

Chapter 5

Constructivist Communications Strategies for 21st Century Faculties and Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the chapter is to provide effective communications strategies, instructional strategies, media strategies, and cultural dimension that are critical to designers and faculties that create and deliver online courses using a constructivist foundation, as the participants become increasingly diverse in global online course rooms. Disruptive innovation, which is evidenced in Information Communications Technologies (ICT) throughout higher education classrooms, is changing the way the world learns. Through disruptive innovation, global classrooms are emerging requiring designers and faculties to have deep knowledge of theory and practice. This chapter provides a foundation for a set of related theories and practices that describe the strategies needed to be able to effectively deliver online in an increasingly global context to students in higher education course rooms, using constructivist learning theory as a guide as the disruptive technologies are deployed.

INTRODUCTION

Online and technology-based learning continues steady growth in education in the United States. According to Allen and Seaman (2014) the number of students taking at least one online course is up to 7.1 million, with the proportion of higher education students taking that one course at an all-time high of 33.5%. Online enrollment growth rate is at 6.1%, 66% of Chief Academic Officers see online as a critical growth strategy, and 74% believe that learning outcomes for students in online are at least as good as or superior to those in traditional face-to-face delivery (Allen & Seaman, 2014).

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Online and technology-based learning are recent terminologies that have been applied to the field of distance education. According to Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek (2009) *distance education* is difficult to define because (1) when the term is used it can apply to geography, time, and/or intellectual distance; (2) the term is often associated with instructional technology and instructional media; and (3) the constant and rapid changes in technology and instructional technology cause a need for ongoing redefinition. Simonson et al. (2007) used Schollosser and Simonson's 2006 definition and defined distance education as "institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors" (p. 7). Reisner and Dempsey (2007) take a broad look at defining distributed learning as

...any educational or training experience that uses a variety of means, including technology, enabled learning. It can provide for intentional and incidental learning outcomes and may be separated by time or distance, or both. Distributed learning includes, but is not limited to distance and online learning (p. 290).

The authors go on to say that in distance learning typically the learner is separated by both time and space from teacher and peers and in online learning the learner is limited to the use of internet-based technologies.

Gaspay, Dardan, and Legoretta (2008) acknowledged that the terms distance education and distance learning have been used interchangeably in the literature and applied to many and varied programs, technologies, media, providers, and audiences; however, typically certain characteristics are always included such as the separation of teacher and students in both space and time; learner control of the timing of receipt of the instruction: asynchronous communication between student and teacher mediated by print or other instructional media. Suffice it to say that the definitions of distance learning, distance education, distributed learning, distributed education, online learning, and eLearning will continue to evolve as the technology continues to change rapidly. The focus of this chapter is to describe distance education and the foundational communications strategies, instructional strategies, media strategies, and cultural dimension strategies that are available for fostering effective communications between teachers and learners in online graduate courses.

BACKGROUND

The evolution of distance learning (DL) has been a 19th, 20th, and 21st century phenomena starting with correspondence courses in the late 19th century and progressing to online learning in the late 20th and early 21st century (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007; Simonson et al, 2009). Following correspondence courses came broadcasting in the form of instructional radio and television. Broadcast technologies were followed by teleconferencing in forms such as interactive video conferencing with two-way audio and one-way video, teletraining using two-way audio, and two-way video conferencing. With the advent of the wide use of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s online learning, where the learner utilizes internet-based technologies, emerged. There is much debate over the differences in online learning versus eLearning, similar to the debate over the definition of distance learning and distance education.

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