas and degrees, differences in quality and level of computer equipment, access, connectivity; and the increasing cost of education with the downturn in the economy, are all great challenges that world organizations are addressing to make schooling available for all.

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# Interviewing as a Learning Tool

# Lya Visser

#### INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly global field of learning and learning technologies there is a need to assist students in getting to know experts in the field of training, instruction, and learning. It is important not to restrict ourselves to those experts in our own direct or national environment, but to give learners the opportunity to get in touch with international views and international scholars. There are various ways of realizing these goals, such as attending conferences, reading articles and papers by (international) experts, and/ or inviting foreign colleagues to participate



Lya Visser, Director of Performance Improvement, Learning Development Institute (USA & France). E-mail: lvisser@learndev.org and Part-time Professor, Educational Technology and Leadership, The George Washington University (USA). Telephone: +33.4.90249275. E-mail: lvisser@gwu.edu

in online discussions. There is, however, also the possibility of initiating discussion with experienced educators in our field through interviews. This introductory article discusses how students engaged in interviewing experts about their experiences, concerns and challenges. The students involved in this interviewing project were all working towards a master's degree. The interviewees were professionals in the international field of learning and training.

#### THE VALUE OF AN INTERVIEW

An interview can be seen as a purposeful conversation in which one person (the interviewer) asks (prepared) questions and another one answers the questions (the respondent). The goal is to gain useful information on a particular topic or a particular area to be researched. Interviews can be effective tools to increase knowledge about a topic or to gain information on a research subject and to identify further questions that the learner may wish to pursue. Interviews are widely used because they are a powerful means not only for collecting information, but also for gaining insight. A good interview provides information about the personality and motivations of the interviewee.

As a learning exercise, interviewing increases interaction with professionals in relevant fields and encourages understanding. Students have to take initiative, collect information on the topic of the interview and on the background of the interviewee and thus try to get somewhat in the position of the other, formulate exact (unambiguous) questions, and take responsibility for administering and reporting on a "virtual happening." Interviews are also an excellent way to sharpen the understanding of the interviewer.

In the case of international interviewees the students also have to get some background information on the setting within which the interviewee lives and works, and this should promote greater international understanding.

#### THE PREPARATION

First of all, the student has to be introduced to the art of interviewing—that is, collecting data. This means that different interviewing techniques, such as informal or conversational interviews and structured interviews, will have to be discussed.

The online learners of The George Washington University prepared structured written interviews. This means that the interview was, although not the only contact the interviewer had with the interviewee, the core contact. The interview was seen as a formal, fact finding exercise and students were encouraged to use a respectful but conversational stvle approach that aimed at establishing rapport, and at the same time ensure that the nature and style of their questioning would reveal that the interviewer had basic knowledge of the topic of the interview and was familiar with the background of the interviewee. The goal was to gain useful information on a particular topic or a particular area and to analyze the information in a structured way. A write-up of the interview was sent to the interviewee to make sure that the latter agreed with the key points made.

# THE STEPS FOLLOWED

In preparation for these interviews the instructor had approached a number of

international colleagues in the field of training and distance education, asking them to serve as interviewee. The students were prepared through a short paper on "How to interview." The pool of interviewees was then made available to the class with a short description of the work or research these educational experts had done over the years. Students could choose an interviewee on a "first come first served" basis. They were encouraged to do a search on the background of the various potential interviewees and to choose someone whose interests matched their interests.

After this the students prepared for the interview by collecting additional information on the interviewee and by preparing interview questions, which the instructor reviewed and discussed with the student. Discussion points that came up were, among others, the need to correctly address the interviewee, the importance of avoiding yes/no answers, the way of structuring questions around topics, the usefulness of ending with an open-ended question, and a "thank you" letter once the interview had taken place.

The students made corrections and additions to their interview questions based on this feedback. After this the students conducted the written interviews and submitted them as a graded assignment. It is worth noting that the interview represented only 8% of the students' final grade. The students were nevertheless very much dedicated and produced—as will be seen from the selected interviews high quality work.

## THE BENEFITS

As has been already mentioned, the benefits of the interviews come, in summary, down to concentrating on a small part of the extensive field of educational technology. This was done in such way that there was no teaching-learning situation, but an active search for information on the chosen topic as part of the preparatory process for the interview. It was also a piece of work on which the student had to perform independently, except for some feedback on the questions, and had to take the lead. The focus was on various skills related to educational technology. The most important skills covered in this way were leadership/management skills, communication skills, design and critical thinking skills and, finally, the skill of approaching people of different cultures in a sensitive and sensible way.

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# An Interview With Evgeny Patarakin

# **Kimberly Kon**

he tools for training have shifted significantly in the past several years, changing the way training is conducted on a global scale. New training environments have adapted to a more technology-oriented society and trainers have found ways to use the technology to connect people and facilitate collaboration. To gain some insight into the changes that are taking place, I conducted an e-mail interview with Evgeny Patarakin, an associate professor at Nizhny Novgorod Pedagogical University. Patarakin has explored training in collaborative online environments, and he currently teaches courses on collaborative actions in the network, social



Kimberly Kon, Project Coordinator, Summer Sessions and Online Learning Initiative, The George Washington University, 1922 F Street NW, Suite 304, Washington, DC 20052. Telephone: (202) 994-9361. E-mail: kimie@gwu.edu

services in pedagogical practice, building of professional network communities, multiagent models in science education, and making websites. He also works on creating e-learning media in collaborative and interactive software including Moodle, MediaWiki, and elgg. In addition to his teaching appointment, Patarakin serves as head of the Learning Communication Laboratory (Uchcom), Program System Institute Russian Academy of Science. His experience with Uchcom has included coordinating the Summer School Network, teaching classes on Internet technology at elementary schools, and organizing the IMUTE, RAT-1, and RAT-2 international projects between arts, sciences, and education.

#### **TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS**

When asked about formative moments in his training experience, Patarakin described his role as coordinator for the educational network, Letopsi.ru, because Letopsi is a huge project with more than 30,000 participants. He also referred to his experience organizing a Russian branch of the Scratch project, which originally started as a collaboration between the Lifelong Kindergarten research group at the MIT Media Lab and the KIDS research group at the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. Scratch is a new programming language that makes it easy for kids to create interactive media and share their creations on the web. Patarakin has continued his involvement with Scratch and played an active role in a One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) deployment project in Russia using Scratch. In August 2008, Patarakin, along with a team of professors from his university, participated in a summer camp where they taught teachers and students to use the XO computers. In particular, Patarakin led training on how to use Scratch and LegoLogo. Examples of the students' animated cartoons can be seen on the web at http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=EYFBoK45fLc

#### **REFLECTIONS ON TRAINING**

As one who has been in the field of training for many years, Patarakin has seen and experienced the evolution of training and its growing integration of technology. One role of technology in training that is evident to him is the "wiki approach" to collaboration, which he utilizes to address a challenge he has often faced in training situations: how to change our individual behavior. Patarakin believes the wiki approach dramatically changes training as we all accept new rules of behavior inside the wikis. He explains that the participants respond to the difference between PowerPoint and wiki ideology. He says, "It is very unusual for them that we can share and collaborate with each other and our students."

Alongside collaboration, technology plays another role in training as a means of collecting and combining resources. Patarakin explained that another challenge in training is "how to collect a huge diversity of projects in one media." One way he has addressed this issue is through the use of MediaWiki, a free web-based software application that is used to run and manage wikis.

Increased access to and effective use of technology has influenced the evolution of training over the last decade. Patarakin commented that he has seen more collaborative activities and more connected with the Internet, as evidenced by the various training projects using wikis, online communities, and other methods of sharing works and ideas. "We can use more complex media-not only text and images, but video and programming blocks." On the evolution of training in the foreseeable future, Patarakin said, "I think that this trend of complexity and richness of our collaboration will be increased in the next few years."

#### Evgeny Patarakin Associate Professor Nizhny Novgorod Pedagogical University

# An Interview With Muriel Visser

# Shaunagh Bedford

exting, Facebook, Twitter, Blogging, Blackboard, Wikis, the Internet! How can we fathom education and especially distance education without this technology? In several parts of the world, though, educators are still changing the lives of many without some or all of these tools. I had the great opportunity to interview Muriel Visser, an international expert in distance education and curriculum design who often develops and implements change and hope with minimal or no technology.

Since 1990, Visser has been involved in the development and implementation of educational training material for many



Shaunagh Bedford, Student, Educational Technology & Leadership, The George Washington University, Washington, DC, and Training and Support Manager, TeamUnify LLC, 63026 Lower Meadow Dr., Bend, OR 97701. E-mail:shaunagh b@yahoo.com

world organizations, including the Ministry of Education of Mozambique, The United Nations Children's Fund, Finnish Development Organization, Danish International Development Agency, and other organizations throughout the world. Visser's current work is developing international guidelines and toolkits for HIV/AIDS workers in all sectors to help them offer better educational opportunities to international communities being devastated by this pandemic.

Visser and I communicated through email because of our great distance. I researched much of her written material and focused my questions on her work and research on implementing HIV/AIDS education into the curricula and also her work in distance education in remote communities.

Lack of technology and political interference have always been hurdles in Visser's work, but her perseverance has developed great strides in HIV/AIDS prevention and distance educations programs being implemented. While we are desperate to find a wireless signal, she has supnongovernmental ported а local orgainzation in Mozambique develop a program for over 10,000 children, whom, with the use of radio and study guides, have been able to achieve an upper primary education. This program is still in place and expanding. In some cases, students are even receiving texts on their cell phones (today cell phones are becoming widespread even in poor countries) to remind them of assignments and other snippets of information. Although Visser

says the decision makers in the African government (Ministry of Education, etc.) remained convinced that distance education is a measure of last resort, it's apparent that her work is offering hope and opportunities.

In Visser's research and articles (many are located at http://www.learndev.org/) you can see that the impact she was hoping for hasn't been achieved and there is frustration in the results. I asked her about the great obstacles that she battles in finding solutions in Africa for the education of HIV/AIDS and if distance education has achieved its potential.

**BEDFORD:** Where do you see distance education in Africa in 5 years?

**VISSER:** I am not sure distance education will be that much further in Africa in five years. We must also not forget that distance education often requires a substantial upfront investment (although afterwards the cost is often lower than conventional delivery) and that many countries don't have the resources to make these kinds of investments—e.g., in Mozambique 96% of the education budget goes to teacher salaries!

There is still too little political commitment to distance education and too strong a belief that children and adults can only learn if they are in a classroom, in front of a teacher, receiving information. Unfortunately in many (developing) countries, ministers of education are politically appointed and don't necessarily have a background in education. This underscores, I believe, the importance of doing much more research into distance education programs. It also implies much greater efforts in reflecting on what learning really means and how it can be achieved (just think about how much we learn-in a less structured manner-from surfing on the Internet).

Although Africa is struggling with the HIV/AIDS pandemic there has been some progress in other countries involving the

integration of HIV/AIDS education into the curriculum. This progress has helped Visser to develop the toolkit for other countries in developing similar education. I asked Visser to explain the process of the training program and the constraints she has encountered.

VISSER: There has been a lot of progress, particularly in countries with generalized HIV epidemics. Some good examples include Kenya, Namibia, and South Africa. The most successful cases have been where teachers are given substantial training (a week or longer) and where this training includes strategies for dealing with "difficult to teach content" such as sexuality and talking about condoms. This includes getting teachers to explore their own feelings about sex and their own sexual behavior. The advantage of this strategy is that they become more comfortable with talking about these issues, more knowledgeable, and they also become aware of the fact that HIV is something that can affect everyone (and not just something abstract), which increases their commitment to doing something about it. In some of these contexts. some very successful teacher resources have been developed, focusing on interactive pupil-centered materials. Also successful has been the use of drama and music in schools as a way of getting the messages across, as well as the use of peer educators. The peers were students themselves who then receive specific peer training. In Kenya, for example every school is required to have an AIDS club where students can talk to a trained peer about issues related to HIV/AIDS.

So, yes some progress has been made but there are still a lot of constraints, just to mention a few:

• Teacher training does not consistently include a component on HIV/AIDS and sexual reproductive health, so a lot of inservice training has to be done, which is expensive and more difficult to put in place.

- The focus of the teaching is too often still very academic—teaching the theory of the problem, but not the practical issues.
- Teachers still engage in selective teaching, meaning they teach what they feel comfortable with, and this is usually not the part that relates to issues of sexuality or of condoms. This is related to a lack of consistent support from their supervisors.

The conclusion is that it is not sufficient to train the teachers. School directors, school inspectors and senior education managers also need to be trained so they can encourage and support this important work that teachers are doing.

**BEDFORD:** How far back do you think your work in educating people on AIDS/ HIV was put by the Pope's comments on condoms?

**VISSER:** Unfortunately, people's behavior in general is not very rational (just look at how many people smoke even though they know it is bad for them). So the Pope's comments were—to put it mildly—extremely unhelpful. And in Africa and Latin America, where large numbers of people are Catholic, his words will have had a major impact.

**BEDFORD:** What is your current research?

**VISSER:** For the past 5 years I have been working as a consultant with many different development agencies, mostly on HIV prevention in the education sector. Your question is very pertinent because in spite of my best intentions, I have not recently been involved in much research. Most of the work that I do is in developing guidelines for people who work on HIV/ AIDS and education issues, doing case studies, and also lots of evaluation work. Here are the links to some of my recent work:

 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/ 001566/156673e.pdf  http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/ 001627/162723e.pdf

**BEDFORD:** If you could have one wish for the implementation and success of one of your programs in distance education that never reached fruition what would it be? What program has given you the most satisfaction? The most success?

VISSER: In the mid 1990s I was working with my father on a very innovative program, "Learning Without Frontiers," which aimed at creating learning opportunities using a variety of different media. Unfortunately, it got ensnared in a political fight and the funding never was made available to put the design into practice. You can read more about the LWF initiative at: http://www.unesco.org/education/ educprog/lwf/lwf\_docs.html

**BEDFORD:** If you were offered the opportunity to do any project no matter the size, scope or budget what would it be?

**VISSER:** I would most certainly focus on training of senior managers on the importance of addressing HIV/AIDS, gender, and sexual reproductive health through their policies and practices.

#### SUMMARY

The Internet is a great tool, but what I realized is that discussing the issues with the author of the research brings a much greater depth and understanding of the subject and the material. What truly surprised me was how Visser's answers were able to convey not only pride but also the frustration in trying to not only bring education but understanding to a community.

Visser has dedicated much of her work helping with the development and implementation of distance education programs to communities that would otherwise not have an opportunity of learning. Her work has offered change and hope and her current research will lay a framework for the future of educating about AIDS/HIV.


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A Global Leader in Visual Communication

# An Interview With Jeroen J. G. van Merriënboer

### Michael Crudden

#### INTRODUCTION

**F** ollowing a reading of *Ten Steps to Complex Learning*, I was presented with an opportunity to conduct an interview with one of the authors, Jeroen J. G. van Merriënboer. In the book, van Merriënboer describes how learning is constantly evolving to meet the needs of increasingly technical occupations. One fundamental issue cited in the book is the inability of education and learning to achieve transfer of learning (van Merriënboer & Kirschner, 2007). This interview



Michael Crudden, 22215 Bear Mountain View Circle, Chugiak, AK 99567. Telephone: (952) 807-4223. explores that thread, focusing on the frontline educator and the communication challenges of innovation. The exchange was conducted online via e-mail, in the form of a series of questions presented at one time. The response received addressed each question in a single message and shared some of his thoughts on the idea of developing a working language for teachers to engage in development.

We as a discipline are continuing to expand the capabilities and reach of educational technology. Some in the community are fortunate to be part of focused teams, with on-demand access to specialized resources like computer programmers to develop applications. Many of us are isolated in classrooms across the country, countless armies of one with limited resources but big ideas. Whether part of a group or individual, we are all talking along closely related threads, if not identical threads. Most of us in the field are neither computer programmers, nor graphic designers or network engineers. We are practitioners with a vision and a desire to see that vision come into being. So how exactly do we do that?

Once an idea is created we need to be able to transmit the idea. This transmission needs to capture both the technical detail and the essence of the concept, a difficult proposal. Engineers are able to communicate highly technical ideas to other engineers, through numbers. To understand those numbers, all one needs is an engineering degree. You or I (I am not an engineer) can look at a schematic and appreciate some basic elements, but for the most part lack the ability to interpret how each nuance is essential to the design.

Engineers do not communicate design plans in narrative form. They learned long ago that besides not being practical it is inadequate for their needs. A need was identified to communicate highly technical information in a standardized manner that could be understood by all in the field. They created a language, a method of communicating that effectively packaged all of the detailed information of their idea and allowed it to be read and understood by others.

In the development of educational technology, we are continuing to communicate ideas in narrative. We try to paint a picture using words, and we hope that those words will be received and interpreted in a way that creates an accurate reflection of our idea. The word "hope" used here represents chance, and the chances are that what we describe is not what is ultimately produced. We are reliant on surrogates, interpreters that take our descriptions and attempt to parse our expressed thoughts into a language that can be used by software engineers, or the like. Often what is lost in translation is the essence of the idea.

We can agree that the creation of applications for learning continues at a brisk pace, yet we as educators have not yet developed a language that we can use to communicate with each other and with those who have the specialized skills take the idea from its origin and produce it within the computer. Presented with a vast array of technological advances but currently without a means to speak directly to the technology, teachers have a language problem.

#### BACKGROUND

Since 1998, van Merriënboer has been a professor of educational technology at the

Open University of the Netherlands. Recently, he moved to Maastricht University, where he is heading the research program of the Department of Educational Development and Research. Van Merriënboer holds a master of science degree in experimental and cognitive psychology and a PhD in instructional technology. The areas of research he has conducted over the course of his career include instructional design for complex learning, intelligent performance support for instructional design, interactive computer-based learning environments for complex skills, cognition and instruction, and technical training. In 2000, van Merriënboer was named World Leader in Educational Technology by Training Magazine.

**Q:** In your book Ten Steps to Complex Learning, you talk about the development of a language to be used among instructional designers. If you were to create such a language, what would it look like?

A: I think we need more than one language, depending on the design level we are working on. Compare software engineers, who use "use cases" at a high level, flow charts and structure charts at lower levels, and programming languages at the implementation level, or architects, who start with sketches that are further developed into blueprints and detailed technical drawings. A very basic, high-level "visual language" I am using in my book Ten Steps to Complex Learning are the circles (learning tasks), L-shapes (supportive information), dotted boxes (task classes) etc. to visually describe training programs. I think such a visual design language could be further developed. Another lower-level language that has been developed by my former institute at the Open University is Educational Modeling Language (EML), which has been further developed to the IMS Learning Design Language. Of course, the main challenge is not to design languages but to motivate instructional designers to use such languages on a wide scale (i.e.,

make them into standardized tools for communication).

**Q**: With regard to the previous question, would the use of this language be limited to instructional designers or be used by all educators?

A: In my view, the main users are instructional designers. But depending on the level of the language, it can also be used to communicate with other stakeholders. For example, a high-level visual language used to communicate the main components of my 4C/ID model might be useful to discuss training programs with training managers and teachers; a lowerlevel language such as IMS Learning Design might be useful to discuss e-learning applications with programmers.

**Q**: In the world of aviation training, the first day of training for a new student pilot is aboard the aircraft in flight. What are your thoughts about this approach, from a cognitive load standpoint? How would you approach this learning issue?

A: Cognitive load theory (as well as 4C/ ID) states that you should decrease cognitive load in the beginning of the learning process, without losing the nature of the "whole task." For training pilots, you should thus first confront the learners with the simplest type of flight professional pilots encounter (probably a routine flight from A to B with good weather conditions, etc.), and, in addition, you should provide a learning task with maximum support/ guidance (probably a worked example, meaning that the learners are required to observe all actions performed by an experienced pilot during this simplest kind of flight). Furthermore, cognitive load theory offers prescriptions to focus the learner's attention on important pilot actions, to prevent split attention, etc.

**Q**: As we move forward in the development of instructional content and learning systems, we adopt increasing levels of standardization. While standardization brings many benefits, those benefits are not without risk. Can we have an environ-

ment with standardization that also fosters innovation?

A: Yes, I see no fundamental conflicts between innovation and standardization as long as standardization does not limit creativity (e.g., Does the Java programming language limit innovation, or does it favor it?) The design languages discussed above are a form of standardization, but as Java, they should have enough "expressive power" to allow for creativity and innovation. The problem is, however, that many recent standardization attempts in the field of education do not provide the necessary expressive power because they apply an inflexible template, building-blocks, or metadata-approach.

**Q:** On the issue of standardization, what role, if any, should government play in this development? If the Department of Education (or equivalent) were to mandate a system to be used for instructional design, do you think that would promote or hinder development?

A: I see no role for government. We need not one system but different systems (e.g., depending on the design level we are working on), and the best systems should be developed in competition. In my opinion, this is something that should be done by the educational/instructional design field and its stakeholders, not by the government.

#### **COMMENTARY AND CONCLUSION**

For educators to be able to speak directly to their technology and manipulate it in their image would require an extensive time investment. This is unlikely, but what is likely is the high level language van Merriënboer references in his response that can be used not by the technicians writing code, but by the practitioners putting ideas to work for them.

We have all had such ideas, notions that could change the world. When confronted with the prospect of engaging in the development process it feels an insurmountable task. That feeling was not so much the work involved, but the lack of being able to communicate the concept to colleagues in a meaningful way. Removing development barriers for stakeholders can only result in a deeper pool of resources for educators throughout the field.

Some would argue that another abstract set of rules to learn and use to create technology is just another barrier to the creative process. Van Merriënboer speaks to this with his response to standardization, and the key lies in developing a language that allows for creative expressions. Van Merriënboer's years of research and work in the area show that there are needs for communication tools. Educators are segmented into many fields, such as public education, professional training, and others. Our separate fields tend to be isolated, but through a shared language we can all share the same conversation.

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#### JEROEN J. G. VAN MERRIENBOER MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

# An Interview With Peter Mortimer

Tracy Lau

s part of a project to investigate cultural significance in the field of distance learning through communication with international experts, I interviewed Peter Mortimer, a British national living in France working as a project manager for the French Governmental Institute for Distance Education (CNED). CNED (http://www.cned.fr/) was founded in 1939. It is the prestigious, leading supplier of distance learning courses in France, Europe, and the greater French-speaking world. With 300,000 student enrollments in 500 courses composed of 3,000 modules, the Institute is a counterpart to the Open



Tracy Lau, Student, The George Washington University, 2121 I Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20052. Telephone: (202) 994-1000. E-mail: tlau@gwmail.gwu.edu

University (UK) (http://www.open.ac.uk) in the English-speaking world.

Mortimer is a professional training expert graduating from the University of London with a master's degree in distance education. He is also a specialist in creative media use. My main interests for this interview focused on his professional development in Europe, his views on distance learning design, and his experience in a research project adapting the use of distance education in prisons as part of a large European Union supported project.

Without much knowledge of what is going on in that part of the world, I first did some research on what is going on in Europe, and especially in France, in the field of distance education, so as to get the interview questions right. With the differences in schedules and time zones being a challenge, Mortimer answered the following questions through a self-recorded session:

- 1. In distance learning, does the choice of technologies (e.g., learning management system) make any difference? If so, how?
- 2. You have extensive experience in creative media use. Does that impact the way you design a distance learning course? If so, how?
- 3. You talked about learner-centered approach on your personal website, http://peter.mortimer.free.fr/ Why is it so important to you?

- 4. How did you get involved in the networked teaching and learning in prison project?
- 5. What approach does that take? Any face-to-face components?
- 6. What are the critical success factors for the project?
- 7. What are your key takeaways?
- 8. Looking into the future, what roles do you see distance education can play to make learning more accessible/afford-able?
- 9. How would you design an ideal distance learning course?
- 10. What is your best-kept secret about distance education?

Mortimer has a very practical perspective on the use of technologies in distance education. Understanding the wide range of existing technologies from a simple web page to some elaborate virtual world like Second Life, Mortimer argued that one had to test and assess technologies upstream before bundling them with any new programs. The essence is to keep technology simple and transparent to the target audience. At the same time, Mortimer recommended that professionals in the field of distance education should learn about as many technologies as possible. They could then match up the right technology to fit various learning profiles.

To Mortimer, every learner is unique. With his learner-centered approach, he aimed to draw information out from the learners to help them identifying who they were and to eventually assist them to develop to their fullest capacity. Mortimer believes that the only way to retain longterm concrete learning results was to provide learning materials relevant to learners' life and aspiration. The knowledge stayed with them when they cared about the content.

Mortimer compared a well-designed distance education course to a good book with pleasing layout and illustrations. A positive first impression opened the door to get people further into the medium. Without getting overly aesthetic, Mortimer supported that courses needed to be visually appealing to their audience. At the same time, with his extensive creative media experience, Mortimer recognized that designs should be kept simple and self-evident. The creator should step back regularly from the project to see the bigger picture.

In a collaboration research project examining the situation of learners in prisons in France and in the bigger European context, Mortimer attempted to identify the learner profiles, their aspiration and motivation to education and training, particularly to higher education. Mortimer argued that to prepare offenders returning to the twentyfirst century, they "need to master its channels of communication-the Internet, intranets, and mobile phones-and that enabling networked learning in prison, notably in the field of higher education, is the means of achieving this" (Mortimer, n.d., p. 1). With the constraints of prison environment, Mortimer conceded that his recommended distance networked teaching and learning approach was difficult to implement, to say the least. Prison learners were nowhere near the top of any government policy agenda, so a huge amount of work would be needed just from that perspective.

During the project, Mortimer worked with prison administration and authorities; he learned that ideals and ambitions had to be carefully tailored for various circumstances in reality. One had to learn to negotiate, be humble and down-to-earth and be satisfied if an inch was gained. The research also informed Mortimer of the diversity of prison culture across the six European countries. There was no use to impose one's idea on others. Adaptation was the key to take advantage of best practices and good solutions.

Even though no concrete applications were drawn from the project results, Mortimer recognized that a better-implemented communication plan from the beginning would have helped to generate a wider impact in the six collaborative countries spearheaded by Spain.

Looking at the future of distance education, Mortimer pointed to the social networking phenomenon on the Web. He saw its potential for people to understand what they needed to learn and/or wanted to learn by sharing experience, exchanging ideas and engaging in dynamic discussions. He saw all kinds of learning happening when people came together in these vast communities with tools available on the Internet.

Mortimer concluded that for any distance education program to be successful, motivation has to be ingested into the design. One should slip into the psyche of the target audience and be empathetic to their needs. The program should put learners in a position to be creative with tutors ready to help on the side. Educators and administrators involved should bear a mission to assist learners to gain more knowledge and to acquire new skills to better themselves.

Although Mortimer was speaking from another continent, the knowledge and experience he shared certainly have universal application. It is also quite obvious from the interview that Mortimer's passion for his profession plays a major part in his success in the field.

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#### Peter Mortimer Institute for Distance Education, France



# An Interview With Wolfram Laaser

## **David Wickes**

his interview provided an opportunity to obtain the perspectives of an international expert in distance learning and technology, Wolfram Laaser. Distance education in areas outside of the United States, particularly in Africa, often differs in scope and availability of technology and other resources. Laaser, a German scholar, has considerable experience in developing distance education programs for Africa and the Middle East and recently retired from the Center for Distance Study Development at FernUniversität in Hagen, the only state-maintained distance learning university in Germany. The educational delivery system at this university



David Wickes, Executive Vice President and Provost, University of Western States, 2900 NE 132nd Ave., Portland, OR 97230. Telephone: (503) 251-2810. E-mail: dwickes@uws.edu

includes written materials, interactive CD-ROM and DVD media, and online learning modules. To prepare for this interview, I researched Laaser's background and experience by reviewing his portfolio on LinkedIn, as well as other biographic material found through a Google search, and by reading several of his publications. The interview itself was conducted by e-mail. After a preliminary communication to introduce myself to Laaser, I then submitted questions.

It was obvious from the background information I had on Laaser that his depth and breadth of experience in distance education and in training with technology was very great and the scope of questions I could pose could be very broad. I decided to focus upon those areas related to his experience in Africa and on his current interests. For each question, I have provided a little background on the issue or topic to better frame the question for Laaser. Rather than asking for a purely academic response, I expressed my interest in obtaining his immediate reaction or personal opinion based on his background and unique experiences.

#### LAASER'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE AFRICAN VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

As a practice exercise, I recently planned a simulated training activity for rural teachers in Botswana. I subsequently read Laaser's article on "Virtual Universities for African and Arab Countries" (eLearning Africa, 2008; Laaser, 2006b) and was pleased to note that many of the difficulties he discussed relating to Africa had been included in the literature review I did for my Botswana training simulation. He discussed in detail the African Virtual University (AVU), and how it had evolved from a system combining e-mail, fax, telephone, and one-way satellite links to its current state of high-speed Internet access, interactive video, and a very large library of instructional materials.

I posed the following question to Laaser: "In the three years since you published this article on virtual universities, have you been surprised by the progress made in the AVU and with the extent of interaction with universities around the world? Do you feel that there is an appropriate level of learning material produced in the participating African universities compared to the course materials produced elsewhere? Are quality controls adequate?"

Laaser's response: "Thank you for your very well prepared questions. Unfortunately I had no chance to go back to Africa last year. But I gave a short interview in preparation of the eLearning Africa conference. My impression is that the African Virtual University still is far from offering own developed degree programs and that it is still dependent [on] a considerable amount of donor money. Like the commonwealth project a lot of propaganda is made for many years until a minimum output is achieved."

#### LINEAR VERUS NONLINEAR TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many of the training programs Laaser has developed have been produced on CD-ROM or DVD (Laaser, 1998, 2004, 2006a; Laaser & Gerke, 2001). One of the debates in this country is over the extent of control that should be given to students in taking a lesson. On one side of the argument is the feeling that students should progress through the training material in the precise, linear order that the trainer intended. On the other side of the argument is the idea that students should be given free rein over the material and be allowed to access the components in a nonlinear fashion if desired.

I asked Laaser for his position on this matter: "Do you have any strong opinions in the linear vs. non-linear access debate? Do the CD-ROM or DVD training materials you produce limit students to a relatively linear path or do you allow for skipping to various sections/chapters?"

Laaser's response: "I think that linearity or non-linearity is not the main point. Nevertheless, I always allow for students to select chapters of my production on CD-ROM or DVD. But still the idea is that they should study the whole program. I am still convinced that in distance education you have to produce elaborated teaching material to compensate for the lack of frequent face-to-face sessions. Also I always aimed at contributing other aspects to student learning that they don't find in the printed course units, practical application of theories, expert interviews, simulation and animations to better understand difficult concepts."

#### **REUSABLE LEARNING OBJECTS**

In his article, "Economics of Distance Education Reconsidered" (Laaser, 2008), Laaser wrote about the failure to meet the high expectations that had been set for the development of huge repositories of customized or reusable learning objects. Even in my field of medical education, I have noted that there is far less sharing of learning objects between universities than one would expect, leading to substantial duplication of effort and cost.

With the economic difficulties facing developing countries trying to establish distance learning, I asked Laaser about his experience with sharing of learning objects: "On the global level, overcoming difficulties in language and cultural markers may drive up costs for localization of learning objects, but what do you feel is the major factor in the delay in developing repositories of reusable learning objects within a given country? Have you encountered cultural differences in the willingness of educators in different parts of the world to share materials they have developed? Are universities able to produce learning materials as cost effectively as private companies?"

Laaser's response: "I am convinced that good description of learning objects can help to know about other people's way to teach a certain concept. I do not believe that teaching can exist in just an automatic combination of existing learning objects. One obstacle is that the development environment practically always will diverge from the potential user's context. Second, the amount to adjust is mostly quite laborious or even impossible. A good teacher is reinventing the content for himself or, in Marx terms, appropriating the knowledge for himself to be able to teach others. The saying that you should not reinvent the same thing is sort of an ideology to market data banks of learning objects. Finally, we know from economics that property rights—or, in our case, copyrights—are the driving forces in a market economy. So there is a systematic resistance to share teach-ware. This will be impossible to be overcome in our contemporary societies."

#### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN EVALUATION

There are many challenges in the evaluation of distance education systems and in the evaluation of the learning by distance learning students. There are many different approaches to evaluation, and it seems that some of these may be due to cultural factors. For instance, some cultures welcome review and constructive criticism, and others do not, so I now question whether the evaluation component of instructional design that I've learned in this country (United States) is universal.

With this in mind, I asked Laaser about cultural differences in distance learning: "Have you encountered significant cultural, philosophical or attitudinal differences between developers of distance learning materials in Africa and their counterparts in Germany relating to implementation of formative and summative evaluation? Is the evaluation component more accepted in one of these geographic regions? What differences in the approach to the evaluation stage of instructional design have you encountered that could be attributed to culture?"

Laaser's response: "I think that in authoritarian societies evaluation still is a very difficult issue. There is no tradition in questioning teachers by grading them through their students. Also, in Germany, usage of extensive evaluation still is something that professors are not yet very familiar with. However I think also that the US tradition of evaluating everyone by everyone is exaggerated as well. What does it help a student if he gets from his fellow students 3 instead of 5 stars? Is that really motivating? I think especially in adult education this way of majority voting is inadequate. That doesn't mean that feedback should be absent, but I think in adult education we can let people classify themselves just by looking at what their costudents are producing."

#### **COMMENTS ON THE INTERVIEW**

Laaser is a fascinating person to read about and to interview. His global experiences certainly added to my perspectives on the international differences in teaching with technology. His comments on training programs in Africa reinforced greatly what I had reviewed in my exercise on developing a distance education program for use in Botswana. He was candid on the limited progress of the African Virtual University project toward meeting expectations. Regarding linear versus nonlinear learning systems, he was less concerned about that issue than he was that the distance learner have complete materials to compensate for the absence of face-to-face learning. Finally, Laaser confirmed my suspicions that evaluation needs to be dealt with differently depending on the cultural context. But most interesting was his negative opinion of quantitative peer evaluations in U.S. education. This gave me food for thought.

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#### Wolfram Laaser FernUniversität

## **BOOK REVIEW**

# The Challenges for Marketing Distance Education in the Online Environment: An Integrated Approach Edited by Ugur Demiray and N. Serdar Sever

### Natalija Lepkova

The Challenges for Marketing Distance Education in the Online Environment: An Integrated Approach, Edited by Ugur Demiray and N.



Natalija Lepkova, Associate Professor, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU), Lithuania. Telephone: +370 687 58936, E-mail: Natalija.Lepkova@vgtu.lt Web: http://www.vgtu.lt and: http://www.sentvk.st.vgtu.lt/en /DARBUOTOJO CV/101328

Serdar Sever (Eskisehir, Turkey: Anadolu University, 2009, 732 pages). Available from http://www.midasebook.com

istance education is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and andragogy, technology, and instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically "on site." According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it "is a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both." In other words, distance education is the process of creating an educational experience of equal qualitative value for the learners to best suit their needs outside the classroom. Rather than attending courses in person, teachers and students may communicate at times of their own choosing by exchanging printed or electronic media, or through technology that allows them to communicate in real time and through other online ways.

The purpose of marketing is to understand trends in the field and customer needs in a global marketplace. In this case the customers are students, and they could be called "kings" of the market. This is a challenge with online education because the field is in a constant state of development. Marketing online education programs is becoming more of a necessity as global competition increases. To be on time and in the right place—this is the target of distance learning marketing. For this book, 37 authors wrote 22 chapters from different 17 universities in 6 countries.

This book is divided into six sections, each dealing with a different aspect of marketing for distance learning programs:

- 1. Strategic framework of marketing for open and distance learning programs;
- 2. Advertising, promotion, intellectual property issues, and collaborative distance education;
- 3. Marketing in global context;
- 4. Marketing of language teaching via distance and online programs;
- 5. Three specific case studies from Turkey; and
- 6. Lessons learned and literature review.

#### STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OF MARKETING FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS

In the first chapter, Demiray and Sever set the stage for the content of the book. They argue for the importance of addressing client (student) centered needs in open and distance learning (ODL) settings, and they present the integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach as one model that may be useful. They review global trends, examples from the Middle East, and they describe what has been done in Turkey. They look at the education as a service.

The second chapter, by Tripathi and Mukerji from Indira Ghandi National Open University (IGNOU), makes the case for India, where sustainability through human development and education is a high priority. They describe the IGNOU, make an analysis of academic programs, and apply the SWOC method for programs analysis. The authors suggest how to maintain quality services in the competitive ODL market.

In chapter 3, Demiray, Nagy, and Yilmaz discuss comparative strategies between Turkey and Australia in quality assessment and program development. The authors briefly describe the 4P (product, price, promotion, and place) approach and the Bologna Process.

In chapter 4, written by Shaik, the relevance of the relationship marketing paradigm to student recruitment and retention in distance learning programs is described. An alternative theoretical framework is proposed based on organizational approach to errors in decision making. A case study is presented.

In chapter 5, Unsal and Ruzgar propose treating online education as a form of ecommerce. They review the evolution of online education and then introduce a marketing model to effectively create online programs.

#### Advertising, Promotion, Intellectual Property Issues, and Collaborative Distance Education

Section II starts with chapter 6, in which the concept of advertising and the advertising campaign is presented by Sabuncuoglu and Gokalirer. In chapter 7, Wang analyses the marketing and promoting online adult education. Future trends are also discussed. Ozturk, in chapter 8, examines the characteristics of public relations applications on the websites of universities offering distance education opportunities.

Cuadrado-Garcia and Ruiz-Molina, in chapter 9, introduce e-learning as a pedagogical resource. They describe a collaborative e-learning project between two European universities in the scope of the agreements in the European Union. They explain how the researchers addressed student satisfaction with online activities in the Moodle virtual learning environment and its influence on student performance. In chapter 10, prepared by Richardson, Lane, and Hancock, intellectual property issues are described, which is very important when distance learning courses become globalised.

#### MARKETING IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

Section III starts with chapter 11. In it, Kurubacak describes the global marketing for local distance education programs, prepared. The functional model for global marketing characterized by multicultural decision-making task is presented in this Chapter.

Yamamoto, in chapter 12, overviews the marketing implications of e-learning in a globalised context. In chapter 13, Ojo examines the marketing of e-learning and challenges facing distance education in Africa. This chapter also examines the sociopolitical and economic factors limiting its effectiveness on the continent. The marketing of distance education in Afrika is described.

Guessoum, in chapter 14, focuses on progress in online education in the Arab World and underlines the challenges to online learning in the Arab world. In chapter 15, Linder-Vanberschot, Borden, and Pagels describe learner characteristics and propose a new model for global online learning, based on current international research and literature in this field.

In chapter 16, Rajesh, from Indira Gandhi National Open University, expands Daniels' concept of movement from the triangle-pentagon to an octagon. That is, to the pentagon of access, quality, cost, governance, and relevance, Rajesh adds equity, market orientation, and consumer satisfaction to form an octagon that represents the important aspects of distance education. This chapter describes IGNOU and its participation in these processes.

#### Marketing of Language Teaching via Distance and Online Programs

Section IV starts with chapter 17, which reviews the marketing, strategies, and applications of English language teaching (ELT) programs and products via distance education. Two Turkish cases are presented by Usun and Komur. In chapter 18, by Mirici, marketing of distance foreign language education is dealt with focusing by on three main target groups: learners, teachers, and teacher trainers.

### THREE SPECIFIC CASE STUDIES FROM TURKEY

In Section V, three specific case studies from Turkey are presented. Argan and Argan, in chapter 19, provide an overview and discussion of virtual communities in health care. They review the state of marketing implications in virtual communities in the health care sector.

Gokdag, in chapter 20, eplains the teaching-learning services that organized by private sector for open education faculty students in Turkey. Anadolu University Open Education faculty is described. The students' reasons for attending a private course are analysed.

In chapter 21, Kumtepe, Ataizi, Caliskan, Uztug, and Aydin describe the marketing strategy at Anadolu University and present a list of e-certificate programs.

#### LESSONS LEARNED AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In Section VI, chapter 22, Demiray explores the role and scope of marketing and its applications in the field of open and distance education. Demiray concludes the book with a literature review on marketing in online education. The book overviews distance education in Turkey, the United States, Africa, the United Arab Emirates, Spain, the United Kingdom, and India. The book provides very useful information about marketing strategies in online education.



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# The Role Subject Matter Plays in the Decision to Offer Online Training

#### Julie Gaver and Zane L. Berge

#### INTRODUCTION

plethora of factors influence an organization's decision to offer training online. Now, more than ever, companies must seek innovative ways to support three major business goals: expense reduction, revenue generation, and regulatory compliance (Biech, 2009). Online training addresses these goals by affording employees increased flexibility and opportunities for learning, coupled with lower administrative costs. But does the subject matter influence the decision to offer training online versus face-to-face? Little, if any research has been performed on this topic. Does subject matter *matter*? After conducting in-depth, personal interviews with five human resource and training professionals whose companies offer online learning, our conclusion is "yes." There are certain subjects that these professionals view as being less effective if offered in an online environment. However, as this paper will reveal, necessity often trumps reason, and subject matter often takes a back seat to the reality



Julie Gaver, Owner, Julie Gaver Training & Development, LLC, P.O. Box 51 Myersville, MD 21773. Telephone: (301) 293-4195. E-mail: julie@juliegaver.com Web: www.juliegaver.com



Zane L. Berge, Professor, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore MD 21250. E-mail: berge@umbc.edu

of the need for convenience. But at what cost? As technology continues to evolve, creativity and innovation continue to play a prominent role in meeting the training and development needs of today's learner.

#### THE ROLE SUBJECT MATTER PLAYS IN THE DECISION TO OFFER ONLINE TRAINING

This article reports research involving the e-learning activity at five organizations: an institution of higher learning, a federal government agency, a state government agency, an international financial services organization, and a community hospital. Our interest was in determining what factors influence their organizations' decision to offer online training, specifically the role subject matter played in that decision making process. Because of the subjective and qualitative nature of this topic, the chosen methodology was in-person interview. This method allowed information to be obtained at a deeper level than could have been obtained through survey method and provided additional flexibility during the research process. At the requests of the human resources and training professionals interviewed, the organizations' names have been withheld and individual names are fictional.

#### EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AT AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

The first interview was conducted with the director of workforce development and international programs for one of the largest providers of online education. This organization serves approximately 40,000 students as well as provides training for 31,000 employees who receive continuing professional development. The university recently initiated a program designed to help other educational institutions create online learning programs. In addition to the online university, nine "ground

schools" (campuses) are located primarily in the Midwest. For the purposes of this research, we chose to focus specifically on the 31,000 employees requiring professional training and development.

Approximately 70% of the training offered to employees is online and the remaining 30% is offered face-to-face or blended, with most of that 30% representing a blended format. Their learning management system is a hybrid version that allows them to verify employee training activity for compliance and human resource reporting.

A limited number of courses are offered face-to-face because the university has determined that certain subject matter is more effective in person. In general terms, they include courses that require critical thinking or increased skills application. The decision to begin with a course online followed by a face-to-face session happens on occasion. This is done on a case-by-case basis. The organization has no concrete rules governing what merits this decision to utilize a hybrid or blended approach.

His philosophy regarding employee development training is "education lends itself to an online offering. Concepts can be taught online. Reinforcing application of skills sets, however, require an interactive, face-to-face environment for practice and demonstration of skill sets mastery" (Anderson interview, 2009). For example, an employee needing sexual harassment prevention training may begin the training process online in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of current legal and organizational protocol. However, role playing scenarios that indicate that the employee can internalize the concepts and demonstrate appropriate behavior in sensitive situations may follow in a traditional classroom environment.

When provided examples of subject matter selections, the interviewee was asked to share whether an employee professional development course at his company would be offered online or face-toface. The following responses were noted:

- New software or general computer courses (*online*);
- Math and/or computation skills courses (online);
- Compliance related topics (online);
- Supervisory skills programs (begin online to teach and demonstrate knowledge; follow up f2f course to practice communication techniques)
- Teambuilding (online if sole objective is to teach employees about the roles of team players and related subject matter; blended in order for employees to fully experience the essence of working together as a team)
- Language programs. (Face-to-face. Note: It is the opinion of the interviewee that languages cannot effectively be taught online. Courses like Rosetta Stone are most effective; however, tonal languages, i.e., Chinese, need human interaction and opportunities for continual dialogue with others to learn)

An interesting example was offered that supports the theory that subject matter does count when choosing the most appropriate training method. Their Workforce Development department secured an engagement with a local federal government institution for an extensive online communications course for their administrative staff. "They went nowhere with it" (Anderson interview, 2009). The client was unhappy with the results and did not feel that the participants were able to successfully apply what they learned after the online training. As a result, a subsequent six hour, face-to-face training class was provided to the same participants. It was met with great success. "If you want adults to demonstrate their ability to think on their feet and truly apply what has been taught, you need to do this in a face-to-face environment." (Anderson interview, 2009). Furthermore, it is his opinion that memory retention is enhanced when training is inperson because participants are able to better incorporate the principles taught into their actions and behavior.

### TEACHING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT NEW TRICKS

January 2008 was the official kick off of a federally mandated learning management system (LMS) that ushered HR and training professionals at this federal government agency into a "brave new world." "We went kicking and screaming" was the response from the Department's employee development specialist who was interviewed. One and a half years later, equipped with a comprehensive library including approximately 2,000 SkillSoft courses online, this HR professional is still mourning the loss of predominantly brick and mortar classroom style training. Prior to January 2008, a limited number of online courses were offered and had been created by internal design staff.

Federal government employees have the ability to log into the LMS system to peruse the many course offerings and take advantage of the any time, any place learning that these systems offer. Every topic or course highlighted in the agency's LMS lists both an online and in-person course offering.

Our interview subject did not have general statistics available regarding online usage with the exception of the most popular course. COTR (Contracting Officers Technical Representation) is a mandatory course for anyone spending government dollars, such as HR, procurement, or government credit card users. Regulatory guidelines require this mandatory training and the department has seen a dramatic increase in the amount of people taking this course online. At the time of this research, 200 agency employees have been COTR certified online. The course had previously been solely offered as a week-long face-to-face training session. According to the interview subject, the certification is a regulatory "hoop to jump through," hence

the popularity of the online option. Her description of the course was that "it required no interaction with other employees but strictly a working knowledge of rules and regulations" (Greene interview, 2009).

Several other factors were listed as having a greater influence over employee online training activity, namely convenience, cost effectiveness, and perceived reduction in time spent in training. One employee who contacted this HR professional with questions regarding the online versus face-to-face decision stated. "instead of spending an entire day in the classroom, I'll just do this condensed version online." Our subject demonstrated the ease of taking a communications course online by logging on during our interview. To mimic the ever-so-popular MasterCard commercial: "F2F communications training: half or full day of employee's time. Online communications training: one hour. Cost of not even leaving your desk: priceless."

But at what cost? In the above scenario, the online course offered a series of scenarios with accompanying multiple choice responses with no opportunity to fully integrate or practice the concepts taught. Our subject stated that a live communications course (which is still offered) would offer multiple opportunities to practice skill sets. At the present time, no forms of videoconferencing or related technology are being used to provide a learning experience that provides any form of face-toface experience. All online courses currently offered through their LMS are for parties of two: the student and his or her computer.

The interviewee, who readily professes that she is "not a fan of online learning," commented that she often receives phone calls from department managers looking for customer service training for their departments. In most cases, the manager will first inquire if there are any live offerings and will only choose the WBT option by default.

Although this organization is fully utilizing online training, she believes it is not by choice, but by necessity. That being said, several years ago one of the sites experienced a major plutonium spill. This critically dangerous situation prompted intense safety training throughout the entire organization. An influx of contract subject matter experts and trainers were brought in to conduct a series of training sessions on hazard recognition controls and respiratory protection. Does subject matter determine the training method? In this case, absolutely. All training was performed in a live, face-to-face environment due to the "seriousness of the subject" (Greene interview, 2009). According to this interviewee, the option of online training was never suggested or discussed.

Additionally, two other subjects were mentioned as still being offered only in face-to-face context: ergonomics and teambuilding, once again suggesting this agency's view that subjects requiring practical skills practice or genuine human interaction cannot effectively be taught via the computer-mediated communication.

## ONLINE TRAINING IN THE STATE GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

To compare and contrast the role subject matter plays in a different governmental setting, the e-learning coordinator for a state agency serving 7,000 employees was interviewed. This organization has offered online training for four years and also utilizes the same SkillSoft learning management system offered by the federal agency whose employee was interviewed. The interviewee at the state agency estimates that approximately 40% of their employee base takes advantage of state offered training programs. Of those employees, approximately 50% of their training is through the web-based offerings. Of that

50% of WBT, approximately 5-10% is blended.

In this state government system, individualized online training is not mandated but could be considered a benefit of state employment. According to this interviewee, the state's individual offices have to pay a fee to enable their employees to have access to the many programs offered through SkillSoft. For that reason, they often encounter resistance from some offices that do not want to make the investment. Perhaps this attitude trickles down to the employee level, accounting for the relatively low percentage of employees who take advantage of this training. That being said, he explained that employees with hopes for advancement typically will seek training as a vehicle for promotion.

The employee's interest in a particular subject matter often inspires the search for online training. Employees enjoy the flexibility of taking courses that have the potential for improving current job qualifications, providing personal growth opportunities, or preparing them for advancement on their chosen career ladder. Additionally, an employee may use work time to take online courses, pending approval from his or her supervisor. Like others, the interviewee at the state agency cited convenience to the employee and reduced costs to the agency as primary motivating factors for choosing online over live classes. He also cited employee behavioral styles and job descriptions as influencing factors. For example, he stated that IT personnel lean toward the online offerings because of the nature of their business, whereas social workers seek live, face-to-face training. The nature of the social workers' job, combined with their social personalities, lends itself to a live, more personalized f2f training environment. However, their schedules will not often permit it because of unexpected court dates and other job duties. Once again, they often choose online by default. IT staff prepare for certifications that are

routinely administered electronically, so it is only natural that they use CBT resources to practice for the certification exams.

From an agency perspective, subject matter such as sexual harassment prevention and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance are offered live. Their decision to offer compliance training in-person initially seemed to contradict our earlier findings, but the reason given for this venue was "because we've always done it that way and there are certain state mandates that require the training be presented live" (Olsen interview, 2009). At the conclusion of this interview, it seemed convincing that no one set of rules applies to all organizations. Subject matter is indeed a very gray matter.

#### E-LEARNING AT AN INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SERVICES ORGANIZATION

An officer and program specialist in the Learning & Performance Solutions Group of a large financial services organization was interviewed. The company serves over 200 million customers in over 100 countries. She brought a diverse mix of experience to the interview, having previously worked as trainer, instructional designer, and project manager for the training division during her tenure with the company.

The company has offered some form of online training for approximately 10-15 years, but it has only been the past four to five years that this training format has been a structured, organized, and predominant part of their customer service training program. The focus here was solely on their efforts in this functional area for the purposes of this study.

Seventy percent of their customer service training is self-paced, text-based web training. Of the 30% remaining, a "significant" portion is blended. This format increases efficiency for the organization by allowing it to train employees when needed. Delaying training until a certain number of employees have been assembled for a f2f session is not an option for this constantly changing and growing organization. In addition, the online format addresses the issue of providing critical information to employees with varying schedules, learning styles, and reading speeds. Additional methods of online training include instructor-led synchronous sessions utilizing Microsoft Live Meeting.

Since the nature of customer service training requires participants to hone interpersonal skills, the company recognizes the need to incorporate instructor and participant interaction into the format of some training, hence live (f2f) and online synchronous sessions. However, subject matter such as new customer service processes, regulations, and other technical aspects of the job is offered online and self paced. The financial industry is heavily regulated; therefore, this format allows the company to offer consistent, precise information to all employees involved. These modules are short (1 to 1.5 hours in length) and require only that employees demonstrate understanding of the information presented.

But does subject matter play any role in training format decisions? The proof is in the programs. New hire training has always been reserved for live, classroomstyle environments. "This training is conducted face-to-face because of the volume and complexity of material presented, the outcome desired (skill development) and the fact that we want to set the right tone" (Gouker interview, 2009). According to this source, training that focuses on attitude and communicating the organization's core values are perceived as so critical to the success of the company that it requires a more "powerful presence." "This must happen before the employee begins working the phones; it is that important" (Gouker, 2009). However, the company is discussing the possibility of conducting this important training online utilizing

advanced technologies but it is too soon to comment further. Should this occur, the decision is based solely on economies.

Like others, subject matter that necessitates a blended approach includes communication skills. Employees begin training online to learn appropriate responses to client situations but are then given live, supplemental training to provide a learning environment that allows practicing approved techniques. The interviewee was subjected to the subject matter litmus test. Her responses were as follows:

- Dealing with difficult people (online is possible but f2f is most likely);
- How to talk with a customer (online, if designed correctly and the focus is on understanding customer behavior style. F2f is likely);
- New regulations (online);
- Dealing with change (online in order to "keep negative people from influencing others in a f2f environment"); and
- Any subject matter with large volumes of information (*f2f in order to keep employ-ees engaged*) (Gouker interview, 2009)

The organization continues to pursue advanced technology, which will allow them to present more questionable subjects online if it proves to effectively simulate a face-to-face, interactive environment. Again, convenience, ease of administration, and costs continue to be the driving factors behind this push.

### A COMMUNITY HOSPITAL ON THE CUSP OF CHANGE

The final interview was with the human resource director for a full service inpatient and outpatient community hospital. This past year the hospital joined forces with MedStar, a not-for-profit healthcare organization that operates 20 businesses, including eight hospitals in the Maryland-D.C. area. This organization was selected because it was to introduce its *first* learning management system to employees in September 2009. According to this interviewee, online employee training in the hospital environment is not prevalent in their geographical area. "There is a perception that because hospitals utilize state-of-the-art technology in patient care, they would also use innovative technology to train their staff. That is not always the case" (Remsberg interview, 2009).

Budget restrictions are a huge issue for this organization, and so the desire to save training dollars was a key motivating factor, along with convenience. It will be utilizing SiTEL, a healthcare LMS. Since hospitals operate 24/7, they look forward to using technology in a way that will offer them "round the clock training" (Remsberg interview, 2009).

Because their online courses will initially be individualized, text-based programs, their decision to continue offering some subjects face-to-face supports the notion that nursing competency training modules will continue to be live programs because the subject matter requires a hands-on approach, allowing the trainer opportunities to observe and coach students. In conjunction with the organization's new "no lift" policy, initial training on safe lifting equipment will be offered online with follow up face-to-face (practice) training. In the immediate future, all CPR training will continue to be offered in the traditional classroom environment; however, this visionary HR professional predicts that some day technology will create opportunities for Resuscitation Annie to make her debut on the big screen! For this healthcare organization in its infancy stages of e-learning, the future looks bright; but for now, subject matter still influences its choice of training venue.

#### **OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Five organizations, representing different industries and levels of experience in employee online training and develop-

ment, all answered an emphatic "yes" when asked if subject matter impacted the decision to offer training online versus face-to-face. To these professionals, online training is effective for topics including compliance, factual information requiring only an understanding of material, or subject matter that necessitates little (if any) interaction with another human being. But subject matter including language proficiency, teambuilding, communication, or other topics that address the dynamic interaction between people are still viewed as being more effective if a live element is included in the mix. However, necessity often trumps reason, and subject matter takes a back seat to the reality of the need for convenience, flexibility, and finding less expensive ways of training a company's most valuable resource. But at what cost?

Arbaugh's research on subject matter supports the relative importance of subject matter, but agrees that it is only one of several factors that influence online learning decisions. He concludes that "course conduct probably matters more" (Arbaugh, 2005). Institutional, behavioral, and technological variables cannot be ignored when determining impact (Arbaugh, 2005). Webster and Hackley (1997) suggest that students' attitudes and opinions regarding online learning play a significant role in the success of the delivery method chosen. Quoting Compeau and Higgin's research (1995), they suggest that "the belief that one has the capability to interact with a given technology plays a significant role is users' expectations and performance" (p. 1284). Certainly the interview with the employee of the federal government agency adds credence to this statement.

When considering the process of developing online training, organizations are challenged to continue thinking in terms of expanding the learning experience (Biech, 2009). For the five enterprises whose employees were interviewed, blended learning is the compromise for what some perceive as an inadequate

method for meeting the complete learning needs of their employee base. One fact must not be ignored; unlike academia, which emphasizes the pursuit and accumulation of knowledge, the corporate world is looking for a more concrete return on investment. Corporate online learning must ultimately improve performance and mastery of skill sets in order to earn respect as a viable training tool. Arbaugh suggests that additional research should be dedicated to identifying other characteristics related to subject matter that can influence the delivery choice and ultimately, its effectiveness. The question he poses for us to deliberate continues to be "when are variables such as technology, course structure or participant skills most influential"? (Arbaugh, 2005, p. 68). Webster and Hackley (1997) suggest that, as it relates to technology, factors such as quality, reliability, and "medium richness" are paramount. As online technology and multimedia continue to evolve, offering increased ways to realistically simulate live and interactive dialogue, perhaps subject matter will become a nonissue. But for now, it continues to be a force that cannot be ignored as it strives to compete for its seat at the decision making table.

As online learning becomes mainstream, the question becomes whether, at some point in time, will we have regrets? Will learning suffer when in-person training becomes as rare as a handwritten letter? Will we ever find ourselves reverting back to "the basics," those nostalgic, pre elearning days of brick and mortar? Can organizational training ever go "back to the future" if it is determined that there is no substitute for the personal touch? Or are we doomed to a learning environment addicted to the convenience and economies offered by the virtual world? Perhaps five years down the road it would be interesting to interview the same five companies to see what has changed. For these progressive organizations, will f2f ever stage a dramatic comeback should subject matter continue to matter? Wouldn't that be an interesting journey to document?

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# Considerations for Designing Instruction for Online Education in Developing Countries

### Gudula Naiga Basaza and Natalie B. Milman

here is no doubt that online education opens educational opportunities to learners from many walks of life such as those who are young or old, poor or rich, employed or unemployed, or from developed or developing countries. Online education has many benefits ranging from offering learners the ability to



Gudula Naiga Basaza, Director, Center for Distance Learning Studies, Uganda Martyrs University, P.O. Box 27450 Kampala, Uganda. Telephone: 256.77.460865. E-mail: grbasaza@yahoo.com Web: http://www.umu.ac.ug



Natalie B. Milman, PhD, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, The George Washington University, 2134 G ST, NW, Washington, DC 20052. Telephone: (202) 994-1884. E-mail: nmilman@gwu.edu

learn flexibly anytime, anywhere to minimizing (and often eliminating) commuting costs to learning from experts in the field, and much more. Today, learners from all over the world can earn degrees and certificates from accredited institutions in locations thousands of miles away from their homes, in countries they have never visited, and from institutions where they will never set foot—in a sense, creating a type of "flat classroom" (Friedman, 2007).

Yet, even though online education has grown exponentially in developed countries such as the United States, the reality is that developing countries are lagging behind significantly—statistics (see Figure 1 and Table 1) show the sobering reality of the "broadband gap," the differences between access, speed, quality of service, and price for broadband service in various locations (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2009). For instance, the International Telecommunication Union (2008b), a specialized agency of the United Nations focusing on communications, reported that

Contrary to what is happening in the mobile sectors, Internet use is not growing as quickly in the developing world as in the developed world. By the end of 2007, less than one out of five people living in the developing world were online, compared to over 60 percent of people in the developed world. (para. 2)

It is difficult to comprehend fully the consequences and implications of the broadband gap experienced in developing countries, especially for those who live in developed countries. But, it is important for online educators, instructional designers, and employers providing developing countries with online education and training or who wish to offer it to understand some of the challenges faced.



Figure 1. World information and communication technology (ICT) penetration rates (International Telecommunication Union, 2008a)

World Regions	Population ( 2009 Est.)	Internet Users Dec. 31, 2000	Internet Users Latest Data	Penetration (% Population)	Growth 2000-2009	Users % of Table
Africa	991,002,342	4,514,400	67,371,700	6.8	1,392.4%	3.9
Asia	3,808,070,503	114,304,000	738,257,230	19.4	545.9%	42.6
Europe	803,850,858	105,096,093	418,029,796	52.0	297.8%	24.1
Middle East	202,687,005	3,284,800	57,425,046	28.3	1,648.2%	3.3
North America	340,831,831	108,096,800	252,908,000	74.2	134.0%	14.6
Latin America/ Caribbean	586,662,468	18,068,919	179,031,479	30.5	890.8%	10.3
Oceania/Australia	34,700,201	7,620,480	20,970,490	60.4	175.2%	1.2
World Total	6,767,805,208	360,985,492	1,733,993,741	25.6	380.3%	100.0

 Table 1. World Internet Usage and Population Statistics

Source: Miniwatts Marketing Group (2009).

*Notes:* (1) Internet usage and world population statistics are for September 30, 2009.

A first step for instructors and/or instructional designers to understand better their online learners residing in developing countries is to become acquainted with issues and concerns in the representative country or region in which they live. In many developing countries, for example, Internet connectivity is not reliable and will likely impede learners' ability to participate in a course or training; therefore, measures will need to be taken to ensure adequate and equitable access to and dissemination of materials.

A second step is to conduct a learner needs assessment before or as soon as possible after an online course or training Instructors and instructional begins. designers typically conduct a needs analysis and assessment when designing instruction; however, most do not always know much information about their specific individual learners' contexts, backgrounds, needs, and/or experiences until after the course or training begins (and in some cases, only if they request such information). Dupin-Bryant and DuCharme Hansen (2005) recommend that such a needs assessment should involve an assessment of learners' "(1) computer skills, (2) learning styles, (3) available resources, (4) learner's desired outcomes, and (5) prior learning experiences" (para. 4).

These steps will help to obtain essential information for instructors and instructional designers to design and develop instruction for learners in any context, but especially those in developing countries. It will also help them establish a common learning medium for all learners, use alternative means for delivering instruction, if necessary, and locate resources the learners might use to address the challenges they face. Learners, for instance, may not be able to watch a video of a live recording of a lecture, but they may be able to listen to it as a podcast on their smartphone or read it as a downloadable PDF document. Participation in synchronous online discussions may not be possible, but asynchronous e-mail or threaded discussions might be. Finally, although learners may not have direct access to a technology, there is the possibility that within their vicinity there might be inexpensive, reliable access at an Internet café, a friend's or family member's home, or a local institution that has the requisite resources (technology might be made available at a local institution at a subsidized fee).

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# Using Your Computer More Effectively ... for More Effective Teaching

#### **Errol Craig Sull**

f there is one commonality distance educators share it is that we all use a computer to teach. And we also strive to deliver quality teaching, a positive learning experience, and indefatigable enthusiasm while also embracing any trick, tip, suggestion, idea, or information that



Errol Craig Sull, Online Instructor, P.O. Box 956, Buffalo, NY 14207. Telephone: (716) 871-1900. E-mail: erroldistancelearning@gmail.com

can allow us to accomplish all this in a more organized, timely, and creative manner. This bag of teaching aids can come from many sources, but one that can prove very helpful—and is often overlooked—is the computer itself: software, hardware, configurations, and tools that can offer tremendous assistance to any course we teach.

Packed with varied items, you are sure to find at least one or two that can make your overall teaching efforts just a tad more enjoyable. This will be an annual column, coming at the beginning of each year, but when I find something that screams "Ya gotta share me with your teaching brethren!" I will include it in a column that publishes sooner. Obviously there are many other teaching aids of which I have no knowledge, and so I reach out to you, my readers: please send (erroldistancelearning@gmailcom) me any computer helpmates you've come across. I'll happily share them in future columns. For now, however, here is my first collection for you.

• Organize all for a more efficient course. Google Calendar (calendar.google.com) is a big help in keeping all areas of your life organized, which makes for an easier time in managing your course. You can create events and tasks, establish parameters (such as date, time, and location), request reminders (e-mail, pop-up, or text message), and more. What's especially helpful with Google Calendar is you can sync it with Outlook, Mozilla Sunbird, or Apple iCal, as well as your iPhone or iPod Touch, Blackberry, or Windows mobile device. You need an active Google account, but that's free, and this calendar can help you get all class e-mails, announcements, grade postings, and other dated material done on time.

- Understand all phrases, including regional ones. Deciphering colloquialisms, phrases, or idioms can be difficult and time consuming in an online class, especially since students can live just about anywhere in the world, and you may not be familiar with what a student has written because the language is so regionalized. Enter Phrases.net (www .phrases.net), the most comprehensive Internet listing of phrases obscure and common. Be sure to also bookmark Abbreviations.com, Synonym.com, and Dictionary.com, as well as Wordcounter (http://www.wordcounter.com), a site that lets you quickly ascertain what words are being used most often in a written piece.)
- Keep abreast of the latest teaching materials. TeacherStorehouse.com (www.teacherstorehouse.com) is for all teachers—online or face-to-face classes —but it offers a wealth of useful materials, books, software, and other items, either to purchase or from which to simply get ideas to use in your class. What is also especially useful are the Links and Teachers' Lounge links: the former offer a wide variety of useful web teaching sites and the latter is a great place to share ideas and info with other teachers. And a quick suggestion: there is a ton of

online teaching forums that exist to specifically discuss all aspects of online teaching: participate in at least one you'll come away a much more informed distance educator!

- Always have that passed-up-yet-interesting article available for later reading. We often come across an article or essay that looks oh-so-interesting but we have to pass it be because reading it just won't fit into our schedule at the moment. And while we may promise to go back and read it, we often forget. To help us with this-there is so much valuable info we accidentally stumble across that can help us be better online instructors in so many ways-two exceptional sites exist that can capture and keep track of every interesting page you come across for reading at a later time: Read It Later (readitlaterlist.com) and Instapaper (www.instapaper.com). Each site offers something slightly different from the other, but both can be valuable in helping you to expand your resources of ideas and info for online teaching.
- A tip to help keep you from landing in Sent E-mail Doo-Doo. We have all done it: sent an e-mail we wish we could unsend, and seldom can this be done. And with so many items that need our focus it is often impossible to concentrate only on the e-mail we are writing-even though we know we should. Okay, so try this to give you one more hurdle your e-mail needs to cross before others read it: configure your e-mail to have your computer force a spell check before it is sent, then always purposefully misspell a word in the e-mail. The spell checker will stop at the misspelled word, preventing the e-mail from being sent-and also serve as a reminder to you for one more thorough read before sending the e-mail off to its intended reader(s).
- While Office 2007 does not allow document to be saved as PDF files, you can

**do it.** There are times when we need to save files-from students, administrators, colleagues, others, ourselves-in a .pdf (Portable Document Format) file, but Word 2007 is not configured to do that. However, there is an add-on from Microsoft's website that will add this option to the Word Save As menu (it also allows you to send files in .pdf formats). Simply log onto www.microsoft.com/downloads, then type in 2007 Microsoft Office Add-in: Microsoft Save as PDF or XPS in the search box at the top. Once you locate it, click the Download link in the blue box and save the file to your hard drive; when the download is complete, double click it to start the installation. Now you can save your work as a PDF file by clicking the Office button: mouse over Save As and choose PDF or XPS (similar to PDF, but Microsoft's version) —and instead of a Save button you will see a Publish button.

- Be prepared when traveling with your computer. Whether it be another city or a coffee shop down the street, sometimes you need a USB cable and an Ethernet cable. Be sure you have one of each handy. Also good to have: an extension cord, if an outlet is not nearby and you need to use your battery pack; contact phone numbers for any Internet-related provider in case of an emergency; the latest antivirus software on your computer-many public locations do not encrypt their internet connections, opening an easier path for online viruses; for especially long or long-distance trips carry a set of boot disks, as well as the registration number(s) should you need to reinstall programs; extra batteries and a phone cord (for an Internet connection) or your wireless data access card; passwords you will need (write them down in a small notebook, not on your computer, as in case it crashes you will need use another computer).
- Keep your computer clean for greatest efficiency. It is there, and it works, and we expect it to work: our computer does its job, day in and day out, but to maximize its abilities all components need be regularly cleaned; before you do this, always first shut down and unplug your computer-you don't want to accidentally change any settings. Once this is done you are ready. Keyboard: turn it upside down and gently shake it, then use a can of compressed air and a PCspecific scrub brush to clean between and on the keys. Mouse: for a trackball, wash the ball with soap and water, then let it air dry or dry it with a lint-free cloth; use a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol to thoroughly clean the rollers. If your mouse is wireless remove the batteries, then flip it on its back and use a cotton swab to swab out any dust built up inside the small light hole; if your mouse has small, flat feet to help it glide be sure to swab them with rubbing alcohol. Monitor: use a dry-lint-free cloth or a foam paint brush to wipe the monitor; you can use a bit of liquid to help but wipe it off immediately. Tower: use compressed air regularly to clean inside and outside the hardware tower-dust builds up quickly and you do not want it clogging any part of your hardware, as this can slow or damage components.
- Label your PC's cables. The more addons we have on our computer the more cables exist—and unless something goes wrong or we have a Monk-like cleaning obsession chances are we lose track of how many cables we do have "lurking down below." But when we find the need to disconnect one or more of the cables it can take some time knowing (a) the purpose of the cable(s) and (b) where to reconnect the end(s) of the cable(s). To keep this straight, type out the info on labels, cover each with clear sealing tape, punch a small hole near the end of each label, and attach each to

its respective cable. This way you will always know the purpose of each cable and to where it connects—and save much time and frustration in the process.

- Send large e-mails, not having to worry about an e-mail service supporting the size. There are times when we want to send our class an e-mail that has attachments—pictures, graphs, articles, and so on-but the size is so large our e-mail service says, in essence, "Sorry, no can do. It's breaking my back!" However, 2Large2Email using the site (2large2Email.com) will send the recipient of your e-mail a download link instead of multiple megabytes of data than can overload the person's inbox or present your e-mail from going out. The free version of this service has a 200 MB max file size and a limit of 100 downloads.
- Clean up your office workspace to keep your teaching efforts more efficient. There are so many items that just seem to grow in our office workplace, around our computer-and the more of these we have the less efficient we become, as we spend more time searching for this, looking for that, and overlooking the other thing. Uncluttering and organizing our office workspace has so many advantages, and a site called Unclutterer (www.unclutterer.com) offers tips and advice on how to maintain a clutterfree and organized office workspace (as well as household). There are also forums and discussions where readers offer additional tips.
- Test your PC for online threats. Often, it is only when it is too late that we learn our PC has not been fully protected against an online attack. But using an outside testing service, such as Shields Up! from Gibson Research (www.grc .com), can test your PC for file-sharing, port, messaging, and browser vulnerabilities, as well as providing detailed info about the vulnerabilities.

Some fun and interesting sites. There are—as of November 2009—269 million websites on the Internet; obviously, we can only be familiar with a small fraction of these. And for our courses we tend to accumulate only those that relate directly to the subject we are teaching, how to become a better teacher, and trends in distance learning. Yet it is crucial to look at sites that are simply interesting or just plain fun; they help give us a breather, they help to rejuvenate us, and sometimes provide us with info we can also share with our classes. Some recent ones I've come across: 100 Most Mispronounced Words (tinyurl.com/3b2jf). About Big Numbers (pages.prodigy.net/jhonig/bignum).

Academic Earth (www.academicearth .org)—view thousands of video lectures from top scholars at major universities. Contact Help (www.contacthelp.com) locate customer service numbers that will connect you with real folks. MonkeySee (www.monkeysee.com)—a huge collection of how-to videos. World Clock (http://www.poodwaddle.com

/worldclock.swf)—a large number of interesting categories, such as World Time, Population, Illness, Death, Environment, Energy, US Crimes, Food, and others. TypeRacer (play.typeracer .com)—pit your typing skills against other players to see just how good you are.

• Be aware of Wi-Fi spots in your destination. Having Wi-Fi access has become so important that many hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, and other spots advertise it. But to be safe, call ahead and ask—it can save you from the panic mode you'll surely fall into when you arrive and find no Internet connectivity available. There are also many master lists of Wi-Fi hotspots available on the Internet; here are the ones I consider the best:

- www.wififreespot.com/
- www.wi-fihotspotlist.com/
- www.jiwire.com/search-hotspot-locations.htm
- www.wifinder.com/
- US airports (free and for-a-fee Wi-Fi): http://www.travelpost.com /airport-wireless-internet.aspx
- US airports (free Wi-Fi): http:// www.wififreespot.com/airport.html
- Worldwide (bars, marinas, shops, etc.): http://www.ezgoal.com/ hotspots
- Worldwide airports: (free and for-afee Wi-Fi): http://usatoday.jiwire.com/ hotspots-hot-spot-airport-directorybrowse-by-country.htm
- Keep all user's manuals handy. One of the easiest items to lose with a new computer-related purchase is the user's manual, and often it is only when we need it that we realize it's not around. Three tips to help with this problem: (a) Once you've purchased the item, go online, find it, and save it to a file called User's Manuals: (b) Create a file in a file cabinet called User's Manuals and keep all manuals there-if your computer crashes you will still have all manuals; (c) for vintage computer manuals visit http://www.vintagecomputermanuals.com/ and read Smart Computing's article "How to Find Computer Manuals http://www.smartcomput-Online: ing.com/editorial/article.asp?guid= &bJumpto=true&Isfrm=IN&article= articles/webonly/techsupport/06w10/ 06w10.asp&ArticleID=31062
- A ready source for mouse feet. Most of us use them with our computer and they are often taken for granted, but when mouse feet are lost or need be replaced, just where do you find them? Rarely are they found in computer stores and computer manufacturers can make you jump through hoops to get new ones. Enter Slicksurf.com, an online shop that sells only mouse feet and for just about every brand. I found

them to be reliable and very quick to deliver orders.

- Get more productivity from your mouse. A great way to extend the productivity of your mouse's efforts, Kat-Mouse (http://ehiti.de/katmouse/), lets you keep your keyboard focused on a specific window while allowing your mouse to scroll other open windows. It can also send the window on which your pointer rests to the back of a group, which can make locating a hidden window easier (especially helpful when looking over more than one student assignment simultaneously).
- Find your I.P. address and host name. Some forms and programs require you to enter your I.P. (Internet Protocol) address, unique for your computer (it's how computers "talk" with one another); also, you may need to know your "official" host name for programs, tech support, or forms. One site that immediately provides you with both is KnowMyIP.com (http://www.knowmyip .com/)—it's a helpful site to bookmark.
- Visit distance listening listservs for a wealth of information. Type in "distance learning listserv" and you will get a plethora of links, divided into two categories: generic (for anyone interested in distance learning) and specific (for specific job titles, genres, schools, subjects, etc.). Take the time to visit some of these, and definitely become a member of at least one: sharing distance learning info, problems, insights, suggestions, and concerns with others in the same profession can be very helpful in improving your efforts as a distance learning educator-and this equates to a better online learning experience for the students.
- A fun site to help build vocabulary and feed the world. It is nice when a website comes along that is engaging, is helpful in a charitable sense, and can improve our mind. Such a site is Free Rice (http:// freerice.com). In a colorful and informa-

tive website a vocabulary test is given; for each right answer the sponsor of the site will donate 20 grains of rice to the United Nations World Food Program. *REMEMBER:* The more we fertilize our plants, work the soil, and weed the yard the brighter the flowers, the tastier the vegetables, the sweeter the fruits.



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# Ask Errol!

ell, here it is: a Q & A column specifically for anyone who teaches at a distance. Since I began my other column, "Try This," for our journal I have received many e-mails asking "How do I ...?" and "What do I ...?" and "Can you give me a suggestion for ...?"—all important questions, but ones I could not answer in my column (it's not a Q & A column) or personally (no time). So this column will appear in each issue of *Distance Learning* with my responses, based



Errol Craig Sull, Online Instructor, P.O. Box 956, Buffalo, NY 14207. Telephone: (716) 871-1900. E-mail: erroldistancelearning@gmail.com

## **Errol Craig Sull**

on my 15+ years of teaching and developing online courses, to those questions that have the widest reader appeal.

As for specifics, the deadline for the nest Ask Errol! column is March 15, and I will take all questions relating to distance learning and teaching, with one caveat: this is not a column that serves as a computer repair/advice column. If you are having problems with hardware, software installation, downloading material, networking, webcams, printers, and so on, it would probably serve you better to contact a professional who specializes in these areas. Finally, please be sure to include your name, school or organization affiliation, email address, and a contact phone number. Send all questions to me at erroldistancelearning@gmail.com. (Also: I welcome comments and suggestions on anything in this column!)

This inaugural column contains some of those many questions I indicated above, but I have left out names of the senders as they had no idea I would be using their questions in an internationally read column; however, all future columns will contain the name of the person who submitted the question.

Finally: remember that any suggestions and info I offer in response to the questions must always be implemented based on your school's policies and procedures; this is the umbrella under which all online courses fall. And we begin ...
Weekly Discussion Board postings are an important part of my online class, and nearly all my students are constantly posting. My problem is one student dominates each discussion thread through a large number of postings (at least twice as much as anyone else in class) and at times browbeats other students' postings. Is there a diplomatic way to handle this?

This is so common in a synchronous teaching environment, as students often believe they are "hidden" from the rest of the class and thus can post at will. Also, distance education offers a great environment for the normally reticent f-2-f student to come out swinging with words. To counter this, take the following steps, in order listed:

- 1. Check with your faculty handbook and/or supervisor regarding any policy the school might have; if yes, be sure to follow it.
- 2. Post a general announcement or e-mail to the class (whichever you prefer) that begins on some positive note regarding the discussion but then delves into a reminder of balance of postings in each discussion thread and that each person's response is valuable.
- Send a private e-mail to the offending 3. student (we never want to embarrass a student by confronting him or her in a forum where other students can read our comments), beginning with a compliment of how much you appreciate his/her enthusiasm for discussion. Next, slide into a reminder of the professional, spirited, and positive vibes that are important for any discussion, and point out (use at least one example, as the student might honestly not be aware of how his or her postings are wrong) where the student has crossed the line. Finally, end by asking for the student's input (you might also suggest a phone conversation).

And if it continues? It is rare when a student is removed from a course for such an instance, but a reminder to the student that grading for discussion includes the substantive nature of the postings, and the student's approach does not merit much in this area, will usually keep the student in check. The possibility of a negative grade can be a powerful weapon in an online class!

It seems with nearly every online class I teach there is at least one student who complains that because he or she worked hard, the low grade earned in the course—usually a C or D—is not deserved. Even though I tell these students their grade is simply a reflection of all their efforts in the class and that the grade breakdown was plainly outlined in the syllabus, this does not satisfy them. Any suggestions?

The problem here is that many students equate simple expenditure of effort and time with the right for a very good grade but we know it is the quality of the assignments resulting from the students' effort and time upon which grades are based. Thus, it is crucial to begin each course with a separate posting (e-mail, announcement, etc.—something the entire class will read) that discusses effort in and time spent on the course in relation to your approach to grading. (Reason for a separate posting: it emphasizes the importance of the subject matter.)

Two other suggestions: (a) Post reminders of this policy every few weeks in the course—while we like to think students will always recheck our first postings of the course they often do not. (b) For any students who mention the effort and time they have expended in any portion of your course—or if you notice students who are very active in the course but doing poorly with grades—be sure to send them a private reminder of your grading policy. The best defense for you later on is a good offense now.

Is there any surefire way to get students actively and enthusiastically involved in an online class when they readily admit

#### they are scared and nervous because they have never taken an online class and their computer skills are minimal?

There is a myth that students taking online courses are computer savvy. Add this to the new-and quite different (from an f-2-f class)-environment of the online class and you have students whose work in the class or interest in the class can be negatively affected. Here, the online instructor's tone is crucial, and it must begin with a portion of an opening "Welcome to the Course!" e-mail that recognizes the two problems you point out—and that you are not only always available to help, but eager to do so. And keep a watch on any students who mention this-your proactive intervention might be needed (it can not only help a student to adjust but also keep that student from dropping your course), including a phone call. Also, be aware of all IT resources your school makes available for students, and have handy all IT phone numbers and e-mail addresses you can pass along to students.

My course is set up so there is a new discussion board posting every 2 weeks; during the 2-week length of each discussion I find students very eager to get involved in the first week but they quickly fall off in the second week. I get the impression they are tired of the subject to be discussed or believe they've contributed all they need to contribute in that first week. How can I keep them just as involved during the second week of each 2-week discussion posting?

No matter how exciting or controversial or important a discussion question/topic, it is rare when the discussion thread can run itself. We as online faculty are crucial components to keep that portion of the course beating strongly and loudly. There are a few things you can do that guarantees this, no matter how long a discussion thread is "alive": (a) Be sure to post at least one response to a student's posting daily—and always end your posting with a question to the class that warrants a new direction or interesting twist on the discussion question/topic; (b) Include personal stories from your past that relate to the discussion thread—this not only makes your posting quite interesting to students (nearly all students want to know about their online instructor's lives beyond the course!) but also shows an additional value of the thread's focus; (c) Be specific in picking up on a student's comment and asking that student to explain or comment further on his or her posting.

My school presets its course syllabi, so I must adhere to the assignments in my syllabus, adding nothing to it. This is okay, and I do my best to keep students involved and enthused by being a constant presence in the course, returning assignments and responding to student emails on time, and offering good feedback on all assignments. But I feel there is more I can do to keep students excited about the course. What would you suggest?

It is important we fall back on our creativity and sincere interest in the subjectand not be afraid to do so "outside the box." One of the best ways to add vim and enthusiasm to the course is by offering students one or more cartoons, riddles, articles, personality profiles, unusual facts, websites, and/or pieces of history that relate to the subject of your course. Doing this serves three functions: (a) It adds a lighter side to your course, thus giving the students "desserts" in addition to the main entrée of the syllabus-this always pulls in student interest; (b) Any of these reinforce the subject being taught, but do so in a fun, "Hey, this is interesting!" manner; (c) They give your course a richer, more complex tone, allowing for a more complete distance learning experience by the students.

**Remember:** The greatest minds of the ages have asked questions to learn, to grow, to expand and one of these minds is the distance learning instructor.

# When It's Your Life...

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*lished* products." Most integrated technologies sustain, and do not disrupt.

On the other hand, distance education is certainly not a sustaining technology. Rather, distance education, virtual schooling, and e-learning are disruptive. For example, distance education is aimed at students (older, working, remotely located learners) who are "ignored by established companies" (traditional schools). Distance education presents a different package of performance attributes that are not valued by existing customers. Distance education has come to "dominate ... by filling a role ... that the older technology could not fill."

Christensen (2003; Clayton Christensen, Anthony, & Roth, 2004) has written extensively about the concept of disruptive technologies. Christensen's work has been widely embraced in business. His work helps explain why some established industries fail, and others spring up, seemingly from nowhere. No better example is the personal computer. Not a single mini-computer manufacturer has been a successful manufacturer of personal computers; they did not see the power of the new technology until others had captured market share.

Similarly, most in education have ignored the potential of looking at the ideas behind Christensen's theory, and how disruptive technologies might transform education and training.

In Florida, there is a mandate that every public school district must establish a vir-

tual K-8 and K-12 school (Simonson, 2008). Many have wondered why Florida legislators would pass such a sweeping law. Perhaps the answer is disruptive technology. Whatever the reason for Florida to establish virtual schools, it is clear that distance education and virtual schooling are disrupting traditional education, and this may be a good thing. It might be a good idea for educators to become more cognizant of Clayton Christensen's work, and the power of disruptive technologies to change education.

And finally, Christensen likes to say that because of disruptive technologies these are "scary" times for managers in big companies. It is likely that because of distance education the next few years are going to be *very scary* for school superintendents, college presidents, and training directors.

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## Distance Education as a Disruptive Technology

### **Michael Simonson**

A disruptive technology or disruptive innovation is a technological innovation, product, or service that eventually overturns the existing dominant technology or product in the market. Disruptive innovations can be broadly classified into lower-end and new-market disruptive innovations. A new-market disruptive innovation is often aimed at nonconsumption, whereas a lower-end disruptive innovation is aimed at mainstream



Michael Simonson, Editor, Distance Learning, and Program Professor, Programs in Instructional Technology and Distance Education, Fischler School of Education, Nova Southeastern University, 1750 NE 167 St., North Miami Beach, FL 33162. Telephone: (954) 262-8563. E-mail: simsmich@nsu.nova.edu

customers who were ignored by established companies. Sometimes, a disruptive technology comes to dominate an existing market by either filling a role in a new market that the older technology could not fill ... or by successively moving up-market through performance improvements until finally displacing the market incumbents....

By contrast, "sustaining technology or innovation" improves product performance of established products. Sustaining technologies are often incremental however they can also be radical or discontinuous. (as cited in Wikipedia, in Teets, 2002)

hus, technological innovations might be categorized along a continuum, from sustaining to disruptive. In education, a sustaining technology might be a SmartBoard, which in most applications is a way to present information dynamically and efficiently—a sustaining upgrade to the chalkboard and overhead projector.

As a matter of fact, most attempts to integrate instructional technology into the traditional classroom are examples of sustaining technologies—computer data projectors, DVD players, e-books—all which "improve product performance of *estab*-

... continued on page 73

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