



## COMPARATIVE CURRICULUM DISTANCE EDUCATION

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### Distance Learning and Its Neighbors

Definitions are important, not merely the espoused definitions but also the enacted definitions, the definitions by denotation and by connotation, what distance learning means to academic but also what it means to managers, students policy-makers and others stake-holders across the various continents, countries regions and cities where it seems to take place. A brief discussion of the relevant ones might identify and resolve some of the concepts and confusion around distance learning. Its potentials and its possibilities or perhaps not. One simple definition might be implied by binary contrast between campus education and distance learning, but similarities with online learning e-learning and virtual learning now blur the issue, as does in a different direction, overlap with community learning and adult learning

We casually referred to campus education and distance learning. This seems a clear distinction, one happens on campus or within campus universities, the other does not. Many campus universities now however exploit digital technologies to reach larger distant markets and reach out to students who may study entirely remotely and entirely online. So campus universities can have significant proportions of distance learning students. Online learning, Digital learning most-learning and virtual learning are apparently synonymous and interchangeable and are merely the preferred delivery mechanism form outdistance clearing. They are however never the sole delivery mechanism for either campus universities of distance learning hence the use of the rather vague term, blended learning, to denote that digital learning is combined in some unspecified proportion with one or more other modalities. We shall see the consequences of this confusion when we look at the global picture.

### THE PURPOSE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning is education the possible purpose of distance learning are drawn from those of education. These purpose are now troubled as never before. one purpose of education

is to services economic and put learners into employment, specifically the cash economies and paid employment. This has been widely accepted. It is however increasingly problematic. Not only has globalisation over the past decades meant that employment is a fluid phenomenon as companies pursue changing markets, resources, raw materials, and tax and tariff regimes but there is growing talk of the hollowing out of the labour market meaning the ever-widening chasm between people who manage, create and decide and those who clean toilets and clear trash, and thus an increasing barrier to any social mobility that might have been facilitated by education. On the other hand, any talk of on education for unemployment for meaningful live outside the economy, the difficulty politically in the public domain. Digital technologies are one of the cause of these trends over our lifetimes and on the near horizon artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of things (IoT) will only accelerate these processes. These factors appear in our later discussion of educational technologies trends. This purpose is clearly utilitarian, objective and quantifiable, but even if accepted as the main or sole purpose of education it is problematic.

There is an increasingly consumerist orientation to higher education, driven by the rhetoric of mobilization and mercerization, which respond to a call for job-ready graduates coming from both employers and the debt-laden graduates but this purpose is potentially at odds with the further-proof graduates (and lifelong learners) depicted in the more utilitarian aspects of digital literacy. Higher education institution are under continued pressure to produce job-ready graduates and this drivers soft skills, digital literacy and problem-based learning inter alia into the curriculum and some of these may be more challenging to deliver at a distance.

## **THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT OF DISTANCE LEARNING**

Having briefly discussed the various possible purposes of education we can now discuss the pressures and trends starting with this make up the environment of the distance learning globally. Technology, the that one, is seemingly the easier to discuss. Any Simplistic analysis tells us that digital technology get smoothly and inexorably better, small, faster and cheaper. In the broadens, the does seem to be true, but any smooth curves and established paradigms have inevitably been disturbed by each now game-changing innovation, the i-phone being

recent and obvious. Both the general trends and the game-changes are however driven by the commercial imperatives, of the makes and the vendors of digital technology.

This technology is not only devices and infrastructures but also software systems and services and is reflected not only in the shifting balance between say mobile phone and networked desktop computers but also a shifting balance between say web 2.0 application such as social media and dedicated educational system such as the learning management system (IMS). These changes not only put more technological power in the hands of learners but also more agency and control. These consequences, as and when they happen, will play out differently in different countries, cultures and classes. The general implication. If such an implication is possible. is that learners will expect more choice and control more respect and more variety, as they import their online experience and achievements into their distance learning.

#### **CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY TRENDS AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

The Success Survival or transformation of distance learning may depend on its capacity to align, appropriate or co-opt any of the other trends or technologies evening in the educational technology space of practice and policy. Some of these we have already mentioned in trying to define where distance learning fits and is defined in relation to other pedagogies. A recent and much respected UK report highlights some specify development on the now These include,

1. Paced learning a specific regime to improve retention and understanding.
2. Larners making science, pedagogy to develop more scientific frame of mind amongst learners.
3. Open textbooks, exploiting technology and the 'open' movement to mix purpose-built texts
4. Navigating post-truth addressing challenges of conflicting perspectives and competing facts, and competing fact and the recent phenomenon of 'fake news'
5. students led-analytics the development of learning analytics to empower learners

## SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY TRENDS AND DISTANCE LEARNING

We conclude by looking at some specific trends in educational technology and their likely significance for distance learning. The flipped classroom was originally an American conception and a response to various practical and pedagogic problems and challenges (principally those of encouraging autonomous active learning discussions about bring-your-own-device and increasing pressure on contact time and a response to a specific infrastructure and technical environment namely the widespread availability of cheap connectivity and personal, social and domestic digital technologies. Whilst an underpinning theory of the flipped classroom may have emerged, the idea was nevertheless originally nationally specific and culturally specific, and so are the documented experiences, originally from a very specific and culturally specific, and so are the documented experiences originally from a very specific setting, namely schools in America. The flipped classroom concept should not be interpreted merely as using technology to displace the consumption of content out of the classroom. In fact, the principles of the flipped classroom can be expressed as the following questions.

1. How can educators optimize the face-to-face learning experience? what is it that students can only get fact-to-face with lecturers?
2. How can educators optimize the ways in which students can learn from each other face-to-face what is it that students can only get face-to-face with each other?
3. How can educators optimize the campus experience? What is that students can only get by common campus?
4. How can digital technology support addressing these challenges? And what dose digital technology do most effectively or uniquely?

We should considered the flipped classroom alongside discussion of personal response systems (PRS) and Problem –based learning (PBL) Whilst the first incarnation of PRS was delivered on delicate devices, the so-called clickers or zappers for example in economics and many other disciplines – and thus an unsustainable expense – later incarnations use software or apps such as Secretive which run on learners own devices. They essentially deliver the ability to make the lecture, already highly cost effective, more interactive and flexible PBL (62) with its focus on problem-solving team-work and real life problems make learning more authentic and

open-ended. These initiatives all potentially separate distance learning from a much clearer articulation of the best of face-to-face learning namely flexible responsiveness and engagement and distance learning educators must address the implicit critique.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to put distance learning within the wider context of the global technological and economic trends and pressures and against the context of specific educational technology trends and initiatives. This has not been easy since these trends are characterized by fragmentation and diversification . The abstract conclusion is the need remains open flexible and aware to seek and expect change, connection, agency and authenticity. The nature of these wider context does however mean there are no simple conclusion, only a more complete understanding of a fluid partial and complex environment which education including distance learning cannot operate ignorance or isolation. The practical conclusion must come from the providers, the founders, the managers and the trainers of distance learning so think through this abstract conclusion to their individuals programme, instructions and responsibilities.



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