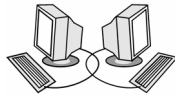


Chapter II

Critical Issues for Educators and Trainers: Developing a Philosophy of Education



Making Connections

In our last chapter, we explored the competencies and best practices needed to be successful in distance education. This chapter will continue to lay this foundation with a discussion of critical issues for educators and trainers. One of the first things to consider when creating or taking a new course at a distance is your own philosophy of education. Reviewing research studies can help educators, trainers, and learners understand the applications and practices that work in this setting. The concept of distance education as an innovation and the impact of technology in a global society are important as we consider the audience, access, and impact of distance education. Questions to guide your thoughts for this chapter are: What is the “no significant difference phenomenon” and how does research provide the theory to help guide the design, delivery, and evaluation of distance learning programs?

Introduction

Have you ever written a statement of educational philosophy? Sure, there are major schools of thought regarding philosophies: liberal, progressive, behaviorist, humanist, radical, and analytical (Elias & Merriam, 1980). But we are talking about your own personal philosophy. What do you believe about instructing and learning (in general)? These beliefs serve as the foundation for designing, delivering, and evaluating distance education courses and programs. We will return to this question in the application exercise at the end of the chapter.

We mentioned previously that being the instructional leader in a distance setting requires a unique bundle of competencies. For example, an instructor needs to know how to make the best use of the technologies available in order to personalize instruction and actively involve students in the learning experience. That is fundamentally our belief (philosophy). This belief is formed and strengthened by our research and the research of others.

Designing interactive components for instruction and feedback, ensuring that the audio/video components are working properly, and being comfortable with the technology that serves as the interface and connection between you and the distant learner are just a few of the skills needed for success in programs of distance education. For some, these knowledge, skills, and abilities (competencies) may be new. Consequently, distance education as a delivery system often may be perceived currently as being an innovation. Can it be? If so, why? A little background is in order. This background and perspective can also affect your philosophy.

Distance Education as an Innovation

Many universities and corporations are installing digital infrastructure to reach new audiences through distance education (Murphrey & Dooley, 2000). Specifically, continuing education, academic courses, and full degree programs are being developed to meet demand from individuals seeking nontraditional access. In the United States, 93 “cybercolleges,” or accredited institutions offering credit-granting courses online in 1993, were listed in *Peterson’s Guide*. In just seven years, there were 1,000 degree and certificate programs available from nearly 900 institutions (Peterson’s Lifelong Learning Group, 2000). According to the International Data Corporation, the number of people

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