

Distance Learning Final Paper

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The history of education is fascinating. The journey of how knowledge has been transferred and disseminated over time. We evolve who we are through the knowledge we pass down through the generations. First through oral traditions, then formal written history and apprenticeships and finally into the first advent of formal education and instruction. Where formal education has always been a privilege of the wealthy and the pious in recent years it's become a staple of a civilized society to see to the basic education of it's population.

The rise of the industrial world, the invention of the printing press and other amazing technological marvels primed the ground for making education not just a bonus but a need in order to make a living in the modern world. While classroom education has remained both static and constant in its evolution and development, we're here to talk about distance education.

Distance education differentiates from standard formal education not only by the nature of the separation between learner and instructor, but in the nature of the learner. The market for lack of mercenary term for distance education has always been the non-traditional student. Students already in jobs, supporting families or otherwise geographically and economically unable to take time to work on their education full-time. Farhad Saba quotes M.G Moore to define the difference between traditional learners and the adult learners interested in pursuing distance education. Instrumental independence involves the ability to undertake an activity, including learning, without seeking help; emotional independence is the capacity to pursue the activity without seeking reassurance, affection or approval in order to complete it. The drive to achievement is derived from a need for self-approval (Moore, 1983, p. 162).”(Saba, 2016)

The first known reference to a distance education course was in 1728. Caleb Phillips advertised in the Boston Gazette a correspondence course in short hand. We don't know if his course was successful but the first correspondence course in the UK was created by Sir Isaac

Pitman who was also going for short-hand instruction. The strange thing was that Pitman's school didn't open until 1840 some hundred years after Phillips. Pitman's shorthand methods are still in use today. (Pappas, 2017)

Correspondence courses took off and continued to be an influential part of distance education for decades to come. But in the 1960's technology advances brought us educational broadcasts, and recorded media. No longer was the course limited to written content but expanded to include the audio, and even video. (Saba, 2013)

From there things just got more interesting. The late eighties brought us live instruction via teleconferencing and moved us into the Flexible learning model and asynchronous online learning. That became popular in the early 2000's. (Pappas, 2017)

We have all the knowledge at our fingertips and can access it at anytime. Teleconferencing gave way to video conferencing, and additional software and technology advancements have brought us up to date with interactive media designed and produced with the intent to allow any student at any time or place to be able to learn the material.

The history of learning isn't just about the delivery method, but also about the approach to learning itself. The earliest programs focused on a straight didactic approach. Teacher in front of a classroom speaking and the children basking in the glow of their words and while that format hasn't actually changed that much in the last 2 centuries we have changed how we deliver material in a remote fashion and how we create educational materials to better increase the retention and learning of students across the spectrum of abilities and temperaments.

Instead of rote dictation and memorization learning theories have developed to help us to understand how best of approach the act of teaching and increase the success of students in the act of learning.

While early theories on learning focus on external stimuli viewing learning as simply a behavior to be observed. Later theories like the Cognitive theory posit that looking at the internal process of learning inside a person's mind isn't just possible it's needed to effectively identify the best learning paths. Cognitive learning wasn't simply about rote memorization but the act of making connections between new information and information and experiences already in a person's memory. Tying learning to other memories helps it to stick and makes retrieval more effective. (Çeliköz, 2019)

Social Constructive theory took the approach of looking at how we interact with others as we learn and how creating social relationships can help to increase the learning process because it again ties the information and skills to a more concrete and preexisting experience like creating something with a group. (Kukla, 2000).

Connectivism theory is about the connections we make and can pivot ourselves around between what we are currently learning and what we had already learned and what we could be learning in the future. The idea that all the time we are learning and making connections which will inform future connections allow us to swiftly increase our knowledge and change our perspective. (Utecht et al., n.d.)

My current view is that these theories feed off one another. They are situationally relevant in their own right. Just as all learners are individuals it follows that not all projects can be achieved through any and all theories. It benefits us to evaluate the goals of the course and see which framework and theory will help achieve that goal and not exclude any until after initial development has been completed.

Course Development

My approach to the course itself was an idea of filling a need I had observed in my colleagues. I use the ADDIE model framework to analyze the need I saw and established what form the course should take. We have a great deal of specialized knowledge among the faculty and staff, but the basics of technology can elude even the most esteemed among them.

My goal was to provide an overview of a basic computer set up, basic computer navigation and introduce the learning management system we use (Canvas). With this basic knowledge I would then introduce the idea of solving simple computer problems using that knowledge and some elementary problem-solving strategies.

I created visual and textual informational content. I created interactions in the form of quizzes, and discussion boards. I monitored the boards and added my own comments and enhancements to the answers as the course went on, and I reviewed the quiz results with the idea that future iterations of the course would expand on the content and provide more challenging assignments to further increase staff competencies in the technologies we're using more and more for our blended instruction.

Reflection

My biggest struggle was limiting my scope. There was so much I wanted to cover I got overwhelmed in the process. My initial outline was significant and comprehensive and completely undoable given my time constraints. I think once I got the course up and running the whole thing went very well. I was a little concerned I'd pulled back too much, but I was able to strike a balance with where I ended up and where I'd like to go in the future. It highlighted some holes in the knowledge that I knew were present, but now I have the data to back up the need for increasing this kind of professional development.

While I did get a little bogged down in the weeds; I did find the process enjoyable. I liked finding the images and putting the content together. Considering what layout would best display the information. With more time and experience I can see this being a challenging but fulfilling profession. My biggest takeaway is more planning, with clear deadlines and milestones. I could create amazing audio and video presentations, but I won't be able to do that if I don't budget the time appropriately.

I think overall the design worked well the progression from the basics through to the more advanced was a good method, but again I do bemoan the limitations I had to impose on the content inside the modules.

I really enjoyed reading my colleagues comments and I was surprised by some of their posts and ideas when it came to the discussion boards. Some of them knew shortcuts I hadn't covered myself, which was great, but didn't confirm that they'd reviewed the material I'd provided. I was a little disappointed that there weren't more interactions on the discussions, but I think that's a problem that's universal. We want to provide that social component that the research tells us is effective but creating it asynchronously without mandating it which instantly kills the social interaction we're searching for...well I haven't found a sufficient substitute yet.

I could see that some of the students were going through the motions because they'd been asked by a superior (not me) to complete the training, others were there to genuinely participate and I think with this type of course that's an expected mixture of reactions.

In the end I think the course worked well as a prototype. Was it perfect? No. Did it achieve what it set out to? Yes. Will I continue to develop the course for future employees? Yes, there's nothing stopping me from adding more content and expanding it into a drop-in course so that our new faculty and staff have some grounding in the technologies we're using. There's also

the possibility of creating the course for our student body. Our population is a mixed bag of older students, and just out of high school. Some of them haven't touched a computer since Windows '95 and others haven't ever sat down with a full-sized keyboard before and done everything technology based from a mobile device. It's a wide spread of exposure and knowledge that we need to bring to common ground in the middle with the standard computer set up.

Whether this works or not remains to be seen, but for this mini-course it's worked out well enough to want to move forward.

References

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