Distance Education: A Personal Definition

Defining Distance Education

Distance education has been defined as an educational system that “utilizes technology and web-based content in order to provide a virtual classroom experience” (Tull, 2013). In reality, distance education goes beyond these basic concepts. The field of distance education is characterized by a variety of theories and ideas that make this learning discipline truly unique and one that continues to evolve.

In The Evolution, Principles and Practices of Distance Education, Holmberg (2005) defines distance education to include “teaching and learning being brought about by media: in principle students and their teachers do not meet face to face” (p. 9). In order to allow distance education to exist, media is required. As such, Holmberg (2005) stresses, media can be “printed and written word, audio and video recordings, telephone conversations [and] computer communication” (p. 9). In A Systems View of Online Learning, Michael Moore and Greg Kearsley (2012) further support this idea by emphasizing that some type of technology (media) must exist in order for distance education to take place (p. 2).

Discussion

The original definition (as posted in “How Do You Define Distance Education?”) was limited by the term “web-based” (2013). Terms such as web-based and e-Learning are characteristics of distance education. Holmberg’s (2005) use of the word media may include these terms, but it does not limit distance education to an online format. Instead, Holmberg’s (2005) definition highlights the basic concepts of distance education without limiting it to one specific method for learning.
D. R. Garrison and M. F. Cleveland-Innes (2010) and Otto Peters (2004, 2010) stress that distance education grew out of correspondence education, which developed in the industrial age. With innovation in technology and industry, distance education evolved to meet the growing demands of society (Peters, 2011). Limiting distance education to only include web-based or e-Learning content would disallow any further evolutions of this theory. Holmberg (2005) would agree and argues that the above terms are actually part of the media that make up distance education (p. 11).

Otto Peters (2004) comments on these modern technological advances in *Distance Education in Transition*. Peters (2004) admits that there is an increase in the “use of digitized learning environments and the net” (p. 20). As Peters (2004) states, we are in a “new era of distance education” (p. 20) that no doubt will eventually require us to come up with new theories and concepts that will include online and eLearning.

**Conclusion**

Distance education should not be limited by terms like e-Learning or web-based content. Instead, a definition like Holmberg’s (2005) should be used and supplemented by theorists Moore and Kearsley (2012) and Peters (2004, 2010, 2011). Each theorist has demonstrated that there are many components of distance education without limiting the field to one specific format.

Thus, distance education is an educational system that takes place at a distance and is supported through some type of media component. History dictates that distance education cannot be limited by exclusive terms and must be open-ended in order to allow the field to continue to grow and evolve.
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References


Concepts and terminology- Student bodies [e-chapter]. In B. Holmberg (Author), *The Evolution, Principles and Practice of Distance Education: Vol. 11* (pp.9-11) [Adobe Digital Edition]. Retrieved from Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg website: http://www.box.com/shared/y97qyc7m0t


