

Chapter 1

Understanding Transformative Learning in Online Education

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ABSTRACT

In these days when innovation and creativity have become crucial in online education programs and courses, higher education institutions should consider about the judgments of authorities about these novel activities, opinions of program development staff, and comparisons executed programs with its online education design. Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to discuss about how to develop and deliver transformative online education surrounded by egalitarian values of excellence in each stage of this action, and also global qualities which are vital in higher education. To integrate diverse and multicultural principles under any online education model in higher education, online learning should focus on the development, implementation and evaluation steps of its distance education system, and help all stakeholders decide whether they continue or terminate their online education.

INTRODUCTION

“The illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Alvin Toffler

One of the important movements of the human being is to develop the concepts which are defined by them. Learning is one of these concepts. After learning was defined in the history, its different

types, styles, approaches and theories have started to be analyzed within the time from behaviorist to constructivist approaches or from face-to-face to distance learning. It is possible to increase and multiply these examples.

As one of the learning theories, transformative learning is a growing theory in the learning area and it has been considered since the last quarter of the 20th century. Mezirow (2000, 1997, 1990, and 1978) has led this theory with his explanations. People are living in a world in which they reach the knowledge easily with the capability of

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mass media or interactive media like the Internet including web pages, blogs, wikis, emails or online communication environments in the first decade of 21st century. Since the huge and massive capability of the sources, it is not possible to attempt memorizing all of the desired knowledge for a person or learner. The transformative learning theory proposes another point of view to the prospective learners as explained with details in the following paragraphs and pages. Basically, this approach directs people or learners to transform and use their knowledge in their real lives.

Aside from transformative learning, another important concept has been growing up in the learning area: Online education as a spectrum of distance learning. Online education enables learners to learn in their locations and meet them with the global world within interactive synchronous or asynchronous communications. Distance and online education is always growing, because technological developments open new horizons for this learning environment. On the other hand, only a traditional or cutting edge technological infrastructure cannot provide itself for a successful learning environment. This technological infrastructure must be supported by a learning point of view like theories or approaches. This situation reveals that technology is an indispensable component of distance education; but it is not able to compose a successful distance education application. Transformative learning may be one of the approaches which can be used in any online education application.

This chapter presents here not only deals with improving transformative online education but comes to take hold of the most important political, societal, economic and moral issues of our time in higher education. Since online education has been made the education revolution accessible for everyone since the beginning of 1980s, the management, communication, pedagogy and learning, technology, and evaluation systems designs of transformative learning have been the most important issues of the higher education

community. In short, the main issue of this chapter is to explain and identify clearly transformative learning in online education. The changing conditions connected with this learning theory in this learning environment are also explained.

FACE OF CHANGE

The world around people has been changing day after day. These changing happen from lifestyles to cultural issues or from learning styles to paradigms. Transformative learning field is one of the changing environments in the world, because it can be connected to online education with the developments of technologic capabilities and pedagogical perspectives. Before explaining the changes related to transformative learning in online education, there is a need for explaining transformative learning. This situation composes a better understanding about transformative learning and changing conditions.

Transformative Learning

One of the meanings of transformation is a qualitative change (WordNet Search, 2009). It is possible to explain transformative learning relevant to qualitative changes in the lives of persons/learners. Cranton (2002) highlights that if individuals are open to alternatives in their viewpoints for some events, they can transform their ideas or behaviors for their experiences. Johnson (2008) indicates that a new and different way of looking at the environment produces the outcome of transformative learning. Wilcox (2009) explains when individuals are critically questioning themselves, their beliefs and expectations, they experience a deep shift in perspective which leads them a new way of being in the world and this is a spectrum of transformative learning. The examples given above, point out an important phenomenon of transformative learning. This way of learning deals with individuals. When individuals start to

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