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TRENDS OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRESSION IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES: PEDAGOGICAL ASPECT

This paper describes and analyzes the main trends in the development of distance learning in the educational system of the USA. The authors characterize pedagogical and methodological approaches to the implementation of online learning in different educational institutions. The requirements for the preparation of online instructors and the necessary conditions for students who choose distance learning or individual online courses are investigated. The attention is focused on the benefits and popularity of the remote (or virtual) education in the US schools and universities.

Key words: distance learning, distance education, online learning, students, USA, US universities, student-centered learning.

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ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ РОЗВИТКУ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ В ОСВІТНІЙ СИСТЕМІ США: ПЕДАГОГІЧНИЙ АСПЕКТ

Розглянуто та проаналізовано головні тенденції розвитку дистанційного навчання в освітній системі США. Охарактеризовано педагогічні та методичні підходи до реалізації онлайн-навчання в різних освітніх закладах. Досліджено вимоги до підготовки онлайн-інструкторів та необхідні умови для студентів, що обирають дистанційне навчання або окремі онлайн-курси. Акцентується на перевагах та популярності дистанційної (або віртуальної) освіти в університетах США і школах.

Ключові слова: дистанційне навчання, дистанційна освіта, онлайн-навчання, студенти, США, американські університети, особистісно-орієнтоване навчання.

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ТЕНДЕНЦИИ РАЗВИТИЯ ДИСТАНЦИОННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ В ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ СИСТЕМЕ США: ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ

Рассмотрены и проанализированы основные тенденции развития дистанционного обучения в образовательной системе США.

Охарактеризованы педагогические и методические подходы к реализации онлайн-обучения в различных учебных заведениях. Исследованы требования к подготовке онлайн-инструкторов и необходимые условия для студентов, которые выбирают дистанционное обучение или отдельные онлайн-курсы. Акцентируется на преимуществах и популярности дистанционного (или виртуального) образования в университетах США и школах.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное обучение, дистанционное образование, онлайн-обучение, студент, США, американские университеты, личностно-ориентированное обучение.

The practice of distance education in the United States is traced back to its early roots. In the 20th century, distance education remained at the periphery in corporate training, K–12 schools, and most universities, but it gradually developed its practice by using broadcast media, and later the Internet. Since the turn of the current century, distance education has seen an unprecedented growth in the US. Antecedent to this growth is the emergence of a post-industrial economy as well as expanded theory building and research in the discipline. The future of distance education depends on how successfully established institutions can adapt themselves to the post-industrial environment by adopting key theoretical concepts and implementing research findings, and how institutions are able to reduce the cost of education while increasing access.

The 2015 Survey of Online Learning, Online Report Card: Tracking Online Education in the United States, conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group in partnership with the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), Pearson, WCET, StudyPortals, and Tyton Partners, revealed the number of higher education students taking at least one distance education course in 2015 was up 3.9% over the previous year. Growth, however, was uneven; private non-profit institutions grew by 11.3% while private for-profit institutions saw their distance enrollments decline by 2.8% [1].

«The study's findings highlight a thirteenth consecutive year of growth in the number of students taking courses at a distance» said study co-author I. Elaine Allen, co-director of the Babson Survey Research Group [1].

Growth continued, despite muted support by faculty. The study revealed only 29.1% of academic leaders said their faculty accepted the «value and legitimacy of online education.» The proportion of chief academic leaders reporting online learning was critical to their long-term strategy dropped to 63.3% in the most recent results [1].

This paper delves into how the evolution of distance education has changed teaching and the role of the teacher from a disseminator of information to a facilitator of learning. It will discuss the professional

development needed to prepare the teacher for teaching in the online learning environment.

The over-whelming majority of distance education students in the United States are adults. Since the adult learner is the premise for distance education curriculum, the author thought a look back at the beginning of the change from pedagogy to andragogy would segue to the next challenge for the educator; namely, teaching online. Let us look at the beginning of distance education [7].

Distance education as we know it today began with what Moore called the third generation of Distance Education. The period was the 1960s and early 1970s. Moore stated that this was a time of critical change in distance education, resulting from several experiments with new ways of organizing technology and human resources, leading to new instructional techniques and new educational theorizing. [7]. As technology progressed, so did the progression of distance education. By the 1970's, it had achieved broad acceptance and in the 1980s, it «arrived» as one of the «flavors of the decade» in education, in higher education especially [8]. Garrison and Shale (1987) recognized the move into an Information Age characterized by technologies capable of interactive and individualized education at a distance in 1987 [5]. Keegan (1988) [6] stated that distance education is the normal provision of education for the working man and woman, for the taxpayer, the homemaker, those who do not wish to attend a conventional institution, and sometimes for their children.

As distance education grew, so did the realization that the role of the teacher was changing. He/she must adhere to this new arena of teaching. Beaudoin [2] (1990) stated that the emergence of increasingly student-centered learning activities in the 1970s, facilitated by new instructional technology introduced in the 1980s, is contributing to a dramatic evolution in faculty roles, and raises fundamental questions within the professoriat about how it will contribute to the teaching-learning process in the 1990s and beyond. In particular, the likelihood of significant increases in distance learning enrollments within the next decade will have a profound impact on faculty members' instructional roles. Beaudoin recognized that faculty would have to adjust monitoring and evaluating the work of geographically distant learners rather than transmit information in person [2].

Electronic technologies have increasingly changed the interaction between instructor and student. For most of the 20th century, distance education involved pen and paper, the typewriter, and the postal service, which provided the sole link between the individual instructor and the individual student. With the development of the radio and then television, it became possible to transmit educational courses, programs and content widely using these mass media distribution channels [8]. The development of the

world-wide-web and satellite enables even broader access to university courses.

Interaction is also a very important aspect of the role of the instructor in distance education, and one that changes in the online environment. Learning involves two types of interaction: interaction with content and interaction with other people. Technology available today allows interaction with and about the content. In the past, while this interpersonal interaction has occurred almost solely between instructor and student in distance education, it is increasingly possible for students to interact with one another, even when geographically separated. The most important role of the online instructor is to model effective teaching and accept "the responsibility of keeping discussions track, contributing special knowledge and insights, weaving together various discussion threads and course components, and maintaining group harmony"[3].

There is no question that the role of the teacher is changing [13]. The teacher is no longer the «dispenser of information», with the increase access to resources on the Web. In some communities, the changes taking place are transforming schools, doing away with traditional buildings, providing flexible hours, making available large amounts of multimedia, etc. These are certainly changing the role of the teacher.

Sellers (2001) wrote that the traditional classroom teacher served as the initiator of all classroom activities, and as such, he/she was responsible for students' learning opportunities. Online learning is ultimately student centered and student-driven. The online environment encourages student-centered learning in which intellectual acquisition replaces the didactic force of the teacher as the main impetus of learning [10].

As evidenced by various studies mentioned, the most critical issue in this educational revolution is the role of the instructor. The distance instructor loses a certain autonomy common in the traditional classroom. In online learning, the instructor becomes a member of a team; subsequently, the instructor no longer has total control of the learning environment. For a number of years, teachers have managed classes by virtue of their control on information. Now, with instant access to vast resources online, students are no longer dependent on the teacher alone for knowledge. Muirhead (2001) wrote that distance education would demand changing the traditional role of teachers from information transmitters to guides who arrange meaningful learner-centered experiences [9].

Many studies suggest the constructivist model of teaching works best for the online environment. Educational technologists have often implied that an effective way to integrate technology into the teaching and learning process is to follow a constructivist model. Constructivist instruction asks learners to use their knowledge to solve problems that are meaningful and

realistically complex. The problems provide the context for the learners to apply their knowledge and to take ownership of their learning [12].

The teacher's job becomes one of facilitator in a constructivist model. Instead of telling students the answer, the teacher asks questions to help them discover the answer themselves. For this type of teaching to be successful, teachers need to give students time to explore the material and construct meaning from the experience. That the roles of teachers and learners are changing is an obvious assumption [10].

When integrating student experiences with technology, the role of the teacher changes. The teacher no longer has to be in charge, but can give some of the control over to the students and the technology. The task for the teacher is to arrange the learning environment in such a way as to provide situations in which students use their own knowledge to construct meaning of a particular problem. A learning environment is created in which students are active participants in the learning process [10].

Another area that affects the change of the role of the instructor in distance education is the Transactional Distance Gap. Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance defines the role of faculty in distance education. This concept of «transactional distance» defined the relationship of instructor and learner [8]. According to Moore, transactional distance is the gap of understanding and communication between the teachers and learners caused by geographic distance. It is filling this 'gap' of understanding and communication between the teacher and learner that defines the role of the instructor. The instructor must be the one to bridge that gap through special teaching techniques, distinctive procedures in instructional design and the facilitation of interaction [7].

It has become apparent that successful online teachers also require a unique set of skills. There is persistent opinion that people who have never taught in this medium can jump in and teach a class. A good classroom teacher is not necessarily a good online teacher [4].

Davis and Roblyer also cite that there are several areas of unique competence for distance instructors, all of which require experience with distance learning environments.

• Course planning and organization that capitalize on distance learning strengths and minimize constraints

• Verbal and nonverbal presentation skills specific to distance learning situations

• Collaborative work with others to produce effective courses

• Ability to use questioning strategies

• Ability to involve and coordinate student activities among several sites [4].

They further state that many communication skills required of the online instructor are similar to those needed for effective classroom teaching. However, the online instructor's role requires a paradigm shift in perceptions of instructional time and space, virtual management techniques and ways of engaging students through virtual communications

Not all faculty members are suited for the online environment. Faculty cannot be expected to know intuitively how to design and deliver an effective online course because, even though courses in technology are becoming more available to students. Seasoned faculty have not been exposed to techniques and methods, needed to make online work successful. Instructors need training and support to be willing to adopt this new teaching paradigm. They need to know how the online mechanisms of their courses, can be implemented in the new environment [11].

For distance education to be successful, faculty needed to be trained in the technology as well as the pedagogy of distance learning. Teaching online is a new experience, different from teaching in the classroom. It requires a different set of skills and a different pedagogy. Although there are many individuals in the field who champion the educational value of the Internet and other online information systems, there is a preponderance of anecdotal evidence that the absence of formal training opportunities for faculty is the greatest impediment for acceptance and subsequent use of the Internet in higher education. Training classes must be provided to both full-time and adjunct faculty members. Training for teaching via distance education is essential [14].

It is clear that one of the keys to effectiveness of distance learning is that the instructor takes full advantage of the interactive nature of whichever technology is being used. This means bringing learners frequently into action by asking questions, encouraging student presentations, getting students to talk to each other, and in other ways involving them fully in the teaching-learning process [7]. In the viewpoint of Zane Berge, «The technology will not improve learning any more than a new schoolhouse will improve learning in our brick-and-mortar classrooms today.» [3].

A consistent finding over the years is the strong positive relationship of academic leaders at institutions with online offerings also holding a more favorable opinion of the learning outcomes for online education. The more extensive the online offerings at an institution, the more positive they rate the relative quality of online learning outcomes. It is unclear, however, which came first -- is it that those institutions with a positive opinion towards online are more likely to implement and grow online courses and programs, or is it that institutions with experience with online develop a more positive attitude as their online offerings grow?

While clearly not a measure of quality, there is one dimension that academic leaders believe is equivalent for the both types of courses — the level of student satisfaction. The reports first examined this aspect in 2004, and found respondents believed that students were at least as satisfied with online courses as they were with face-to-face instruction. The most recent results confirm this, with nearly two-thirds of all academic leaders surveyed report that they believe that the level of student satisfaction is "about the same" for both online and face-to-face courses. A small number believes that satisfaction is higher with online courses, while a slightly larger number say it is higher for face-to-face courses.

There are other dimensions of a course for which academic leaders believe that one or the other delivery methods is clearly the superior option. Face-to-face instruction is viewed as far superior for student-to-student communications. Over one-half of all academic leaders report that they believe that face-to-face instruction is "superior" or "somewhat superior" in supporting student-to-student interactions. Another one-quarter rates the two methods as about the same for this dimension. The results are reversed when academic leaders are asked about the ability to allow students to work at their own pace in each type of course. Here nearly 80 percent of the respondents believe that online instruction is superior. This compares to only four percent who say face-to-face instruction is superior for this dimension.

When asked why their institutions have implemented online courses and programs, academic leaders in the US have consistently said that online education provides greater flexibility, sometimes for the institution or the faculty member, but primarily for the student. Not surprisingly, online instruction is seen as having much better scheduling flexibility for students. Over 90 percent of all academic leaders rate the scheduling flexibility of online as "superior" or "somewhat superior" to that for face-to-face instruction.

Even institutions that have the most positive attitudes towards online learning, and have implemented the most comprehensive online programs, often report that not all their faculty fully accepts online instruction.

The perceived acceptance rate by faculty varies widely between colleges and universities with online offerings and those without such offerings. Over one-quarter of chief academic officers at institutions with no online offerings report that their faculty do not accept its value; which is, perhaps, a self-fulfilling prophecy. Institutions that offer only online courses and those that offer both online course and full online programs report that only seven percent of their faculty do not fully accept online education. Conversely, the proportion of leaders at institutions with online programs that say that their faculty accept online is highest at 44 percent (compared

to 21% for those with only online courses and only 13 percent for those with no online). While the acceptance at institutions that are more engaged in online is greater than at other institutions, there remains a level of concern among all academic leaders about the full acceptance of online instruction by their faculty. Part of this observed pattern may be the result of hiring practices — institutions with extensive online offerings may be hiring teachers specifically for online instruction.

In 2009 chief academic officers were firstly asked about the training provided to faculty who are teaching online. Nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of all institutions reported that they do not provide any training (even informal mentoring) for their faculty teaching online courses. In the survey of 2011 the scope of investigation was expanded to examine training for faculty developing or teaching online, blended, and face-to-face courses.

There was a substantial decrease in the proportion of institutions that report that they do not provide any training for their faculty who teach online -- it was only six percent of academic leaders who report this. The pattern of types of training provided was otherwise very similar in 2011 as it was in 2009; internally run training courses are the most common approach, followed by informal mentoring and then by a formal mentoring program.

Thus this paper proves that successful progressing of distance education mode in the USA universities and other educational institutions is highly correlated with special training provided for potential distance learning instructors. The more experience faculty get while working in online programs the more evident it becomes that such training modules are essential for successful delivery of distance courses.

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