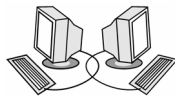


Chapter XIV

Future Trends

with

Chehrazade Aboukinane, Texas A&M University, USA



Making Connections

In this book, so far, we have covered five major sections: Foundations of Instruction and Learning at a Distance, Adult Learning Theory, Systematic Instructional Design, Technology Knowledge and Skills, and Administrative Issues. We based the chapters in these sections on seminal and current research, as well as practical applications in higher education and human resource development. The final chapter of this book explores future trends and directions in the field of distance education. We know that technology continues to increase in power while decreasing in cost, so it is clear that the technological capabilities will change. But will adult learning theory and instructional design principles also change? We stressed that these fundamental principles will remain constant and serve as the foundation for effective instruction and learning, but who knows what the future holds? What major changes will occur in the field of distance education 10, 20, or even 50 years from now?

Introduction

When we paused to reflect on possible futures for the field of distance education, we chose to begin with what other professionals predicted in their writings. In an article created for the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, Wilson (2001) stated that technologies are still reflections of us:

Through technologies and new ideas, we are always in the process of re-inventing ourselves. Technologies serve as mirrors of our values and aspirations, as well as our weaknesses and intractable problems. This truth about technologies underscores the importance of subjecting our plans to continuing scrutiny. Whenever possible, we want our technologies to reflect our best selves and our highest ambitions (p. 12).

With this in mind, we explored both the educational changes and the technological advances that will impact instructing and learning at a distance in the future.

Educational Trends

Education is changing as a result of distance learning applications and practices. Howell, Williams, and Lindsay (2003) conducted a literature review of distance education journals to compile a list of 32 trends that will impact distance learning. This list was specific to higher education but can be applied to other settings. The trends were clustered into student/enrollments trends, faculty trends, academic trends, technology trends, economic trends, and distance learning trends. Can you make a list, based on your own experience, of what some of the 32 trends are likely to be? Incidentally, you might identify some trends not mentioned that if you reviewed such a list of trends in five years or so, you could say, "I told you so!" To read the complete article to find out what others have predicted, check out the Internet Connection on the next page.

Howell, Williams, and Lindsay demonstrate the interrelationships of future trends that will impact distance education. Good (1999) also emphasized the

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