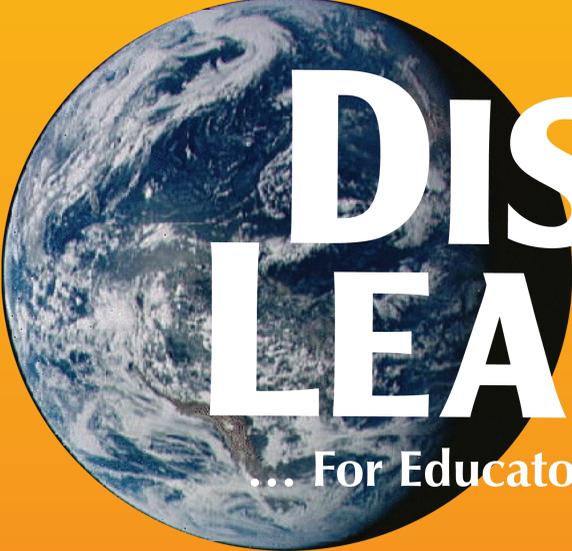


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DISTANCE LEARNING

... For Educators, Trainers, and Leaders

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- ▲ The Potential of Wireless Handheld Devices to Enhance Pediatric Curriculum
- ▲ Using Professional Development to Facilitate Faculty Participation in Distance Education
- ▲ Distance Learning in Belize: A Benefit for Youths and Adults
- ▲ U.S. Army and U.S. Navy Staff Officer Distance Education Programs
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Distance Learning, an official publication of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), is sponsored by the USDLA, by the Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University, and by Information Age Publishing. *Distance Learning* is published four times a year for leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the fields of distance learning, e-learning, telecommunications, and related areas. It is a professional magazine with information for those who provide instruction to all types of learners, of all ages, using telecommunications technologies of all types. Articles are written by practitioners for practitioners with the intent of providing usable information and ideas for readers. Articles are accepted from authors with interesting and important information about the effective practice of distance teaching and learning.

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Distance Learning is for leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the fields of distance learning, e-learning, telecommunications, and related areas. It is a professional journal with applicable information for those involved in providing instruction of all kinds to learners of all ages using telecommunications technologies of all types. Articles are written by practitioners for practitioners with the intent of providing usable information and ideas. Articles are accepted from authors with interesting and important information about the effective practice of distance teaching and learning. No page costs are charged authors, nor are stipends paid. Two copies of the issue with the author's article will be provided. Reprints will also be available.

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The Potential of Wireless Handheld Devices to Enhance Pediatric Curriculum

Kathleen Cahill and Rui Li

INTRODUCTION

For the past 5 years, we have seen rapid development of wireless handheld technologies, from Palm Pilot to iPod/iPad and smartphones. Inevitably, wireless handheld devices have become a common technology at work, school, and play. Almost all students at Saint Anselm College have some type of wireless handheld devices (WHD) that

they use frequently to communicate and socialize. The quick growth and popularity of WHD helps bring an interesting new idea to our faculty members. Can we use wireless handheld devices in teaching? What is the potential of this technology tool to assist students' learning? How can we integrate the use of wireless handheld devices into our curriculum?



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The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate students' perceptions on wireless handheld devices in learning and the effectiveness of using wireless handheld devices to enhance pediatric curriculum.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WHAT ARE WIRELESS HANDHELD DEVICES?

A wireless handheld device is a pocket-sized computing device, typically has a display screen with touch input or a miniature keyboard, can connect to the Internet, has plenty of storage for electronic documents, as well as capabilities to host various applications.

A commonly used wireless handheld device is the personal digital assistant (PDA). PDAs have come a long way since the release of the original Palm Pilot in 1996. Today, PDAs offer a range of enhanced features, including color touch screen, audio capabilities, web browsing, operating system, media player, and synchronization.

During the past few years, we have also seen the rise of the iPod Touch, the iPad, smartphones, as well as tablet computers. Their convenient multitouch graphic user interface has won over enormous number of customers and has caught teachers' attention for its potential educational uses. We have seen a dramatic increase of iPod Touch and iPhone ownership among our students, especially our freshmen student population.

HANDHELD DEVICE AS A COGNITIVE TOOL

Computers and related technologies sometimes are viewed as merely a delivery medium that students can learn *from*. This aspect is important. However, in this perspective, the technology is playing a rather passive role and does not engage learners in active learning. It is becoming increas-

ingly clear that another aspect, which pertains to what students can do *with* the technology, needs to be considered by the educator. Technology should offer learners an intellectual partnership that transcends the limitation of human cognition, such as limitations to memory, thinking, and problem solving (Pea, 1985).

Computer-based cognitive tools, thus, are important to this way of conceptualizing relationships between users and computers. Lajoie (1993) grouped computer-based cognitive tools into four categories: tools that can support cognitive processing; tools that can share the cognitive load; tools that can engage learners in activities that would normally be out of reach; and tools that can support learners' hypotheses testing. We believe that the wireless handheld device, due to its organized and immediate-access feature, can function as a cognitive tool to support and facilitate learning.

COGNITIVE LOAD

Cognitive load refers to the total amount of mental activity imposed on working memory at an instance in time (Cooper, 1998). Cognitive load researchers are interested in measures that can be taken to free working memory load so that more capacity can be made available for actual learning that facilitates schema construction. Our investigation focused on extraneous cognitive load, which refers to the demand imposed on working memory by the manner in which materials are presented and the activities required of the learner.

Students in the Child Health Nursing (NU341) course have to deal with a huge amount of clinical information that not only is impossible for them to memorize but also imposes extra load on their working memory. In the past, books serve as a tool to share this cognitive load. With the development of technology, we believe wireless handheld device can share

learner's extraneous cognitive load. With the use of wireless handheld device, learners can have access to several books at the same time on a small piece of equipment without switching books, flipping pages, and carrying heavy books. Information is also presented in an organized manner that facilitates content access. As a result, learners' extraneous cognitive load can be reduced and their cognitive capabilities can be freed to focus on learning the materials rather than looking for and memorizing the materials.

COGNITIVE PROCESSING

There are certain aspects of cognitive processing that we as human beings do best and other aspects of cognitive processing that technologies do best. Therefore, computer-based cognitive tools should be designed so that "learners should be responsible for recognizing and judging patterns of information and then organizing it, while the computer should perform calculations, store information, and retrieve it on the learner's command" (Jonassen & Reeves, 1996, pp. 697-698). Learners should be engaged in more meaningful cognitive processing, instead of reproductive processing.

For example, all the clinical data are saved and presented in an organized and accessible manner in the WHD. Thus, learners do not have to perform lower level cognitive processing tasks such as memorizing and organizing. These immediate-access and organized features provide learners a solid base to start higher level cognitive processing such as analyzing and evaluating, right at the field.

HANDHELD DEVICE IN NURSING EDUCATION

Wireless handheld technology use in nursing education began after the introduction of the first PDA in 1996. Nurse practitioner programs were the first to

incorporate PDA use for students' use (Koeniger & Donohue, 2008). Incorporating technology solutions into the daily practice of nursing has now become a part of every nurse's role in practice. PDA's or WHD give the students access to information at the bedside and has the potential to improve the quality and safety of care, thus reducing adverse effects and improving patient outcomes (Farrell & Rose, 2008). Students need to evaluate and synthesize information and apply it for their patients' benefit (Billings, 2006).

Several North American universities have implemented WHD into a range of nursing programs (Huffstutler, Wyatt, & Wright 2002; Miller et al., 2005; Rice, 2003; White et al, 2005). WHD have been shown to enhance learning in the clinical environment by the rapid and efficient acquisition of information that can be assessed for patient care. In addition, leadership skills and confidence is improved by evidence-based information in real time as required by the student (White et al., 2005).

The Child Health Nursing (NU341) course focuses on the care of the child in the context of the family. Principles of growth and development, health promotion, child advocacy, and communication are integrated throughout the course. A holistic framework is used to critically examine the biological, psychological sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual variables that influence the child and family's response to alterations in health status. Clinical practice takes place in hospitals and community settings such as schools and child clinics. Nursing informatics are integrated throughout the course.

METHODOLOGY

Participants were 41 students from seven intact Child Health Nursing (NU341) classes at a 4-year Catholic college in the northeastern part of the United States.

These classes shared similar demographics: about 94% were Caucasian, 2% were Hispanic, 2% were Black, and 2% were Asian. In addition, 90% of the students were female, and 10% of the students were male.

Six PDAs were purchased for students in the pediatric clinical rotation in the spring of 2008. All PDAs are preloaded with Unbound Medicine software and five textbooks. During the first class session, students were given the PDA along with a brief tutorial. Students were required to bring the PDA to each clinical experience in order to access information on their pediatric client's diseases and medication ordered. Beginning in spring 2010, iPod Touches were also added to the study. A survey was administered at the end of the semester. Interviews were conducted randomly among participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

To understand the effects of handheld device use in learning, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The triangulation of the quantitative data and qualitative data provided a more complete picture of the learning impact.

To answer the first research question, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through surveys and interviews. There were two parts of the survey. First, students were asked to rate their general technology use, efficiency level, and attitudes toward technology use. The second part of the survey focused on their perceived impact of wireless handheld device on learning as well as its ease of use. At the end of the course, the instructor interviewed students and asked them to reflect on their learning experience using the wireless handheld devices. A range of questions was asked on attitudes, ease of use, problems, perceived efforts, and effectiveness. Some sample questions included "what do you think of the wireless hand-

held devices?" "Is it helpful? How easy was it to access information for medications? If so, how?" Interviews were conducted with 50% of the students randomly chosen from the treatment group.

To answer the second research question, quantitative data were collected through course final exam. This instrument consisted of 100 multiple choice questions covering topics included in the course. It was used to gather information on the degree to which students acquired the pediatric nursing concepts taught in the course. The instrument was administered as posttest only.

RESULTS

In answering the first question "What are students' perceptions on wireless handheld devices in learning? What are their general attitudes?", survey and interviews were conducted to determine students' attitudes and perceived effectiveness of handheld devices. The survey results indicated that 91% of the students agreed that WHD were easy to use; 88% of the students believed WHD made their learning mobile, more interactive, and interesting; 76% of students indicated that WHD helped them organize their learning; 85% of students agreed that WHD allowed them to focus on key content; and 56% of students believed that WHD helped them learn and score better.

Three major themes emerged from the interview data analysis. (1) WHD provided a quick and easy way to look up drug and disease information, along with pathophysiology of the disease. Students indicated that, prior to administering medications, it was easy to look up the required mg/kg information on pediatric drugs. (2) WHD helped them answer questions that patients and their family might have. Students pointed out that it was easy to answer parents' questions, as they could instantly find the information without leaving the patient's room. (3) WHD

Table 1
Two-Way Unpaired *t* Test Analysis of Performance Score on Treatment Condition
(Online Database/Paper-Based Database/Nondatabase)

	Treatment Group	Control Group
<i>Mean</i>	82.83	77.6
<i>SD</i>	4.47	7.36
<i>SEM</i>	0.82	1.34
<i>N</i>	30	30

helped them determine abnormal lab values. Student could easily look up normal vs. abnormal lab values quickly and accurately.

In answering the second question, "Does the use of wireless handheld devices have an impact on learning and enhance the pediatric curriculum?", a two-way unpaired *t* test was conducted to determine if the scores were significantly different between the control group and the treatment group. The results revealed a significant difference in performance scores between the two groups: $p < 0.0015$ (see Table 1).

The results indicated that the treatment group (wireless handheld group) scored significantly higher than the control group (no-wireless-handheld group), $p < 0.0015$.

CONCLUSION

As wireless handheld devices have played an increasingly critical role in nursing practice, it is important for nursing educators to adopt this technology for use in their classrooms to prepare students for their career. Our study shows that the use of WHD has enhanced the learning of students in the Child Health Nursing (NU341) course in both the classroom and the clinical component of the course. Student's expressed positive attitudes towards the use of WHD in both the classroom and the clinical area.

Students indicated that the use of WHD made it easier for them to answer parents'

questions, determine safe administration of medication, and to recognize normal vs. abnormal lab values. Students who used WHD in the course also performed significantly better in the final exam portion of the course than students who didn't use WHD. We conclude that the use of WHDs in nursing education enhances the student's abilities to quickly access information that they need to care for the pediatric patient.

Based on the encouraging results from this study, the college plans to extend the WHD program across the nursing department to include other areas such as health assessments and professional nursing. Further study will include a larger sample size and incorporate expanded use of learning applications in iPod Touch and smart phone platforms.

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"BASED ON THE ENCOURAGING RESULTS FROM THIS STUDY, THE COLLEGE PLANS TO EXTEND THE WIRELESS HANDHELD DEVICES PROGRAM ACROSS THE NURSING DEPARTMENT TO INCLUDE OTHER AREAS SUCH AS HEALTH ASSESSMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL NURSING."

Using Professional Development to Facilitate Faculty Participation in Distance Education

Richard Ihde

INTRODUCTION

Within any organization the one thing that remains constant is change and the need for change. Institutions and individuals must remain adaptable or their survival will never be guaranteed (Learning and Teaching Support Network, 2003). Educational institutions are a prime example of a new paradigm being implemented in the form

of distance education. It is becoming a go-to strategy with the sole purpose of creating greater student opportunities; thus educators have an inherent need to prepare for that change (Hoehn & Redline, 2005).

Hall and Hord (2006) describe change as, “a process through which people and organizations move as they gradually come to understand and become skilled and competent in the use of new ways” (p. 4). Professional development sessions can directly apply to everyday concerns of educators and prove to be extremely effective in the change process. Most importantly, these new skills and concepts resulting from targeted development sessions can then be taken directly to the online environment and result in improved student learning (Holland, 2005).



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FACILITATING CHANGE

It is important to realize that many faculty members tend to resist change and see a possible threat to existing values and practices (Learning and Teaching Support Network, 2003). Even when change is a recognized solution to a problem and is well documented, educators resist losing something they personally value (Hoehn & Redline, 2005). The need for faculty sup-

port is especially critical when implementing a distance education program. Jones and Moller (2002) observe that, "Distance education programs that lack the support of a critical mass of college faculty are likely to struggle to maintain viability in today's competitive academic marketplace. The success of an online program therefore is the direct result of the positive support of faculty who lend their energy, intellect and creative energies to the process" (Jones & Moller, 2002, p. 12).

An examination of the process of change and the successful management of change must be approached carefully and skillfully. The personal side of change must be addressed first and foremost in order to allow change and innovation to occur and be adopted successfully. Assessing individual concerns about change can lead to more successful workshops, one-on-one sessions, and even more effective strategic planning. The personal side of change is really where the process must begin (Hall & Hord, 2006).

The process that accompanies change has been explored in depth by Rogers (2003) in his book *Diffusion of Innovations*, in what has become the quintessential volume on change. He describes five stages in what he terms the innovation decision process. The beginning stage of that process can be entered when an individual becomes aware of an innovation. Entrance into the first stage can also be facilitated by a change agent who points out the, "existence of desirable new ideas" (p. 172). The change agent thus creates a case for needing change. The fact that an individual now has been made aware of this need for change creates a situation in which he or she realizes a need exists resulting in a state of dissatisfaction or frustration.

Rogers (2003) points out that this perceived need means the process of adoption can then begin to take place, "Thus knowledge of the existence of an innovation can create a motivation to learn more about it and ultimately adopt it (p. 172). What typi-

cally follows, he states, is an information seeking and processing sequence through which an individual seeks to reduce any uncertainty about the innovation by determining advantages and disadvantages. Thus the management of change must begin with the potential adopters being made aware of the innovation and the advantages which can come with making the change.

RECENT EXAMPLE

I recently conducted a short, 4-hour seminar for interested faculty at Arkansas Tech covering the basics of designing an online course. A total of 35 members attended two sessions covering both theory and practical application. As a matter of personal interest I decided to conduct a small, unofficial research project to verify Rogers' assertions. I used a 10-question survey which I administered before and after the sessions. The questions were categorized for purposes of analysis into what I determined were basically administrative and technical issues and were designed to allow the indication of concern in certain areas. The questions are listed below:

1. I have a very limited knowledge of distance education.
2. I am concerned about how distance education affects my students.
3. I would like to know what distance education resources are available at ATU.
4. I am concerned about my ability to develop and teach an online course.
5. I am concerned about non-academic issues associated with online courses.
6. I would like to try developing an online course with some assistance.
7. I would like to know how my current role would change if I teach an online course.
8. I would like some input as to how distance education is being done at ATU.

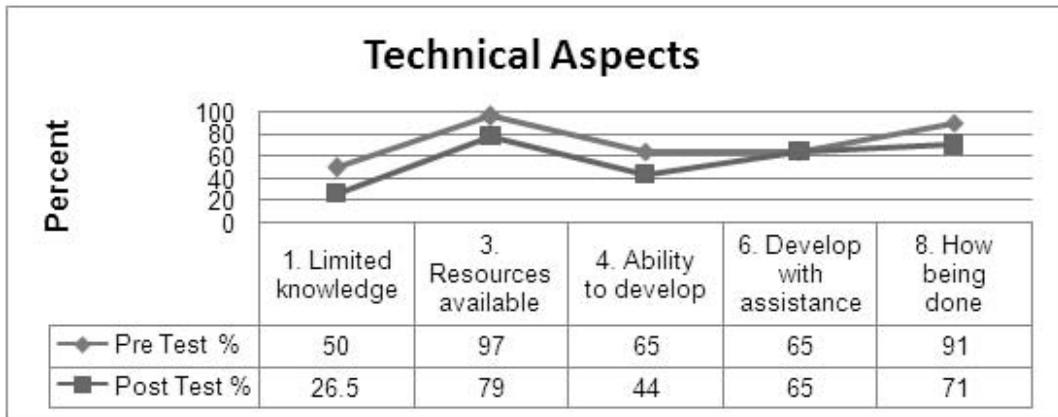


Figure 1. Comparison of pretest and posttest participant technically oriented concerns.

9. I am more concerned with my current teaching duties and responsibilities.
10. I am not very concerned about doing distance education at this time.

Participants were asked to rank the importance of each statement using a Likert-type scale with 1 indicating *total irrelevance*, 2 or 3 indicating *not true of me now*, 4 or 5 indicating *somewhat true of me now*, and 6 or 7 indicating *very true of me now*. Questions 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8 were given the technical designation while questions 2, 5, 7, 9, and 10 were designated as administrative in nature. As a matter of convenience, I used only the last two responses of somewhat true of me now and very true of me now to simplify the data. In looking over the responses, this seemed reasonable since the lower end of the scale seemed to mirror the upper end. That is, if a majority of very true responses were given then a small number of responses were indicated in the not true of me now or somewhat true of me now selections. They seemed to balance each other.

The results are shown in Figures 1 and 2. In the technical questions, as shown in Figure 1, it is clear that posttest results indicated a clear drop in the concern levels indicated in the pretest results. As an example, in the before scenario 50% indi-

cated a limited knowledge of distance education while the after scenario indicated a drop to 26.5%. The interesting question was number 6, in which no change was shown when asked if they would like to develop an online course with some assistance. Before and after the presentation, their resolve remained the same.

Looking at the questions categorized as administrative concerns, shows similar drops in their concern levels from pretest to posttest. Looking at question 2 for example, the concern about how the implementation of an online class would affect students indicated a clear drop after the session.

CONCLUSION

The path leading to a possible resolution of this type of concern, according to Hall and Hord (2006), is one in which the change process can begin with an intervention. Defining this term they state, "In the context of the change process, any action or event that influences the individuals involved or expected to be involved in the process is an intervention" (p. 186). The need for interventions, they state, revolves around a simple premise, "Successful implementation of new policies, programs, processes, practices and even new person-

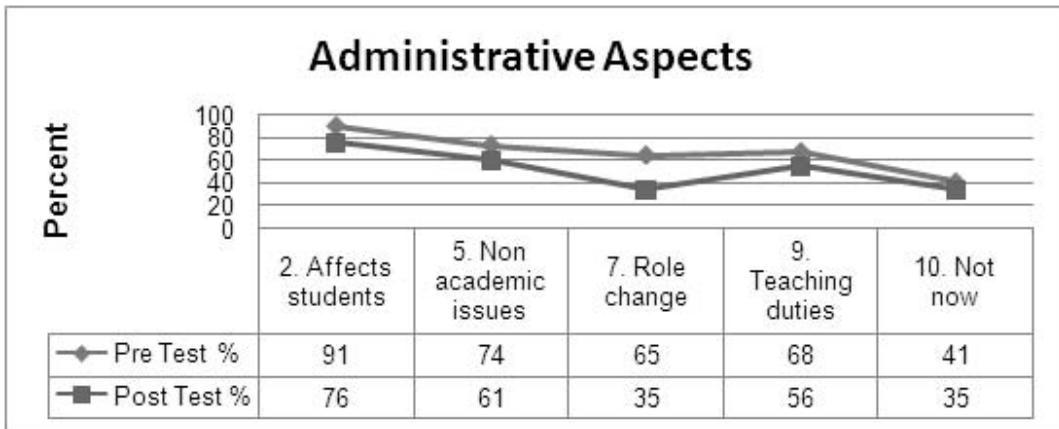


Figure 2. Comparison of pretest and posttest participant administratively oriented concerns.

nel does not just happen” (p. 186). The interventions selected, they state, should have as its guiding principle that learning about the innovation is the ultimate goal, “Since learning new information, skills, and behaviors is at the heart of any change project, facilitators would do well to keep this basic premise in mind as they consider, design and deliver the interventions necessary for change process success” (p. 186).

The use of something as simple as a 4-hour professional development seminar can yield results when attempting to facilitate change. Summing up this experience as simply as possible, I would say that helping potential online instructors develop new knowledge and skills is the best way to develop the buy-in needed to develop a successful distance education program.

Thus the management of change must begin with the potential adopters being made aware of the innovation and the advantages which can come with making the change. Facilitating change by demonstrating to faculty members the innovation will create better opportunities for students ultimately means that, according to

Hall and Hord (2006), faculty members must become students themselves, “learning is the basis of and the corollary to change” (p. 191).

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Distance Learning in Belize

A Benefit for Youths and Adults

Yvonne Palma

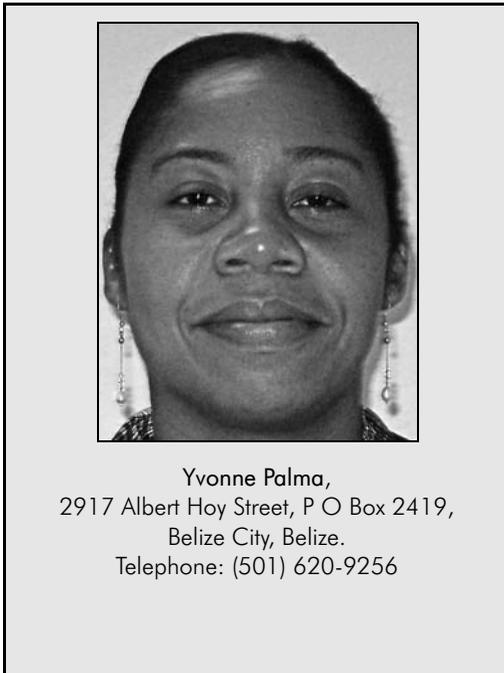
In today's changing world with its economic challenges, addressing the needs of underprivileged youths and adults becomes a growing challenge for any small nation such as Belize. Belize, a Caribbean country in Central America, is the only English-speaking country in the region. With a diversity of people, sites, and a democratically elected government, Belize has a population of 310,000 (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2007).

DEMOGRAPHICS OF BELIZE

As a developing nation, Belize suffers from many societal ailments, such as youths leaving school early with limited opportu-

nity for meaningful employment, and adults who are unskilled and unable to occupy job positions that are available to sustain their families. The problem of crime starts with youths dropping out of school; poor adults received little education, have big families, and are unable to meet their expenses (Crawford, 2010). A survey of the *Police Notebook* (Belize Police Department, 2010) shows crime and violence on the rise, and the age of criminals being youths 13 and 17 years and early 20s.

In 2007, the unemployment rate among youths was 24%. While female unemployment rate was 32.8% of 41.8% participation rate; males were 18.7% of a participation rate of 77.5% (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2007). The concentration of unemployment, according to the Statistical Institute of Belize (2007), has been in the rural area of the country, with high rates of unemployment recorded in the northern and southern districts. The highest unemployment rate for females was in the southern district. In 2009, the highest unemployment was concentrated in the northern district. This was credited to the decline in the sugar industry located in the northern districts and the economic downturn (Statistical Institute of Belize, January 2010)



PROFILE OF THE BELIZEAN STUDENT

Belize, aware of the global environment, is focused on guaranteeing quality education as a basic human right to all through "allocating public funding to schools equitably by funding schools on a per student basis" and "free tuition policy. We know that

many of the students who do not attend secondary school because of poverty and limited access (United Democratic Party, 2008). Through the establishment of these policies, more students will have access to a quality education.

According to the Ministry of Education (2008), of 42,000 students who begin elementary school, 38,000 transition to secondary school, and 20% drop out of secondary school. According to Ingels, Chen, and Owings (2005) students perceive positive school experiences based upon the attitude and skills of their teachers, the degree of safety they feel within their school, their perception of victimization at a school, their perception of school rules, the importance they place on good grades and their reason for being in school. The secondary schools in the country with the highest student enrollment are the urban areas (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The Belizean student lives with mother and father, father, mother, stepfathers or stepmothers, relatives, on their own, boarding with boarders, grandparents or grandparent. The parents of these students have varying levels of education ranging from primary level education to postgraduate degrees. Based on the availability of distance education within the country, more and more parents are returning to school to pursue higher education (E. J. Lopez, personal communication, April 20, 2010).

DISTANCE EDUCATION: A POSSIBLE SOLUTION?

In attempting to address the needs of youths' and adults' unemployment or underemployment, Belize has over the years recognized that the traditional system of education no longer meets the needs of these learners. According to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (n.d.-a), conventional education systems are poorly prepared to deal with the challenges and

opportunities that are present in the emerging information and communication technologies and little has been done to address the growing problem of social fragmentation, human frustration and disempowerment, cultural dislocation, and technological alienation (p. 2). According to Adaji, Salawu, and Adeoye (2008), distance education provides avenues for higher education for vast under-privileged population.

According to Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek (2009) distance education is institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources and instruction. Furthermore, research has found no significant difference between distance education and traditional education in terms of student achievement.

According to E. Raymond (personal communication, April 21, 2010) learners in Belize have been participating in distance learning since 1964. This was in the form of examinations for teachers, where teachers attending the teachers' training school in Belize take qualifying examinations through correspondence. Two-way communication was between student and examination authority through postal services. Students from Belize also completed qualifying subject specific examinations from London's Royal Society of Arts and General Certificate of Education in ordinary and advance levels. Teachers were also able to obtain professional teachers' certification, advancing to the doctorate level through correspondence. Today, these examinations can be taken at a distance online, or via postal and courier services.

Telesecundaria. In 1999, the Ministry of Education through technical assistance from the Mexican government as part of the EDUSAT project embarked on a distance learning initiative. According to Ministry of Education (2009) the EDUSAT

project was to establish secondary education through satellite and television throughout remote parts of the country of the country, to provide secondary education opportunities to students who otherwise would not receive the opportunity. Technical assistance from Mexico included the training of facilitators in the methodology and use of course materials, technicians to provide equipment support, donation of satellite dishes and televisions, as well as course materials for students. The telesecundaria was implemented in the northern district of Corozal at Escuela Secundaria Mexico because the language of the materials was in Spanish, and people in the northern districts were considered more competent in speaking Spanish and hence would immediately benefit from the training (D. Eck, personal communication, 2009).

Telesecundaria, which was launched in Mexico in 1968, provided lower secondary school learning with television support to remote and small communities; lessons corresponding to Grades 7 to 9 were transmitted live, through open public channels to television sets placed in distant classrooms where students listened and took notes in the presence of a teacher (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n.d.-b, p. 2). This program was operational from 2005 to June 2008. After being informed of the program being discontinued, the Ministry of Education conducting an investigation to determine the circumstances that led to the program being discontinued; upon completion of the investigation the explanation received from the principal was the need for additional classroom space (A. Castillo, personal communication, April 20, 2010). Although this program was accessed by many youths and adult learners, training time for the program was Monday to Friday between the hours of 8 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. The time factor also allowed for fewer individuals to access the program and restricted the benefit of utilizing existing

space and available teachers. Although the signal could be accessed in any part of the country, the program was never expanded to other areas within the country. An additional factor may have been language, as the language of course materials and instruction was in Spanish.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Technical and vocational education and training has been recognized as an important element in a nation's development. According to Caribbean Secretariat (1990) TVET is looked upon by developing countries as "a vehicle for the development of marketable skills as an engine for development" (p. 1). As a measure of preparing countries within the region to become more competitive in the global economy, TVET is called upon to help unemployed young people, upgrade existing workers' competencies, reduce the burden of higher education, provide qualified labors to attract foreign investment, and any investment in human development draws return on the individual as well as the society as a whole (CARICOM, 2001). Individuals will benefit from a better career, increased earnings, and a better quality of life. What benefits the society is a skilled-workforce that enables global competitiveness and economic growth.

In an effort to expand and improve TVET in the country of Belize, and provide opportunities for its people, the government of Belize invested \$4.4 million into the establishment and development of Institutes for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ITVETs) (Caribbean Development Bank, 2001). The Institutes for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ITVET) are government of Belize skills training institutions that provide training for employment. These institutions are located in each of the seven districts of Belize and

provide training based on employment training needs in each district.

Stann Creek ITVET is located in the southern district of Stann Creek. The institution provides training in the area of tourism and hospitality, automotive, masonry, carpentry, and electricity. The main industries in the district are tourism, hospitality, and citrus. New resorts are being built in the district, requiring persons skilled in masonry, carpentry, and electrical installation. Once the resorts have been built, skilled persons will be required to provide services in tourism and hospitality. Automotive training was provided to address the needs of the citrus industry. According to S. W. Bowman (personal communication, February 26, 2010) work has began to expand training to secondary school students within the Stann Creek district. He hopes to provide more employment opportunities for the students with the inclusion of a TVET program as part of their training.

Similar to Stann Creek ITVET, Belize ITVET provides similar training with the addition of customized training to specific groups based on request. The institute provides customized training for the Belize Defense Force, along with courses offered at night in the area of air conditioning and refrigeration and auto body repair. Further, request for training has been received from several different organizations, and these programs are customized programs (K. Ellis, personal communication, March 11, 2010).

Orange Walk ITVET, located in the district of Orange Walk, provides training in the area of building construction trades, computer repair, and automotive repair. Orange Walk ITVET focuses on preparing trainees to become competent and excel in the Belize National Vocational Qualification examination. Beyond the entry level program offerings, the institution has moved to offering training in level two, which prepares employees to perform tasks requiring some level of autonomy.

The other four institutions provide similar training with the inclusion of training in the agricultural area in the Toledo district.

According to Bowman (2010, January) the enrollment for Stann Creek ITVET has experienced a decline in the student population. Twelve trainees dropped, out leaving 58 participating in training. Toledo ITVET has 35 trainees enrolled in the programs, which is very small to justify the expense in operating the programs. Bowman (2010, January) attributes the decline in enrollment to financial problems experienced by the trainee in meeting the cost of the program.

DISTANCE LEARNING IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

As the economic situation of individuals continue to decline, the management of the various institutions recognizes the need to expand and increase access for persons who would otherwise be unable to access training. Distance learning in technical and vocational education can allow for underprivileged youths and adults to obtain skills that will make them employable. Although presently the institutions have only computers and Internet, with regards to technological capabilities to provide distance learning using telecommunications systems, the process of trying to provide training for youths and adults in other locations is considered a priority. Belize ITVET began implementing its first distance learning initiative in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye (K. Ellis, personal communication April 20, 2010). This town is approximately 45 miles outside of the city. This initiative provides training to electricians who are unable to travel to Belize City to attend classes. Students will be able to perform the practical aspect of the training by conducting installations within the workplace. This initiative falls within the category of traditional distance learning program that used postal services, and the EDUSAT concept, though without the

technology of satellite and television. For the institution, this is a start and the intention is to expand the distance education program to more individuals through the use of the Internet and other communications technology. There are many open software and available support web-based sites that can be accessed by purchasing licenses or obtaining permission to use the resources.

It is anticipated that programs will be expanded to include students attending secondary schools within the district; satellite centers located in smaller communities would be able to transmit the course using satellite dish and television, as well as videoconferencing and the Internet. (S. W. Bowman, personal communication, February 26, 2010). Distance learning programs will expand opportunities for other students as well as for students at the Orange Walk ITVET (A. Gomez, personal communication, March 11, 2010). The advantage will be that students will be able to take course in programs not offered at that specific ITVET. With distance learning programs offered through the ITVETs, the youths and adults who are ultimately the clients that the ITVET targets will benefit from such an initiative. This will facilitate quality skills training being provided with the introduction of communications technology to persons who would otherwise be unable to access training offered using technology. According to Moore and Tait (2002), many countries have developed vocational and other types of short-cycle colleges, sometimes spanning both secondary and postsecondary levels to provide training to adults and youths. In this sector there are many examples of open and distance learning programmes that may be useful to the ITVETs.

A COORDINATED EFFORT

In order to be successful, the plans and efforts of the ITVETs in providing distance education to clients requires coordination

and funding. A distance learning division within the TVET system is required. The division will offer individuals the opportunity that would otherwise be inaccessible to them within their own location through a system of telecommunications and internet technology. This initiative will not only provide programs that will be offered through the distance unit, but also allow existing customers from the traditional face to face division, local community, and other targeted groups to access training from the convenience of their own location. According to Simonson et al. (2009), the unavailability of technical support creates a major barrier that discourages many faculties from teaching online course. The need to offer the relevant support to the institutions will also be required, and that will require the Ministry of Education to invest in infrastructure development and teacher training.

BENEFIT TO YOUTHS AND ADULTS

According to the Commonwealth of Learning (n.d.), benefits of distance education include overcoming problems of physical distance, solving time or scheduling issues for learners and schools, expanding limited number of places available for learners, and it makes the best use of few teachers. In 2008, the Ministry of Education began a subsidy program, in which students entering secondary schools and those entering the second year receive subsidies to assist with cost of school. In 2010, students completing elementary schools from the Stann Creek and Toledo districts were automatically entitled to subsidies to offset the cost of schooling (A. Genitty, personal communication, April 22, 2010). With the availability of this program, underprivileged students living in remote areas will have the opportunity to obtain relevant materials required for schooling face-to-face or at a distance.

With its small population and high unemployment rate, Belize can benefit tre-

mendously from distance education. The ratification of the free labour movement among Caribbean countries, now more than ever, highlights the need for Belizean youths and adults to become skilled, certified, and competent to meaningfully participate in employment. The vast amount of capital investment made by the government of Belize into infrastructure development in technical and vocational education and training can be further expanded with additional investments to include the development of distance learning initiatives. This will allow for the participation in distance education of more underprivileged youths and adults throughout the country.

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U.S. Army and U.S. Navy Staff Officer Distance Education Programs

Lawrence L. Gruszecki

In a recent copy of *Army*, the magazine of the Association of the United States Army, Lieutenant General (Retired) James M. Dubik paints a grim picture of the education needs of Army's officers. Dubik warns that, "The current leader-to-led ratio is too low for what the Army is being asked to do now and in the future" (Dubik, 2010, p. 22).

America's continual and increasing involvement in areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait is creating a demand for a particular type of officer, the staff officer.

Within these areas of operation, America's military forces are molded into "joint forces" to meet combat, intelligence, logistics, and civil affairs requirements in these countries. Additionally, U.S. military forces are engaged with the forces of other countries creating multinational headquarters. Even more demand is created by reorganizing large units into numerous smaller units. These units are represented by the brigade combat team, which consists of approximately 4,000 personnel (Brigade, n.d.).

Dubik notes that the leader-to-led ratio in the Army alone has steadily risen over the past 20 years. The interaction of America's four military branches, interaction of their forces with the military of other countries, and a greater quantity of smaller units has created a need for more officers. He advises that well educated and experienced leaders are presently required. To meet these needs, Dubik further identifies the need for these officers to attend the necessary military schools to be prepared to perform as leaders and staff officers.

Staff officers plan and control military operations as well as provide administrative, intelligence, and logistic support. An historical statistic from Desert Storm suggests that the staff officers of the United States military can be quite effective. Realizing that political issues and operational concerns are not exactly parallel, the comparison is nevertheless provocative. From



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1963 to 1964, the U.S. military transported only 184,000 personnel to Vietnam. As a contrast, in preparation for Desert Storm, 184,000 personnel were moved into Saudi Arabia in less than 90 days (Swain, 1994).

One may find staff officers of many different ranks ranging from lieutenant to colonel. The level of staff officer of particular concern is at the O-4 field grade rank. In the Army, the O-4 field grade officers are majors and the Navy's O-4 field grade is lieutenant commander. These officers are also referred to as middle grade officers.

The examination of the Army and Navy officer education program for these officers presents an interesting contrast based on their operations. As is seen in various media, Army operations are conducted on and above land and the Navy's operations that are principally conducted on the seas and oceans of the world. Regardless of the geographic location, the work of field grade staff officers is an integral component.

The Army's field grade staff officer education program is the Command and General Staff College and is located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The Navy's field grade officer program is the College of Naval Command and Staff and is taught at the Naval War College located in Newport, Rhode Island.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff's Office of Professional Military Education Programs determines the curriculum of both colleges, as well as the Marine and Air Force colleges. The Joint Chiefs of Staff prescribe policies, guidelines, and procedures, which are followed by each service. As the college of each branch of service teaches a common curriculum, the graduates of the Joint Military Education Program Phase I are imbued with the same knowledge.

The Joint Military Professional Education curriculum is required by the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and established by the Skelton Committee on Armed Services in 1989. The Goldwater-Nichols legislation stressed the

interoperability of the services. The completion of the Command and General Staff College or the College of Naval Command grants an officer a Joint Military Professional Education Phase I diploma. (Joint Professional Military Education, n.d.).

Both colleges strictly follow the Joint Military Education Program curriculum and undergo accreditation reviews by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Additionally, each college presents the curriculum from their service's point of view. Regardless of approach, both colleges educate and train officers to be adaptive leaders, capable of critical thinking, and prepared to plan and conduct operations within their service, other services, governmental agencies, and multinational environments (J. Hickey, personal communication, July 20, 2010; T. Kallman, personal communication, July 26, 2010).

Approximately 950 active officers are chosen per year to attend the resident courses at Fort Leavenworth or the Naval War College. However, many more field grade officers compose the ranks of the Army and Navy. As Dubik indicates, officers should be afforded the education that will allow them to be effective staff officers in many different types of assignments.

To reach all field grade officers, both colleges project a demanding and vibrant non-resident distance education program to the balance of the Army and Navy personnel. Active, Reserve, and National Guard officers as well as officers of sister branches and senior Federal employees can earn the Joint Military Education Program Phase I diploma through these distance education programs. As an example, the Command and General Staff College extends their program to approximately 6,000 officers each year who are at duty locations around the world (Command and General Staff School Mission, 2010).

The Command and General Staff College organizes the Joint Military Education Program Phase I curriculum into the Intermediate Level Education Core and the

Advanced Operations and Warfighting Course. The Intermediate Level Education Core course is composed of six components, which account for approximately 300 hours of classroom instruction with a focus on the spectrum of operations which the Army currently accomplishes along with warfighting. Instruction begins with the foundations component. Topics range from creative thinking and problem solving to topics as international security environment, leader development, operational law, and civil-military relations. The strategic environment component follows and addresses topics as strategic concepts, national security, national strategies, strategic communications, and strategic logistics. The doctrine component provides instruction in Joint Operations with operational design, operational art, and battle command. Joint operations instruction continues with Joint Functions component, which studies topics as the command and control of forces from sister services when they operate together. The planning component specializes in the understanding of the joint operations planning process and its application.

The Command and General Staff Advanced Operations Course is adapted to the officer's functional area as Infantry or Communications. The instruction is divided into components over a period of four months (Command and General Staff School Mission, July 2010).

The College of Naval Command and Staff Joint Military Education Program Phase I curriculum is organized into three core courses. Instruction begins with the National Security and Decision Making course. Instruction provides an insight into command and staff decision-making. Topics include political science, leadership, psychology, management, anthropology, and other related disciplines. Strategy and War is the next course. It is an analytical study of war, which focuses on the methods to achieve global and multi-national interactions, strategic and political inter-

ests, and goals. The Joint Military Operations course addresses the Joint Operational Planning Process to plan the employment of U.S. military forces across the range of joint and combined military operations, prepare military officers to participate in joint operational planning and to advise senior commanders (Academics, n.d.).

The Army and Navy nonresident Joint Military Education Programs provide face-to-face classes, online, and compact disk instructional formats. They represent a tremendous effort to provide high quality instruction to officers across the United States as well locations around the world. The Army and Navy nonresident programs also fulfill Dubik's concern for developing and maintaining well-educated officers.

The Total Army School System is the overarching administrative organization for the Army. The Total Army School System prescribes and supports all levels of education for recruits to general officers provided by the Army (Army Regulation 350-18, 2007). The Command and General Staff College is included in the Total Army School System.

The Army projects face-to-face instruction to nonresident students in six regions of the United States. A training division serves each region. A seventh training division provides support to personnel in Germany, Japan, Korea, and Puerto Rico. The administrative personnel and instructors of the divisions include active and reserve military and Federal civilian employees.

A professional development brigade is assigned to each division. A battalion in each brigade is dedicated to the Command and General Staff College instruction. The Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth is responsible for the curriculum taught by the instructors. The Command and General Staff College is also responsible for the training and certification of the instructors in the battalion

who teach the Joint Military Education Program curriculum.

The face-to-face program taught by the battalions consists of three phases. The instruction may take place during active duty for training or inactive duty for training formats. Instruction is based on a ratio of one instructor to eight students. Additionally, a portion of the instruction is completed online. Students are required to comply with a strict attendance policy.

An 18-month web-based nonresident course is also offered to students. Much support is provided to the students throughout their instruction. As an example, students are assigned a counselor during their enrollment. Students interact with each other as they participate through Blackboard and SharePoint asynchronously. While students and their counselor or an instructor may meet synchronously in a chat room, instruction is asynchronous due to the many time zones in which the students reside. Weekly assignments, threaded discussions, and instruction through Blackboard are enriched with Flash files of video instruction. Notably, the distance education staff is attempting to expand this type of instruction with Adobe Flash Mobile so the instruction may be seen on Android type cell phones and soon on iPhones.

The third format is designed for officers who are assigned to remote locations and do not have access to the Internet. These officers are provided the program courseware on compact disks. The compact disks include activities and instruction of the web-based format. (CGSC Circular 350-3 dated 1 December 2005; T. Kallman, personal communication, July 26, 2010; D. Ward, personal communication, July 26, July 28, and August 2, 2010).

The Fleet Seminar Program of the Navy provides similar coverage across the United States. The program is administered by the Naval War College's College of Distance Education. The program is offered at 20 locations in and around the

United States. Norfolk, Virginia, Jacksonville, Florida, New Orleans, Louisiana, San Diego, California, and Everett, Washington represent locations along the east, south, and west coasts of the United States. Inland locations include Great Lakes, Illinois, Millington, Tennessee, and Fort Worth, Texas. The Fleet Seminar Program is also offered at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Each Fleet Seminar location offers one to all three of the Navy's core courses. Students enroll each year for a particular course. Courses begin in September and meet 34 weeks for 3 hours until the following May.

One unique location offering the Fleet Seminar Program is the Naval Post Graduate School at Monterey, California. The Naval War College at Monterey offers the three core courses in a class format. To attain their Joint Military Education Program diploma, students complete four courses (Naval War College Monterey, n.d.).

The Web-Enabled Program is available to officers who have Internet connectivity. When students are enrolled they are assigned to online cohort groups. Students are also assigned a Naval War College faculty member who assists the student as a tutor.

Interaction among students and their advisors is typically asynchronous. Synchronous interaction is inhibited due to the numerous time zones in which the students reside. Academic requirements include readings, an active requirement each week, threaded discussions online, and responses.

The Web-Enabled Program is designed to be completed in about 18-24 months. The Naval War College recognizes that student success is predicated on the amount of time dedicated to coursework. As a result, when students enroll they accept a commitment to dedicate a minimum of two study periods of 3 or more hours each week.

Officers of all services may apply to the Fleet Seminar Program and Web-Enabled Program. Eligibility is extended to all senior lieutenant to captain sea service officers who are active and reserve, and defense-related civilians. Army and Air Force officers majors and above are also eligible.

The Naval War College also extends the Joint Military Education Program instruction to officers who cannot attend the Fleet Seminar Program or do not have Internet access. The CD-ROM program is composed of video lectures by Naval War College professors and audio presentations, student activities, and self-assessment exercises to broaden and emphasize the content. The program is designed for officers on sea duty or assigned to remote or isolated locations. The student is expected to complete the CD-ROM program in 18 months (Naval War College Provides JPME I to the Fleet, 2004).

The distance education staff of each college is composed of experts in instructional design and distance education. Each staff possesses the expertise to create their own courseware. Both colleges follow a similar distance education course instructional design process.

A central concern in the course design is to maintain their accreditation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. To do so, instruction adapted for distance delivery is based on the essential content that is presented in the classroom. To ensure alignment of the classroom format and distance education format the colleges follow a rigid development process. As an example, the Command and Staff College distance education developers form a working group for each course.

A unique quality control element of course development is the inclusion of the author of the resident course in the process. The resident author is a member of the distance education course development group. To ensure equivalency of the resident and distance education courses, the resident author takes ownership of the

content. With the essential content is identified, the distance education staff selects or develops appropriate media to deliver the instruction. While the Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) model of instructional design is not specifically used, the distance education course developers in the staffs at each college speak in those terms and elements of the design process are used (D. McGill, personal communication, July 28, and August 5, 2010; D. Ward, personal communication, July 26, 28, and August 2, 2010).

Both colleges recognize that the quality of the instructors is a critical component of the nonresident education process. Distance education instructors for the web-based programs are typically retired military and are specifically trained to facilitate the online courses (J. Hickey, personal communication, July 20, 2010; T. Kallman, personal communication, July 26, 2010).

A significant indicator of the course design success is the end-of-course assessment. As an example, assessment is highly regarded by the Naval War College distance education department. Student cannot continue on to the next instruction until they have submitted their assessment of the completed course. Data from the required assessments is anonymous and reviewed by the distance education faculty (J. Hickey, personal communication, July 20, 2010).

The administration and support of online students in the Army's Web-Based course or the Navy's Web-Enabled Program is similar to online schools in the public sector. The descriptions of the Command and General Staff College and Naval War College online programs indicate a significant connection to each student as well as support. Students who enroll in these programs realize that their continued career progression is dependent on the successful completion of the Joint Military Education Program Phase I instruction. As a result, they are quite motivated (J. Hickey, personal communication, July 20, 2010).

The descriptions of the programs suggest a student-centered support paradigm. The student is surrounded by components that support their academic success. Students may converse with instructors and other students through the threaded discussions on Blackboard. Chat rooms are available for students to converse with counselors and instructors. Students may contact their instructors and counselors by telephone and e-mail. Students of both services have full online access to their college's libraries. Counselors play a key role, as students must be aware of the requirements placed upon them to graduate and that they must complete the requirements within a specific amount of time (T. Kallman, personal communication, July 26, 2010).

From an overall perspective, America's military has two general components. One component is referred to as the generating force and the other is the operating force. The active and reserve faculty members and resident students of each college are part of the generating force. As Dubik (2010) indicates, fewer military personnel are being assigned to the generating force, which suggests that each college has a reduced faculty. It appears that the web-based programs serve as an educational multiplier by being able to continue high-level support and expert instruction to officers in operational duty assignments.

The online distance education program of today's military, particularly the Army and Navy, appear to be as contemporary as leading online schools. Both colleges are adapting current technology to virtually place the online student in the resident classrooms. One example is the use of MilBook, which is the Department of Defense's combined version of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Wiki (D. Ward, personal communication, July 26, 28, August 2, 2010).

Just over a decade ago, the Joint Military Education Program for the Command and

General Staff College distance education program was the exchange of printed course materials between an instructor at the college and the student (T. Kallman, personal communication, July 26, 2010). This relationship is almost reminiscent of the late 1880s University of Wisconsin correspondence course for farmers (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009).

Since those days, the distance education departments at both colleges have become as current as any online university. As an example, distance education experts of the Naval War College attend the University of Wisconsin's yearly Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning. This year, distance education faculty of the Naval War College presented a workshop on "Best Practices in Military Distance Learning" (D. McGill, personal communication, July 28 and August 5, 2010).

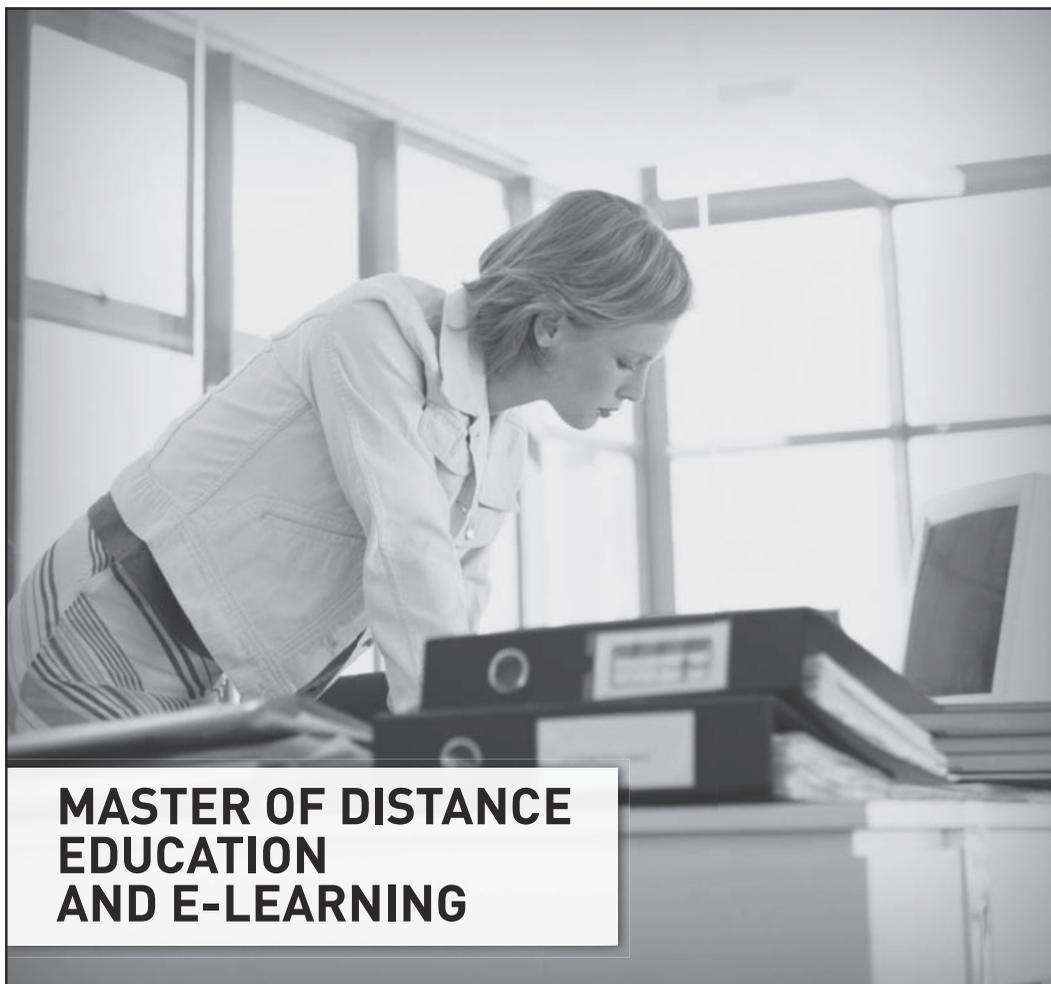
During the Sister Service College conference in January of 2010, Lieutenant General Caldwell, the commandant of the Command and General Staff College, aptly described the education mission of the all the services Joint Military Education Programs. He noted that all the colleges are composed of world-class faculties that develop, administer, and teach. The courses at the colleges are designed to create adaptive leaders with command, control, and support skills to succeed in complex missions during operations (Caldwell, 2009). The students of these colleges, resident and nonresident, receive common instruction specified by the Joints Chief Staff. They compose the core of a formidable force, as they are equally capable to be staff officers and leaders in their respective assignments.

The distance education faculties of the Command and General Staff College and of the Naval War College are answering Dubik's (2010) call for more leaders and staff officers. The nonresident programs of these colleges are a dynamic part of meeting the need for well educated officers.

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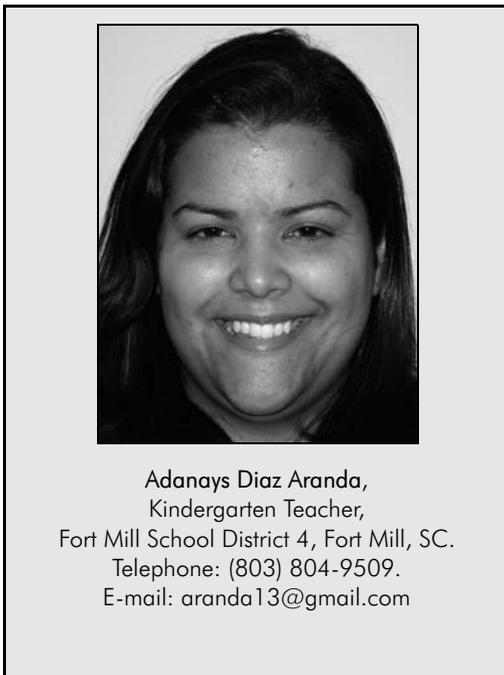
INTRODUCTION

As technology continues to expand the horizons of teaching and learning, the culture within the learning environment begins to change. Rules are established for communicating via the various media (Chen, Wang, & Hung, 2009), which leads to further evolution within the fields of instructional technology and distance education (ITDE). One area that witnesses frequent transitions within ITDE includes the tools used to manage online teaching and learning. Known as learning management systems (LMS), course management systems

(CMS), or virtual learning environments (VLE), these tools help teachers and administrators coordinate and direct online instruction and allow learners to participate in the learning environment. Anyone in the market for a learning management system will soon realize that there are quite a few from which to choose! Moodle is one of the various LMS available today. The purpose of this article is to discuss the benefits of using Moodle for distance education.

MOODLE BACKGROUND

Moodle is an open-source Web application that allows the delivery of instruction online. It can be used solely for online instruction, for blended format, or simply to support traditional instruction (Perkins, & Pfaffman, 2006). The acronym Moodle represents: Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. The designer of Moodle is Martin Dougiamas, who has been working on Moodle since the 1990s, originally as part of his doctoral work at Curtin University of Technology in Australia (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003). After more than a decade of developing and discarding prototypes, Moodle 1.0 was finally released on August 20, 2002 (Moodle, 2010a). Much of the research on Moodle has been performed by Dougiamas himself, along with Peter Taylor, associate professor of transformative education. Their aim for creating and researching Moodle is to improve their own skills in utilizing the Internet to facilitate distance education,



and to “improve the pedagogical skills of other teachers” through a freely available software, and finally to “facilitate a supportive community of software contributors” (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003, Introduction section, para. 3).

THE PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND MOODLE

Moodle supports a social constructionist or constructivist theory. Like Piaget and Papert, Dougiamas believes that learning is a social activity and that learners construct new knowledge by interacting with their environment. Rather than just reading text online, or listening to a recording online for learning purposes, Moodle allows users to be active authors within the environment by providing a platform from which to share ideas via individual and collaborative efforts. As this social view of learning expands, so will the pedagogy of distance education (Ke & Hoadley, 2009). Thus, Dougiamas set out to create software that allows people to truly collaborate and play the role of both teacher and learner within an online lesson (Moodle, 2010c).

Moodle promotes collaboration among learners and instructors by providing activities that grant students the ability to publish, not just retrieve information from a course. And with language packs for over 70 languages (Moodle, 2010b), Moodle creates an environment that is “conducive to inquiry, conversation, and feedback” (Jensen, 2010, p. 78). Because students are allowed to take an active role in their learning, they are better able to reflect critically and truly build knowledge as they interact with the virtual environment.

ENRICHING MOODLE ACTIVITIES

The large variety of activities available in Moodle engages learners while they interact with the learning environment. The following table displays a brief overview of the activities available in Moodle based on Moodle’s features (2010b).

COST-EFFECTIVE AND FLEXIBLE

Perhaps one of the most appealing characteristics of Moodle is that the software is free. In these challenging economic times, schools are experiencing a “climate in which traditional funding sources have become less generous and regulatory requirements are becoming more stringent” (Williams van Rooij, 2009, p. 683). Because Moodle is open-source software (OSS), the basic functions are made freely available to the public. Users wishing to add more functions to the software can pay for these additions (Henderson, 2007). Users might also need to enlist the help of Moodle partners if they need additional assistance with the software, which will also carry a fee. It is important to note that, even with these fees, the overall costs of operating Moodle is significantly less than with other LMS.

Another quality of Moodle is that it is very flexible. Dougiamas created Moodle to be “compatible, flexible, and easy to modify” (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003, Software design section, para. 1). It was created using the PHP language, which is “popular and powerful” (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003, Software design section, para. 1), without requiring too much effort to run the produced software. Because the code is visible (not hidden as with commercial products), users can make adjustments to the code in order to customize the software. Plugs-ins are available to further modify the product. Changes are tracked for the purpose of improving the software, which means that the product is constantly developing. This flexibility and evolution ensures that the product will grow with future users and adjust as their needs change.

MOODLE SUPPORT

One of the biggest myths about Moodle is that, because it is free of cost and private rights, it must not have product support. This is far from the truth. Moodle has various means of support for new and veteran

Table 1. Available Moodle Activities

Activity Type	Description
Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student can upload assignment• Due dates can be specified• Late assignments and resubmissions can be accepted• Teacher feedback is attached to the assignment for review by the student
Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May be customized:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ As Course News only◦ For teachers only◦ Open to all◦ Or limited to one thread-per-user◦ Attachments can be included in posts.
Quizzes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple-choice questions<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ single or multiple answers• Short Answer questions<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Accepts words or phrases• True-False questions• Matching questions• Random questions• Numerical questions (with allowable ranges)• Embedded-answer questions with answers within passages of text, such as cloze-style
Glossaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow students to serve as an author by adding definitions to course vocabulary• Teacher can review entries before publishing• Items can be grouped• Can be exported• Can be searched
Choice Modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow students to complete a single question poll or provide feedback
Chats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are synchronous• Can include a profile picture within the chat window• Can be limited to several users only or open to the entire class• Are logged for later viewing by teachers and students
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow students to peer review work and encourage student interaction
Wikis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow students to aid in building the learning community

users. Because Moodle has built a strong community, there are hundreds of free online documents on Moodle help topics available for users to review. Additionally, fairly priced books with information about the product are available for purchase. Free demonstration courses that can guide the user in creating lessons and managing a virtual classroom are accessible through the Moodle Web site. In the true spirit of learning communities, many user forums have been established within the Moodle community to assist new and veteran users. Finally, Moodle partners are also

available to provide support. Moodle partners are available across the world for a wide range of services, and are associated to service companies that are guided by the Moodle core developers (Moodle, 2010b).

CONCLUSION

Moodle is an interactive tool that aids in the delivery of instruction and learning. It supports the social constructivist theory and offers a large number of activities to encourage instructor-to-student, student-

to-student, and student-to-learning environment interaction, all of which are factors that reinforce the learning process. Additionally, the absent to low cost of using the product, coupled with the flexibility of changing the programmed code to customize the product, make it an attractive option for an LMS.

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Evolution of Homeschooling

Aislin Davis

HISTORY OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Compulsory education is defined as a required period of attendance for all students. The earliest examples of compulsory education can be found in 1st century Israel, when Joshua ben Gamla established compulsory education starting at age 6 (Roth, 1956). Compulsory education can be found in A.D. 1500-1600 Aztec societies, where male students were required to be educated until the age of 16 years (Soustelle, 2002). The earliest evidence of formal public education occurred in Gotha, Calemburg, and Prussia, Germany where education was compulsory between the ages of 5 and 13 years old. Prior to this, teachers and tutors were only

for elite and upper class families. Private schools existed only for the wealthy (Rothbard, 2006).

Compulsory education in the American colonies was first established in Massachusetts in 1647. The law required that every town create a grammar school. The government imposed fines on parents who failed to send their children to school. The government also had the authority to remove children from their parents and apprentice them if they felt that parents were deemed “unfit” to educate their children. Today education in the United States is compulsory for all students, but each state has varying ages when students are allowed to stop schooling (Thattai, 2001).



HISTORY OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN AMERICA

The first public schools in the United States began in the 1600s. The oldest public school is Boston Latin School, located in Boston, Massachusetts. In the United States, formal compulsory education was initially established to provide education to orphans who had no parents to educate them. The concept continued to spread until Massachusetts established a law in 1789 for compulsory public education and another law in 1852 for compulsory school attendance. Thomas Jefferson was the first leader of the United States to suggest a public school system (Rothbard, 2006). The rest of the country adopted compulsory public education by the 1850s. Until this time, most parents provided their children’s education, which was limited to the parents’ education or trade skills. Even in

the 1850s in the United States, formal education requirements were lackadaisical, with moratoriums provided to students during harvest and sowing times.

Public schools in the 1600s based their curriculum mainly on religious beliefs. At this time the only people in America were Puritans so it was easy to teach religious beliefs if everyone was the same religion. But as an influx of immigrants began to arrive to the new world, it became more and more difficult to teach religious beliefs if the population was heterogeneous. After America established its independence from Britain, more and more states developed laws surrounding public education to allow access to all individuals regardless of wealth, background, and religion. Religion was taken out of the curriculum. Nonetheless, private schools continued to grow alongside public schools because parents wanted their children to learn about religion and morals in the classroom (Thattai, 2001).

Horace Mann and Henry Barnard published the *Common School Journal*, describing their beliefs that society as a whole would benefit from common schooling because it would develop citizenship, a united society, and prevent poverty and crime. By 1918 compulsory education laws were established in all states, requiring all children to attend elementary school. Unfortunately many Catholics were opposed to common schooling and decided to establish their own private schools. This decision went to the Supreme Court in 1925 in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, and disallowed compulsory public school attendance by states (Thattai, 2001).

HISTORY OF HOMESCHOOLING

Until the twentieth century, compulsory formal education in the United States had a myriad of supporters. The United States Government had convinced parents that formal education was superior to homeschooling. But in 1964 John Caldwell Holt

wrote a book, *How Children Fail*, which described how traditional compulsory education disrupted the natural process of learning in children. His theories about homeschooling gained national attention on the TV talk show circuit and through *Life* magazine (Field, 2011).

For years Holt attempted to reform the public and private school systems. He felt that the systems were an attempt to classify students and segregate the winners and losers of society. His book, *Instead of Education*, spread the message that there should be an underground railroad to save children from common schooling. Parents told him that they had been homeschooling their children in private without the government knowing. Holt then established the magazine, *Growing Without Schooling*, in 1977. Holt felt that homeschooling would grow in popularity, but not beyond 1 or 2% of the population. In the United States today, 1.5 to 2% of students are homeschooled (Field, 2011).

Raymond and Dorothy Moore launched a comprehensive research study to demonstrate the damaging effects of early childhood formal education. In their book, *Better Late than Early* (1975), they recommended that, “where possible, children should be withheld from formal schooling until at least ages eight to ten” as they “are not mature enough for formal school programs until their senses, coordination, neurological development and cognition are ready.” They suggested that forcing children to attend school too early establishes a sequence of:

1. uncertainty as the child leaves the family nest early for a less secure environment;
2. puzzlement at the new pressures and restrictions of the classroom;
3. frustration because unready learning tools—senses, cognition, brain hemispheres, coordination—cannot handle the regimentation of formal lessons and the pressures they bring;

4. hyperactivity growing out of nerves and jitter, from frustration;
5. failure which quite naturally flows from the four experiences above; and
6. delinquency which is failure's twin and apparently for the same reason (Moore, 1970).

LEGALITIES OF HOMESCHOOLING

As the awareness of homeschooling benefits spread, the legal controversies for homeschooling started appearing. The first homeschoolers dealt with numerous groups, family members, educators, politicians, and neighbors who felt that they were doing their children an injustice. But they held fast and helped to establish the laws and regulations that recognize that teaching one's children is a right (Home School Legal Defense Association [HSLDA], 2011). Today, all 50 states permit homeschooling, but states may establish guidelines and requirements for homeschooling. There are three categories of homeschooling guidelines mandated by state (HSDLA, 2011):

1. Private school—homeschooling is regarded with the same requirements and treatments of a private school and must comply with the laws for private schools (example: California, Indiana, and Texas).
2. State's Compulsory Attendance Statute—there exists no specific reference to "homeschooling," but the laws for homeschooling are included in the parameters of the compulsory attendance statute (example: New Jersey and Maryland).
3. Specific statutes for homeschooling—although the nomenclature for "homeschooling" may differ from state to state, the third category of laws are specific to a group of statutes for homeschooling and the requirements are described (Example: Maine, New Hampshire, and Iowa.)

Although the three categories exist, the laws and regulations for homeschooling differ greatly over a vast spectrum. The following states and territories have no requirements for parents to initiate contact with the state's Department of Education: Alaska, Connecticut, Guam, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The following states and territory have minimal requirements on homeschooling and require only parental notification to the state's Department of Education: Alabama, Arizona, California, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Virgin Islands, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The following states and territories have moderate requirements regarding notification, assessment scores and/or professional evaluation of student progress to the state's Department of Education: American Samoa, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. The following states and territories require strict regulations regarding notification, assessment scores, professional evaluation, plus other requirements (e.g., state approval of curriculum, instructor qualifications, and visitations by state officials): Massachusetts, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont (HSDLA 2010).

The types of requirements by states include submitting attendance records, approval of curriculum, demonstrate teacher qualifications, regular and unannounced visitations by the Department of Education and social workers, send achievement and standardized test scores, professional evaluations, filing private school affidavit yearly, and minimum required work hours per week. Over the years, homeschooling has been challenged a number of times and in some cases outlawed for a number of years in certain

states. Several court cases have been settled in the lower courts over homeschooling and this has resulted in the development of a number of advocacy groups for homeschooling (HSDLA, 2011).

Despite the restrictive legislation on homeschooling, homeschooling is on the rise:

In 2007, the number of homeschooled students was about 1.5 million, an increase from 850,000 in 1999 and 1.1 million in 2003. The percentage of the school-age population that was homeschooled increased from 1.7% in 1999 to 2.9% in 2007. The increase in the percentage of homeschooled students from 1999 to 2007 represents a 74% relative increase over the 8-year period and a 36% relative increase since 2003. (IES National Center for Education Statistics, 2009)

With this rapid increase in homeschooling, parents are often left with a conundrum of wrangling through the homeschooling regulations and requirements. Although there are numerous local and national resources available on the Internet and through printed resources, many parents have difficulty compiling the requirements and advocating for themselves (HSDLA, 2011).

EFFECTIVENESS OF HOMESCHOOLING

A 1997 study of 5,402 homeschool students and 1,657 families to analyze homeschooler performance in the United States, "Strengths of Their Own: Home Schoolers Across America," found that homeschoolers, on average, achieved higher scores by 30 to 37% in all subject areas than their public school counterparts. Students who were homeschooled for 1 year or less scored, on average, in the 59th percentile and students who were homeschooled for 2 or more years scored, on average, between the 86th and 92nd percentile. Students who were homeschooled through their whole K-12 education had the highest

academic achievement (Farris & Smith, 2004). This study found that academic achievement was experienced by all, regardless of race or background. Both minority and white homeschooled students in grades K-12 scored in the 87th percentile. White homeschooled students scored in the 82nd percentile for Math while minority students achieved the 77th percentile. Public school students did not achieve the same equivalency in their achievements. White public school students scored in the 58th percentile for mathematics scores and 57th percentile for reading scores. Hispanic and Latino students scored in the 29th percentile for mathematics scores and in the 28th percentile for reading scores. Black public school students scored in the 24th percentile for mathematics scores and in the 28th percentile for reading scores (Farris & Smith, 2004).

METHODS OF HOMESCHOOLING

There are a number of methodologies that parents adopt in their teaching methods, including trivium classical education, quadrivium classical education, Charlotte Mason, school-at-home, Thomas Jefferson education, multiple intelligences, constructivism, unschooling, radical unschooling, and Montessori. Many parents opt for a blended approach and use a number of sources to develop their curriculum. Seventy-eight percent utilize a public library, 77% utilize a homeschooling publisher or individual specialist, 68% utilize retail book stores, 60% utilize a nonhomeschooling education publisher, 50% utilized homeschooling organization, 37% utilized curriculum from religious institution, 23% from the local public school district, 41% utilized distance learning, 20% utilized media in television, video, or radio, 19% utilized eLearning, and 15% utilized distance education through homeschooling correspondence course by mail (Bauman 2001).

Homeschooling requires a great deal of work in deciding and developing curriculum, learning how to manage time, learning how to organize requirements and document everything, understanding the laws and regulations for homeschooling, ability to apply curriculum to the state standards, and designing curriculum that is both effective and engaging. For parents who do not have teaching backgrounds, homeschooling can be a daunting endeavor. When homeschooling initially became popular, there were a limited number of curriculum providers on the market. Now there are many curriculum providers available and parents find it difficult making sure that all of the areas of a child's education are covered.

ELEARNING AND HOMESCHOOLING

The Internet has become an invaluable opportunity for homeschooling parents to broaden their child's education and expand opportunities for their child to learn through auditory, visual, and kinesthetic methods. Parents are now able to provide virtual field trips, video clips, and flash applications to their child's curriculum. Science labs can be viewed on youtube.com or done using java applets, students can download videocasts and podcasts for mathematics, and parents can use assessment websites to create quizzes and tests. Early literacy can be done through online interactive books that test and assess comprehension while the book is being read to the child. Students can go back and review a word they do not know by running their mouse over the word and hearing the word spoken. Parents can also develop their own resources through WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) web page applications, online assessment generators, course managements systems such as Moodle, and Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM). SCORM is a group of standards that enable accessibility, reusability, and

interoperability for web-based learning content. Opportunities for learning that were formerly out of reach due to distance, money, time, and resources are now available in electronic form (Moodle, 2009).

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND HOMESCHOOLING

Another area that has expanded is the opportunity for homeschooling through distance education; 41% of homeschooling parents utilize online education and 15% utilize correspondence courses, another form of distance education (Bauman, 2001). Parents who do not have confidence in their ability to teach their children can still provide a safe learning environment free of distractions through the use of distance education. Distance education provides families the flexibility to learn anywhere at anytime and provide them with a diploma from an accredited institution. More and more virtual schools are being established that teach religious values and morals. Most religious virtual schools are Christian-based and teach creationism in their science teachings.

Homeschoolers who live in a state where the homeschool regulations are strict are able to utilize accredited virtual schools to avoid the bureaucratic paperwork involved in homeschooling, since those schools fall under the category of private school. Virtual schools are also able to document system logins and calculate attendance hours to fulfill attendance requirements. The curriculum has been carefully planned by the virtual school and parents can select virtual schools that have already aligned their curriculum to their state standards. Students may also have access to standardized examinations and assessments. By attending virtual schools, students fall into a different category of student and are no longer considered homeschool students and are not subject to the same requirements that homeschool students are subject to.

Virtual schools can be private, such as Virtual High School, K12, and Class.com, but a number of states now provide virtual schools within their public school districts so that the cost of attending a state sponsored virtual school is free. States that offer public virtual schools are: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington (Zeise, 2010).

SOCIALIZATION AND HOMESCHOOLING

The most frequent argument against homeschooling has been that homeschool students will be socially delayed due to the inability to socialize with other students (Davis, 2005). Not all homeschool scenarios are isolated instruction. Some homeschool parents connect with other homeschool parents to establish homeschooling communities where one parent teaches multiple families on one day and another parent teaches on another day. Distance education allows students to socialize in different ways through the Internet. Although the style of socialization is different than through traditional schools, students come in contact with many more students than they would in a traditional school. Some virtual schools and distance education programs provide face-to-face opportunities for their students, such as conferences and local field trips. The socialization argument has lost momentum in recent years with the awareness of bullying, cyberbullying, and violence in public and private schools. Distance education has become a safe haven for students who are being bullied in school.

COLLEGE AND HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling's history throughout the United States has been one of hard work and legal battles. Parents' choice to homeschool their children can be a difficult

choice filled with anxiety over documentation, reporting, assessment, and legalese. But elearning and virtual schools facilitate a parents' right to educate their own children. In the past, it was difficult for homeschool students to gain acceptance to good colleges and universities, but parents are now able to use standardized tests, such as SAT I and II, AP exams, and portfolios to apply to college. Virtual schools and homeschool eLearning applications provide standardized assessments, record management, and transcripts for college and university admissions. Homeschoolers now attend over 900 different colleges and universities in the United States, including Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Stanford University, Brown University, Cornell University, and Princeton University (Davis, 2005).

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"41% OF HOMESCHOOLING PARENTS UTILIZE DISTANCE EDUCATION ..."

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Proposal to Save the Family Literacy Program Using Distance Education

Hanny Blanco and Jesus Blanco

During the past 2 decades the United States has had two major educational reforms. Both were made with the active participation of Republican and Democrats. At the 1989 Education Summit in Charlottesville, VA, President George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors reached an ambitious agreement on six national educational goals, produced by a panel under the leadership of Bill Clinton, then governor of Arkansas.

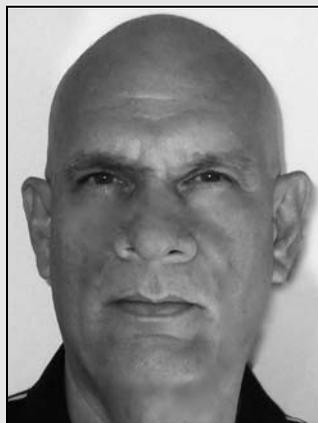
The goals promised that, by 2000, all children would start school ready to learn,

the high school graduation rate would reach at least 90%, all students would demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter, U.S. students would be first in the world in math and science achievement, every school would provide an environment conducive to learning, and all adults would be literate and able to compete in a global economy.

In 1994, President Clinton codified in law the goals promoted and added two more to improve teacher professional development and parent participation. And 7 years later, President George W.



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Bush's No Child Left Behind Act promised Americans that all students would become at least proficient in reading/language arts, be taught by highly qualified teachers, and graduate from high school.

To carry out some of these educational goals, in 2002 The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), working closely with The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), convened The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) for the express purpose of summarizing scientific evidence on early literacy development and on home and family influences on that development. The panel was assembled with expert researchers in areas of reading, early literacy, language, cognition, English as a second language, pediatrics, special education, research methodology, and early childhood education. The NELP report represents a meta-analysis of approximately 300 studies that have been published in refereed journals. The meta-analysis conducted by the panel showed that several interventions, such as reading to them, involving parents in their children's learning, teaching children phonological awareness, teaching oral language skills, and adopting literacy curricula in preschools and kindergartens had a positive impact on children's early literacy learning.

In summary, the report states that conventional reading and writing skills that are developed in the years from birth to age 5 have a clear and consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills. The results also identify areas where additional research is needed (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Since the development of meta-analysis by Glass (1976), there has been an explosion of research syntheses (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004), including the Cochrane Collaboration, the Campbell Collaboration, and a series of high-level reports on educational effectiveness sponsored by the U.S. government aimed at determining what works (August & Shanahan, 2006)

CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PHASE

From a neurological perspective, learning is determined for biological and environmental factors. Although brain variables exert influences on learning, under some circumstances, the environment, in this case, the instruction may also exert influences on the brain (Berninger & Richards, 2000). In other words, the brain allows the student to act on the environment but also can be changed in constrained ways, as the student interacts with the environment. Under this principle, the instructor, the parents, older children the libraries or the day-care practitioners have an important influence on the literacy learning, not only the teachers. In early years this nurture process is sometimes more important (Olson, Forsberg, & Wise 1994). For this reason, a major educational constraint in early literacy development is that are the parents, libraries, or day care practitioners who have to get sufficient preparation for the enormously mission of help the infant reach their expected level of literacy (Berninger & Richards, 2002).

Another educational constraint is that this nurture process has a development window in which these beginning literacy skills are most easily acquired. Berninger & Richards (2002) noted that half of a child's critical brain development is completed by the time he or she begins kindergarten. Furthermore, reports Sharon Begley (1996), "Children whose neural circuits are not stimulated before kindergarten are never going to be what they could have been" (p. 56). For many years school policy was built under the assumption that language developed during the preschool years, reading during elementary school, and writing later. However, as Berninger and Richards (2002) noted, "those systems have overlapping developmental trajectories that interact in predictable ways" (p. 98). Diamond and Hopson (1998) named these language systems "language by ear," with begin in uterus if the fetus is stimulated

using sound, “language by mouth,” which begins with the first vocalization of the newborn, “language by eye,” which begins with the first book an adult reads to an infant or preschooler, and “language by hand, which begins with the first mark an infant makes with a writing implement.

A study by Dubowitz (1995) examined the incidence, timing, and evolution of the brain lesions in the neonatal period. The findings from this work show that children are capable of learning more than was thought, and at a very early age. This new understanding of early brain development has generated a lot of activity for professionals in the education field. With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been increasing pressure put on education systems to demonstrate successful educational outcomes for all learners.

Gunnar and Barr (1998) and Diamond and Hopson (1998) state that “there are significant implications for not nurturing early neurological development and that the brain of a child is developing more rapidly than any other time in their lives” (p. 89).

While this brain development includes the ability to read and write, it also includes social and emotional development. We know from the same research that young brains require opportunities to play, explore, and socialize (Implications of Brain Development, n.d.).

The overwhelming information about the neurological aspects of brain development in infants indicates that there are implications for not nurturing early neurological development because the brain of a child is developing more rapidly than at any other time in their lives, and require opportunities to play, explore, and socialize. The Even Start Family Literacy Program (Even Start), first authorized in 1989 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), in July 1991 was amended when Congress passed the National Literacy Act, lowering the age of

children served from age one to birth and allowing community-based organizations to receive grants. The National Literacy Act, renamed the Even Start program and then the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program, was reauthorized as Title I, Part B, Subpart 3, of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The Family Literacy program was founded on the belief that when parents interact with their young children, they can turn simple experiences into learning experiences, improving their literacy environments. The program affirmed the literacy needs of both children and parents by offering parenting education, early childhood education, parent and child together time (PACT), and adult education, including English language instruction. Also, the program took into consideration not only the neurological aspects of brain development, but also the real social challenges that a family face during the early development of their children. For instance, discipline and guidance for toddlers and pre-kindergarten children are popular topics in parenting education programs. But infants do not require the same kind of guidance strategies, so this topic is often not addressed for parents of the youngest children. The family literacy program promotes parenting education addressing discipline, guidance, and education about maternal depression, exposure of pregnant mothers to drugs, chemicals, radiation and stress that can affect the fetus growth and, consequently, affect the child’s later thinking functions. Additionally, the program offers parents findings of research on the vulnerability of the developing brain to environmental factors such as nicotine, alcohol, and cocaine.

Parents can strengthen their parenting and literacy skills through group experiences as well as through individual instruction. Reading and story-telling time also enables parents to create a controlled and predictable activity for children, involve siblings and other family members,

promotes the sharing of their own childhood experiences, and teach “life lessons” to their children.

In summary, the increasing public awareness of how early brain development affects children’s learning is creating new levels of enthusiasm and support for high-quality infant and toddler care. Through their intergenerational programs, Family Literacy practitioners have had a unique opportunity to have a positive effect on improving the literacy, lives, and futures of many families.

THE END OF EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

The President’s budget proposal for fiscal year 2010-2011, once again, recommended ending funding for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program. On August 10, 2010, the senate approved the bill, and in that bill the President also requested eliminating the funding for the Family Literacy program. As a result, funding for the Even Start program ended, and 44,000 families, including 47,000 parents and 67,000 children living in poverty will have fewer opportunities to participate in education services to increase basic skills leading to additional education, English proficiency, and self-sufficiency. More than half are Hispanic immigrant and refugee families. The Administration cites a 2002 OMB Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART) report on the Even Start Family Literacy Program as justification for eliminating funding. The PART report, however, provides no substantive justification for denying education to the nation’s most vulnerable families. The OMB does not claim to be proficient in the best practices of scientifically based, research-driven education policy or fulfillment. Its primary function in undertaking the PART process is to evaluate the administration’s own management performance. PART does not provide an independent rationale for

denying the continuing education to the thousands of vulnerable families currently served through the Even Start program.

PROPOSAL FOR EXPANDING ACCESS TO ADULT LITERACY WITH ONLINE DISTANCE EDUCATION

This proposal examines the possibility of using the online distance education (ODE) infrastructure to educate participants of the family literacy program. The first section of this proposal reviews the use of ODE in other sectors. The second section examines the experience of the Literacy Link and the IDEAL projects, and other projects that developed Workplace Essential Skills (WES), one of the first ODE courses for adult learners. It also describes current efforts by states to experiment with distance education for adult learners.

THE USE OF ODE IN OTHER SECTORS

Online education has been growing rapidly in higher and middle education, business, the military, and recently in adult education. Those institutions offering online courses needed to build an infrastructure, train participants, identify the target students, implement experiments and evaluation, and deal with funding and organizational tensions. But many of the projects nationwide had passed the costly implementation and experimentation phase, or are in the way to finishing that phase.

Many adult education programs can use technology to reach out to learners functioning below a high school diploma level. Many of the potential adult learners have access to a computer connected to the Internet at home, in a library, or in a community center. Even though this population usually has poor skills in operating a computer and accessing the Internet, the library system and other community centers have the tools to assist them. Those

who are better educated, like high school or university students in voluntary work at libraries, adult centers, community facilities and universities, have given valuable help to the adults interested in learning at a distance. At present, a growing number of adult education projects and products are available for ODE.

LITERACY LINK

In 1995, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), along with the University of Pennsylvania's National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) and Kentucky Educational Television (KET), formed the Literacy Link partnership to design two innovative adult education products. With a \$15 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education Star Schools program, they developed the adult literacy multimedia series WES and GED Connection, as well as professional development materials for adult educators (Lit Teacher and Peer Lit).

The first product completed was WES, an adult education curriculum that introduces learners to the job search process and elements of workplace environments. WES is a 24-unit multimedia curriculum (workbook, video, and online) aimed at improving learners' workplace-related math, reading, communication, and employment skills. The series is designed for adults reading at the 5th to 8th grade levels who want to enhance their skills to either secure a job or to advance within their current positions.

WES was the first adult education curriculum to utilize three media. Content and instruction are linked across media and tap into the strengths of each system.

OVAE

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) began encouraging states to experiment with new ways to increase the number of adults being served. Distance

education was identified as a possible means of expanding services to adult learners and reaching a potentially untapped learner population, like in this case, the family literacy participants.

PROJECT IDEAL

In 2001, representatives from state departments of education in 15 states met to explore how adult education could reach adult learners. In March 2002, 13 states (Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) committed to work together formally in an effort titled Project IDEAL (Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners).

The Support Center of the project has played a key role in the growth of distance learning in adult education, working with more than 20 states to help them establish tailored distance education programs.

OTHER STATES INITIATIVES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR ADULT LEARNERS

MISSOURI

The Missouri Mentoring Program for distance education had a very successful pilot implementation. Mentors felt they were able to fulfill their roles effectively and were interested in continuing to mentor other teachers. Missouri also offers adult learners statewide the opportunity to study online for the GED (at www.gedonlineclass.com). Begun in the fall of 2000, the program is built on the WebCT learning management system (The Missouri Distance Learning Mentoring Program, 2005)

FLORIDA

The Florida TechNet, The Literacy CyberSpace, and The Learning Center

Online (TLC), have been used to teach adult learners online. The sites are oriented to learners without a high school diploma, using Skills Tutor, WebCT, and Blackboard.

CALIFORNIA

The Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN) in Sacramento has the leadership in the many web-based projects in California. Others projects in adult education are: the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CAL-PRO), the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), The California Distance Learning Project (CDLP). They have four major tasks: build and promote a distance learning knowledge base, provide technical assistance in implementing distance learning, test new instructional delivery methods and materials, and help create a statewide distance learning infrastructure.

The LiteracyCenter.Net website provides safe learning activities for parents and teachers to share with young children. All online lessons are free of advertising and free of charge.

KENTUCKY

The Kentucky Virtual Adult Education Web site (KYVAE), launched Oct. 1, 2001, is the result of a partnership between the Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU) and the Kentucky Department for Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL). The site uses PLATO software, and includes a complete GED preparation program along with simulated GED tests. The mission of the KYVAE site is to provide adult learners access to literacy information, curriculum, resources and services in an easy-to-use and motivational format. The site is dedicated to helping adult learners achieve their personal learning goals.

OREGON

OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTANCE LEARNING PROJECT

This computer-based distance learning project is offered to learners in basic reading, writing, and math. After a brief period of orientation in any computer/study room, participants are able to access and complete assignments using the PLATO Web Learning Network from any computer that meets the minimum system requirements.

WEST VIRGINIA

A+DVANTAGE GED PROGRAM

Sponsored by the Office of Adult Education and Workforce Development of the West Virginia Department of Education, A+DVANTAGE GED provides a flexible opportunity for students who want to study for the GED test at home. The website includes online registration and general information.

WISCONSIN

Wisconsin Online Resource Center

Short online lessons in subjects such as English, reading, science, social studies, math, family literacy, ESL, and financial literacy, funded by the Wisconsin State Adult Education Office.

DELAWARE

Delaware offers a full high school completion program online, titled Diploma at a Distance (www.diplomaatadistance.org) that is based on state standards and requirements for traditional high school degree programs. Delaware's program is a carefully structured curriculum with rigorous requirements that is designed to help adult learners earn their diplomas. Delaware plans to develop other online courses

targeted to ABE and GED learners as well as an online family literacy resource center.

ILLINOIS

In summer 2002, Illinois released an interactive online GED preparation program (gedillinois.org). Designed by the Center for the Application of Information Technologies at Western Illinois University, GED Illinois is designed to supplement classroom-based programs and also to serve as a self-contained distance program that adults can use on their own or with the help of a distance instructor. Developed in a partnership between the Illinois Department of Education and Illinois Employment Security, GED Illinois is available to state residents and includes a pre-enrollment self-assessment. The assessment site, called OASIS, is intended to help potential students determine whether they are well suited to be distance learners. It also provides a short tutorial on the computer and Web browser requirements to utilize the program.

CONCLUSION

On August 10, 2010, the U.S. Senate passed the bill with budget cuts for fiscal year 2010-2011; as a result the Even Start Family Literacy program did not have funds to operate the next year. That means that families will lose the support to face the challenge of helping their children during the early years of their development—the period in which the child's potential is determined, and when researchers recommend the development of the early literacy skills. So, all the recommendations from researchers about the importance of the improvement of emergent literacy skills of very young children, significantly correlated with first-grade reading achievement, will be lost. For these reasons we are proposing to utilize the infrastructure already in use for the distance education of adults, in order to contribute to save the

Family Literacy Project. This network has been used with great success in more than 20 states. Many of them already have a noticeable and influential Web presence, and others are prepared to build a presence in the adult community with the active collaboration of local and national universities, professionals in the field, and with funds from private and federal organizations. Several of those states already offer family literacy instruction and the rest have the knowledge, skills, and tools to access the vast array of Internet sites with valuable information already developed for federal initiatives through the national family literacy organization.

Finally, it is necessary for us to reflect upon our current practices in pre-K and kindergarten programs. It is common to see how learning outcomes are defined not by paying attention to the recent research about the importance of the first 3 years of life in the literacy, social and emotional development of the children, but for high standardized test scores. The role of parents in this matter, with the support of a federal program like the family literacy project, has been to help thousands of children in the developing of important emergent literacy and social skills, in order to prepare them for the first year of school and their social development, not to pass a test.

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"WE ARE PROPOSING TO UTILIZE THE INFRASTRUCTURE ALREADY IN USE FOR THE DISTANCE EDUCATION OF ADULTS IN ORDER TO CONTRIBUTE TO SAVE THE FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT."

Using Wikis to Deliver Professional Development

Jessie F. Aranda

INTRODUCTION

There are several challenges in planning and delivering professional development for educators. The biggest is how to deliver a meaningful learning experience while navigating obstacles such as schedules, compliance, change, and workload (Huber, 2010). As with many problems, the right tool and the proper procedure are critical for optimal resolution. The use of Web 2.0 tools as a means of delivering professional development is being explored as a potential solution (Ferriter, 2009).

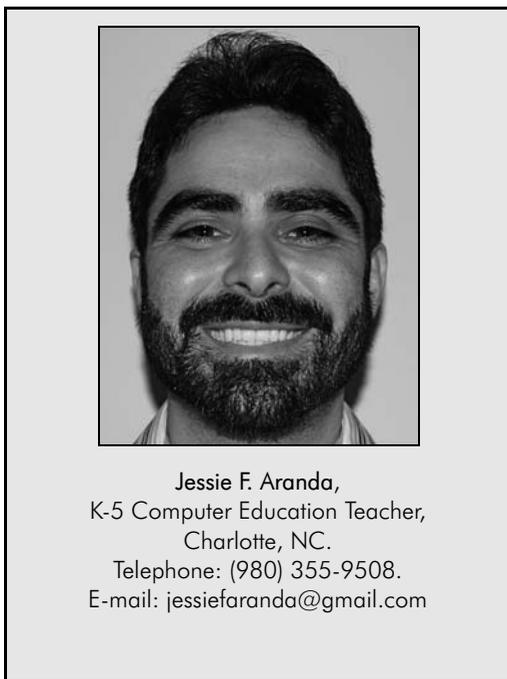
Web 2.0 tools, interactive Web tools allowing two-way information flow, have been a topic of high interest in the area of education. Many of these tools have been piloted in classrooms by adventurous educators (Ferriter, 2009). The wiki, specifically, provides great potential for professional development as it can essentially act as a simplified learning management system. In the following sections wikis will be briefly defined and their application as a means of delivering professional development will be discussed.

WHAT IS A WIKI?

Stated simply, a wiki is a Web page that allows visitors to edit the content on the page. The most widely known example of a wiki is the online resource Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org).

Looking deeper, a wiki has much more to offer than a simple Web page. Wikis are designed to be fast and easy to use (Brunsell & Horejsi, 2010). The idea behind a wiki is that all collaborators (users) are editing one document, in real time, that is always accessible in its latest version. When visiting a wiki, users see the page content in its current form but have access to an edit button that will allow modifications to be made. This process is repeated by all users in the collaborative group until the product is finished.

Wikis offer some great benefits but also have several challenges. The strongest benefits of wikis include the ability to connect from anywhere using the Internet, no



need for specialized software, easy-to-use interface, space for multi-user collaboration, and the ability to incorporate multiple forms of media (Billings, 2009). Some of the challenges of wikis include dependency on a stable Internet connection, multiple authors undoing each others' work, and edits from unknown users. Although there is no solution for the first challenge, the other two can be remedied by the use of a history tool within the wiki to monitor which user has made changes to the page. The ability to limit editing capabilities to only registered users can also be used to avoid changes made by unintended users (Billings, 2009).

HOW ARE WIKIS BEING USED?

Wikis are used in a variety of environments, but their use can be sorted into three basic groups: education, business (Hazari, North, & Moreland, 2009), and personal use. In each of these areas the application of wikis is slightly different, but the underlying purpose for using the tool is the same—collaboration. In the following sections examples of how each of these groups use wikis is discussed.

EDUCATION

Various levels of education use wikis as a teaching and learning tool. Although classroom use of wikis is more common with older students, some elementary school teachers are using this tool for a variety of projects. In middle and high school, students use wikis to create group or class projects including posters and online books (Brunsell & Horejsi, 2010). In higher education, wikis are used for collaborative projects and interactive learning, where students modify a document with the guidance of an instructor.

BUSINESS

The business application of the wiki is at the root of the wiki concept, as business

collaboration is the reason Howard G. "Ward" Cunningham developed the original wiki. Cunningham was seeking a way for employees at his company to collaborate in a quick and efficient manner (Brunsell & Horejsi, 2010). Other businesses have adopted the wiki idea to aid in simplifying idea sharing, meetings, and information organization.

PERSONAL

Wikis are also used by individuals for leisure purposes. Some examples of how individuals use wikis include collecting information on topics of interest, event planning, and chronicling group activities. While these types of wikis may not seem significant in the realm of education, the information that is gathered from the various authors to create a reusable, updatable resource demonstrates a key advantage of using wikis for professional development.

WIKIS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Wikis make an excellent choice as a means of delivering professional development in an online format. Several benefits are shared among all Web 2.0 tools, while some are specific to wikis. A major benefit that can be seen by using Web-based professional development is the ability to access the workspace from anywhere using the Internet. Participants are no longer restricted by having to be present at the time and place a workshop is being offered, creating greater flexibility in scheduling. Using wikis specifically, an organization can gather knowledge on content and practice from existing staff members as they each contribute to the workspace. This knowledge can then be archived and used for future training or as a reference. Through the collaborative nature of wikis, professional learning communities are given an opportunity to develop and grow among participants.

Not only will the participants learn from the content, they will begin to learn from each other's insight and ideas (Samarawickrema, Benson, & Brack, 2010).

HOW TO GET STARTED

Getting started delivering professional development using wikis can be accomplished in a few steps. These steps are basic but can provide an excellent guide for someone looking to try using wikis for the first time.

The first step is to find a wiki provider. Wikispaces, Wetpaint, and PBworks are a few examples of wiki providers. More providers can be located by performing an Internet search. Most wiki providers offer some level of service at no charge. Although the free version may be very limited or basic, it can provide a good start when trying wikis for the first time.

The next step is to add content that will start the training. This content can include any medium that is appropriate—text, images, audio, or video. It is important consider Web design principles when creating the initial lay out of the wiki. The layout should be organized and inviting, making sure not to overload the page (Robb, 2009; Samarawickrema, Benson, & Brack, 2010).

Adding or inviting users to participate is the next step in the process. Membership to the wiki can be left open, meaning any one that visits the site can edit pages and contribute, or editing privileges can be restricted to invited users only. If the wiki is restricted, users will have to use a log-on ID and password to gain access to editing capabilities. Using restricted membership is probably best when using wikis for professional development, as this safeguard will protect the integrity of the information collected.

When creating content, include activities that will stimulate collaboration. Participants should be actively participating, creating content on wiki as well as taking

in existing content (Hazari, North, & Moreland, 2009). This aspect of the wiki is significant because the content created by users is usually easily accepted by other users since they are eased in knowing the source is a trusted colleague with whom they are already comfortable working (Jones, 2009). To stimulate participation, combine wiki tools and instructional methods that complement each other (Hazari, North, & Moreland, 2009). To attain a good blend of tools and methods it may be necessary to create additional resources, on the Web or otherwise, to compliment the wiki (Wilson, & Stacey, 2004). In some cases it may be necessary to precede the online wiki activity with a face-to-face meeting, assuring all participants understand how to use the wiki properly (Samarawickrema, Benson, & Brack, 2010). The presence of an instructor will also aid in engagement and participation, as the users will have an active role model to emulate (Wilson & Stacey, 2004). The instructor presence can also assist in keeping the activity on the correct track.

Finally, once the professional development session has ended, the wiki pages should be locked to disallow further editing and the final product can remain as an archive for future reference. In future iterations of the same training the archived pages can simply be used as guides or they can be unlocked and further evolved by the new group.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

This section contains a list of activities that can be presented as part professional development delivered through a wiki.

1. Writing a collaborative lesson plan;
2. Rearranging units of study;
3. Creating thematic units;
4. Gathering ideas for multiple intelligences activities for a predefined lesson;

5. Creating a list of Web resources for teachers; and
6. Creating a list of Web resources to use in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

While many options are available for delivering professional development through the Web, wikis are a simple and effective way of achieving this goal. Given wikis' strongest feature, collaborative capabilities, compliments the recognized benefit of learning with others, wikis seem like an obvious choice for online delivery of professional development. With careful attention to the instructional methods encased in the wiki, taking care not to rely solely on the technology for instructional delivery, wikis can be a powerful teaching tool. Perhaps what is needed is an instructional framework centered on wiki technology to aid in the creation of online professional development.

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"GIVEN WIKIS' STRONGEST FEATURE, COLLABORATIVE CAPABILITIES ... WIKIS SEEM LIKE AN OBVIOUS CHOICE FOR ONLINE DELIVERY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT."

Why Drop In?

High School Diplomas Earned Through Online Program

Doris K. Koenig

INTRODUCTION

As recently as 2008, it was reported that a mere 70% of America's high school students earn a high school diploma (NECES, 2008). Their lack of a diploma will affect these young adults personally, socially, and economically, and extend out to influence their communities (Richmond, 2009). For instance, students who dropped out who were expected to graduate in 2008 will cost the United States more than \$319 billion in missed wages over the course of their lifetimes. On the positive side, if graduation rates of His-

panic, African American, and Native American students of American high schools and colleges increased to the levels of white students by 2020, their personal income would potentially increase and add more than \$310 billion to the U.S. economy (Richmond, 2008). High school dropouts impact our penal system as well. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000), approximately 30% of federal and 40% of state prison inmates are high school dropouts costing the taxpayers billions of dollars.

As the National Dropout Prevention Center Network (2005) noted: High school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed; graduating from high school will determine how well one will live for the next 50 years; high school graduates earn \$143 more per week than dropouts; dropouts are more likely to apply for and receive public assistance; and dropouts comprise a disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison inmates. The purpose of this article is to stress the importance of earning a high school diploma and options for online learning.



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WHY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DROP OUT

In the 26th Annual Report to Congress, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Drop Outs*, Civic Enterprises interviewed and surveyed former students aged 16-25 who branded themselves as high school

dropouts. The annual report affirms that the majority of high school students leave school with less than two years remaining for completion of their high school education; and, while a number of students had experienced specific learning challenges, the majority of students demonstrated academic achievements. Similarly, an astonishing 70% of the high school dropouts knew they had the ability to graduate, and 81% acknowledged they knew the importance of finishing their high school education.

In response to the perspectives of high school dropouts interview, respondents gave a mixture of reasons for dropping out, including: lacking motivation; academic challenges; unconnected to teachers; unconnected to teachers; school and curriculum; discernment that school is boring; and personal circumstances.

Peer pressure exasperated the problem when the student's peers were also bored with school. Also, many students dropped out of school because of life events: a parent became disabled and they had to get a job to help with the bills, they became a caregiver to a parent or other family member, they became a parent themselves. Many of the respondents to the survey had high grade point averages.

A third of the respondents gave failing grades as reason for their decision to drop out. Absences either through truancy or illness overwhelmed the student and they stated they could not catch up. The majority of high school dropouts felt it was nearly impossible to pass from one grade to the next and felt hopeless when meeting graduation requirements, according to the report. Some also noted that tests were too hard and teachers weren't available for extra help.

Finally, the special education students felt their school did not do enough to help students, like them, who were slower grasping the concepts. In contrast to general education students, the special education students doubted that they would

have worked harder if more had been expected of them.

Many of the respondents stated that they would have liked to have been stimulated. While most affirmed their school's graduation requirements were not easy, many stated they would have worked harder if higher academic standards and more homework or study time had been required of them to graduate from high school.

Fortunately, some adults are empowered to change the way we act towards America's drop out rate. As Marguerite Kondracke, President and CEO of America's Promise Alliance noted, "We do not have to live in a country where three out of 10 students do not graduate on time, and where on-time graduation for minority students is a 50-50 proposition. We have solutions on the ground, and legislative proposals that will bring them to scale" (Committee on Education & Labor, 2009).

WHY DROP IN?

The National Governors Association (NGA, 2010) has asked to partner with Congress and the administration to speed up state high school redesign action plans. The NGA recommends the federal government support state innovations through:

- (1) Congress creating a grant program that encourages states to develop, expand and improve state dual enrollment and early college programs (bridging high school and college) in a variety of coursework areas. This grant may also help states pay for qualified college credits.
- (2) Congress should help states partner with business and local schools to develop and provide mentoring, shadowing and internship opportunities to students in Grades 7-12.
- (3) Congress should support guidance and counseling services for students, including early college planning and preparation.
- (para. 4)

In an attempt for states to provide students with an increased opportunity for

college readiness and success, the NGA recommends:

1. Congress should expand opportunities for students to participate and succeed in Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and certification programs, especially in high-need schools. Expanded access to AP, IB and certificate programs for all students is accompanied by a priority on STEM and foreign language programs and includes paying for low-income student AP or IB testing, training teachers to teach AP, IB and certificate courses and administering more AP, IB and certificate courses and assessments.
2. Congress should provide incentives to states to create dual enrollment or early college programs that permit students to obtain college-level credits or college degrees.
3. Congress can provide resources to states to expand the use of technology in teaching and learning through e-learning opportunities, virtual high schools, e-mentoring, and e-portfolios (NGA, Key Committee Issue, 2010).

According to Prensky (2001), we might refer to high school students today as the Net Generation (Net Geners) or Millennial students. This is for the reason that technology has been readily available to them across America through television, cell phones, computer gaming, and the Internet for all of their life. Could it be that Net Geners are bored with traditional school settings and academics and thus, drop out?

As Roberts (2005) states, "the Internet and related technologies have had a major influence on my generation's culture and development" (p. 4). Roberts explains how most Net Generation students have always been in a world with computers, the Internet, highly interactive video games, and cell phones. In addition, for a multitude of students, instant messaging has outshined the telephone and electronic mail as the

principal form of communication. "It is not unusual for Net Geners to multitask using all three communication methods at once, while still surfing the Web and watching television (Roberts, 2005). Rogers gained knowledge towards the Net Generation's views on technology and learning through interviews, polls, focus groups, and casual conversations with them and the results are as follows.

TECHNOLOGY EXPECTATIONS OF THE NET GENERATION

Roberts stressed the importance of understanding how the Net Generation student defines technology as it relates to education. After a series of interviews conducted with university students, Roberts documented students' perspectives of technology and cites:

- (1) "Reformatting my computer system and installing cutting-edge software that allows me to do what I want, when I want, without restrictions, viruses, and the rules of Bill Gates" (p. 3.2).
- (2) "The ability to adapt and configure an already established program to [something that] benefits me daily, be it customizing Weather Bug to state the weather in my particular region or formatting my cell phone pad to recognize commonly used phrases in text messaging" (p. 3.2) and (3) "Any software and hardware alike that gives me the power to do what I need to do faster than ancient methods of conducting things, such as e-mailing versus writing, messaging three people versus buying a three-way calling package, digital research versus traveling to a well-stocked library, et cetera." (p. 3.2)

Roberts clarified how the students' responses represented two themes on their views of technology: The definition of technology is not limited to the Internet or computers. Net Geners define technology as any electronically based application or equipment that allows access to information or communication. The new data pro-

posed several questions pertaining to learning, such as: (1) How will institutions define and develop technology-enabled learning when students view technology as encompassing a wide range of mobile options beyond the traditional classroom? (2) Do student expectations regarding technology and customization constitute a barrier to effective teaching and learning with technology? (3) What does it mean when students consider an institution's "advanced technology" as "so yesterday?" (Roberts, 2005).

Roberts summarized students' expectations to be concerning whether the faculty member has the ability to use technology effectively. The survey data also indicated that the Net Generation's general expectations as it pertains to cutting edge technology has not completely impacted its expectations pertaining to the use of technology to support education. Rogers believes "this may signal a failure in the responsiveness of colleges and universities in terms of keeping pace with the rapidly changing technological landscape" (Roberts, 2005, p. 3.6). "However, it may also indicate that the opportunity to catch up with the Net Generation in a dialogue regarding its expectations about technology and learning to assess how wide the window of opportunity may still be, as well as how quickly it may be closing" (p. 3.6).

THE ONLINE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM APPROACH

For this article, the discussion will be limited to two different approaches, the online high school diploma and the online GED. Not all online high schools are the same. As the Internet and the field of education expand, students and parents have a multitude of choices. The two most important questions to ask are, "is this school nationally accredited" and "do you have a list of colleges that have accepted students who have earned your high

school diploma?" Attending an online high school affords the student flexibility in hours and curriculum. As long as the school is committed to providing personalized care to the students, success is within reach. Most online schools offer online, text-based, and project-based curriculum, enabling students to mix and match courses according to their learning styles and diverse grade levels in a given subject. For example, one student might be a sophomore but still need to take a freshman math class. Equally important, online schools, encourage higher-level thinking and writing skills as demonstrated through online discussions. As mentioned earlier, many students drop out of high school because of boredom. Challenging students' minds and offering a diverse curriculum can reduce boredom. In addition, online schools eliminate social peer pressures. The online environment is a safe, non-threatening one, free of violence, drugs, and alcohol. A good example of an accredited online high school is Ashworth High School.

Online schools such as Ashworth High School, whose online high school program is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), became even more affordable by reducing tuition on its general, college preparatory, and vocational programs.

At Ashworth Online High School, students can earn an accredited high school diploma at their own pace and from the comfort of their own home. Ashworth has prides in being a worldwide leader in self-guided distance learning and setting new standards of excellence in education since 1987. They offer over 100 career, high school, and college programs with quality instruction, personal guidance, and flexible accelerated studies so a student can move ahead as quickly as their lifestyles deem possible. Many students earn their high school diploma without ever quitting their

jobs. Most importantly, Ashworth offers students a chance to “finish high school or earn make-up credits—all with a self-paced curriculum that fits nicely into your busy life” (Ashworth High School, 2010).

A high school diploma is a stepping-stone to a better career and a larger salary and most employers prefer it to a GED. Not only is Ashworth accredited, it professes flexibility and offers: study anytime, anywhere; affordable tuition; transfer of credits (reduces tuition and speeds graduation); personalized support with unlimited tutoring; vocational and single course options; and social media online campus (Ashworth High School, 2009).

Ashworth’s general and vocational diplomas offer a sound education in core curriculum including, computers, health-care, and skilled trades. However, for the high school graduate who wants to go on to college, Ashworth offers an online college preparatory program.

THE GED ONLINE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM APPROACH

Some online high schools offer a GED program and award students a GED. In contrast, other online schools offer a GED online training, including free materials that help prepare the student to take the GED test in a face-to-face setting. Unfortunately, there are “diploma mills” online. These mills are not accredited and the students are unhappy to learn most colleges will not accept their diploma. It is important for students to learn about accreditation and have peace of mind that future employers will respect their education.

Miami Dade College (MDC) is a state-supported college with eight campuses and numerous outreach centers. MDC’s Adult Education Department offers a General Education Development (GED) online program. Students who are 16 or 17 years old are eligible to enroll in MDC’s GED online program (K. Miller, personal communication, August 6, 2010).

In Florida, the GED test is also referred to as the high school equivalency test. Students take the GED test to demonstrate mastery of math, science, social studies, reading, and writing. Upon successful completion of the test, a student is awarded a State of Florida high school diploma and considered a high school graduate. Over 500 students a year complete the MDC GED online program and graduate with their high school diploma (K. Miller, personal communication, August 6, 2010).

Most importantly, “students at MDC enjoy studying at their own pace from the comfort of their home.... It is easy to get started, all you need to do is stop by one of MDC’s campuses with a photo ID, social security card, to start the application process” (K. Miller, personal communication, August 6, 2010).

The process is straightforward: students take a pretest online; the software identified areas on which students need to concentrate; MDC staff provide explain how to log on and use the system—the training can be completed via telephone, email, or in an MDC lab. Each student enters at a different level and dedicates varying amounts of time to studying for the GED (MDC Website, 2010). The final step requires a student to take the Florida High School Diploma (GED) exam at one of the Miami-Dade County Public School sites where the test is offered.

SUMMARY

Online programs such as those offered by Ashworth High School and Miami Dade College, afford the student the luxury of studying at home and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

With unemployment remaining at high rates in the U.S., students without a high school diploma have little chance of becoming employed. Simply put, high school dropouts are in competition with many unemployed high school graduates.

As prospective students explore their options for an online high school diploma, they should ensure that the institution is accredited. In order for a diploma to be accepted by an employer, colleges, and universities, it must be approved by the Department of Education. As MDC's Karin Miller notes, "Not only do 500 of our students a year graduate high school, many go on to either MDC or another college of choice.... We even have had students accepted into Ivy League universities" (K. Miller, personal communication, August 6, 2010).

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"AS PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS EXPLORE THEIR OPTIONS FOR AN ONLINE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, THEY SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE INSTITUTION IS ACCREDITED."

Is Online Learning for All Learners?

Natalie B. Milman

With the U.S. economy still recovering from a recession, it is not surprising that the demand for “face-to-face and online course and program offerings” in institutions of higher education (IHEs) is growing, especially in public IHEs (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p. 7). In fact, “More than one in four higher educa-

tion students now take at least one course online” (Allen & Seaman, p. 1). For many administrators in IHEs facing the reality of tightening budgets, less classroom space, and the need to meet increasing enrollments, online education is an attractive solution to address these challenges, even though associated costs are often higher than those in face-to-face (F2F) courses and programs (Parry, 2011). However, before investing resources and time in converting F2F courses to an online delivery format, administrators in IHEs and other organizations interested in providing online training should thoughtfully consider whether or not the targeted courses/programs should even be taught via a distance, as well as whether or not online learning is the *best approach* for the *targeted learners*.

Although a meta-analysis conducted by Means et al. (2010) showed that students participating in online courses performed better than those in F2F courses, the researchers cautioned that several caveats were in order. For instance, they noted that “the online and classroom conditions differed in terms of time spent, curriculum and pedagogy” (p. xvii). An experimental study by Figlio, Rush, and Yin (2010) comparing online versus F2F instruction also raised concerns. Their study found that some learners, specifically Hispanics,



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males, and low achievers, performed worse in online courses than in F2F ones. Clearly these findings demonstrate that more research is needed about learners' performance in online education. However, research on factors that might influence students to withdraw from online courses and programs is worth examining, too.

Lee and Choi (2010) conducted a literature review of online course dropouts in postsecondary education. Through an analysis of 35 studies, they discovered three major categories of factors influencing online dropout rates: student factors, course/program factors, and environmental factors. Student factors included students' academic background (e.g., those who had higher grades in previous courses tended to complete online courses whereas those with lower grades had higher dropout rates), technology and time management skills, and psychological attributes (e.g., locus of control—those with a low locus of control were more likely to drop out of online courses). Course/program factors referred to course design, institutional supports (e.g., orientation), and interactions (e.g., student-student, student-instructor). Environmental factors involved work (e.g., increased workloads) and life circumstances (e.g., death in family) that affected students' ability to persist.

Of the three major factors described by Lee and Choi, the only factor that could be directly controlled by IHEs was course/program factors. Of these, institutional supports seem most promising for assisting learners. For example, one of the studies they analyzed found that the primary reason students withdrew from online courses was students' misconceptions about the demands and requirements of online courses. Moreover, the student dropouts had not completed an orientation, which could have educated them about online education (Clay, 2009 as cited in Lee & Choi, 2010). Therefore, a simple

remedy to educate potential online learners is to develop and require an orientation that informs them about the requirements for online learning before enrolling in an online course. Other supports might include encouraging or requiring such texts as Watkins and Corry's (2010) *E-learning Companion* that provides students with a comprehensive overview of the requirements and skills necessary for success in online courses. It also includes an E-learning Readiness Self-Assessment to determine their readiness for online learning and a plan to help them manage their time, peer relationships, and technology.

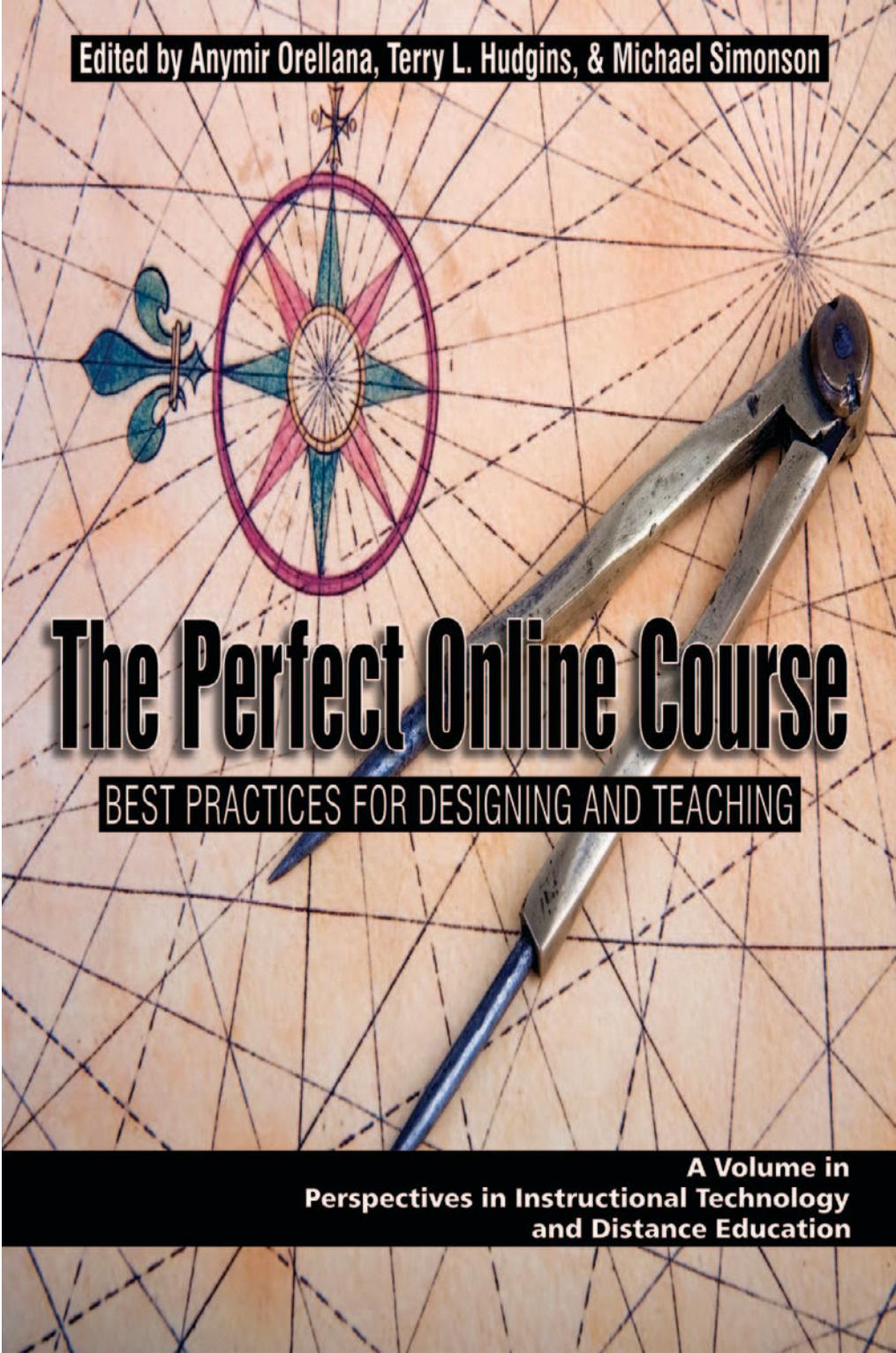
Increasingly, however, learners do not have a choice whether or not to take an online course. Often, it is the only option available to them. In such cases, those offering online courses should provide even more supports to foster the success of all learners. This assistance should involve completion of high-quality orientation by all students, examination, development, and implementation of effective strategies to support students in online courses, careful monitoring of the reasons why students might withdraw from online courses, factors that contribute to their persistence, and also research about factors that promote the success of all students. Online education is most likely not the best learning environment for all learners. However, if no other options are available, it is the duty of organizations and instructors to ensure that learners have the best supports available for them to be successful.

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"A LITERATURE REVIEW OF ONLINE COURSE DROPOUTS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ... DISCOVERED THREE MAJOR CATEGORIES OF FACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE DROPOUT RATES: STUDENT FACTORS, COURSE/PROGRAM FACTORS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS. STUDENT FACTORS INCLUDED STUDENTS' ACADEMIC BACKGROUND, TECHNOLOGY AND TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTES ... COURSE/PROGRAM FACTORS REFERRED TO COURSE DESIGN, INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS, AND INTERACTIONS ... ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INVOLVED WORK AND LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES."



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Errol Craig Sull

It's no secret that many adjuncts teach online courses for more than one school, and as the number of simultaneous teaching contracts for different

schools increase so do the complexities of being productive, efficient, and qualitative for each school. I have known many adjuncts who make their living this way, yet in conversations with them again and again I hear about stress, about being overwhelmed, about making mistakes in class, about not enjoying any of it (but needing to do it for the money). It doesn't have to be this way: with good planning and a solid understanding of varied strategies, teaching online for more than one school at a time can be exciting, fun, and stimulating—while giving you peaceful nights, stress-free days, and an ongoing enthusiasm for doing it again.

The suggestions that follow are by no means inclusive; they cover the broadest areas that overcome the most serious problems. I'd like to hear from you: what else would you suggest to help in such a situation? Let me hear your suggestions. Contact me at erroldistancelearning@gmail.com—I'll include them in a future column. But for now, use these:



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THE KEY: ORGANIZE

The more schools you represent the more deadlines, responsibilities, and events—and if you are not organized you can quickly find chaos, panic, and discombobulation surrounding you. Not only will this make for frustrated and unhappy students, but your supervisors won't exactly be thrilled, either. The answer to this is simple: stay organized by using whatever method(s) suit you best—jotting down all on a daily reminder pad, using any one of the many free online reminder sites, program reminders into your cell phone and/or computer, and/or keep a running master list (in Excel or a doc file) on your computer. You'll be happy you did.

PLAN AHEAD

It's one thing to wait for something—anything! —in an online class to come due before you take care of it, but it's quite another when you have multiple such items from multiple classes in multiple schools—they will quickly bowl you over! So, know what you need to before long before you need do it: some of these items will work much better if you have the time to think them through or plan them out, others won't be such a surprise to leave you scrambling—and thus usually resulting in not your best response. A big part of planning ahead is looking through every nook and crannies of your courses before they begin. The more you know about them the better prepared you will be.

BRING A “TODAY'S ITEMS” LIST FOR EACH NEW DAY OF TEACHING

Beyond being organized comes a checklist of what must be done for each school, each day; add to this list any personal items you need do that day (go to the bank, dentist appointment, lunch with mom, etc.). This list will always keep you on track. Also: whether it be an old-fashioned pad or an online page, keep something handy to jot

down the “unexpecteds,” students requests, and other tasks to do for your schools that pop up daily—and be sure you have a heading for each school so you never get these “to do” items confused.

HAVE SET DAYS FOR PAPER DUE DATES—AND STICK TO THEM

If you know when each assignment is due for each school, you can plan for each assignment: the time needed to assess them, additional info for students prior to the assignments being submitted, e-mail reminders to students who are still late with previous assignments, etc. And here's a neat time-saving trick: if your course is set up where students have a draft of an assignment then a final keep the draft date set, but let the students have until two weeks prior to the end of the course to turn in any final—this gives you staggered submissions, and thus not block after block of many assignments to edit and grade (especially helpful when teaching for more than one school).

BECOME BEST OF FRIENDS WITH E-MAIL, ANNOUNCEMENTS, CHATS, ET CETERA

Constant communication in a timely manner with your students is crucial. The umbilical cord connecting you to them and them to you is the computer, and thus it must be “fed” constantly with your words or info, insights, and reflection ... and in an enthusiastic, motivating manner. As for the “etc.,” more faculty are now also using Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites, but constant communication applies here as well. Yes, ongoing communication with students is a “duh, of course!” element of any course, but it becomes especially important with multiple schools where you have many more students to keep happy and engaged and different requirements for which these students are responsible.

HAVE CLEAR AND EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND SYLLABI

The fewer questions you get from students where the questions could have been prevented, the more time you have to handle your courses; thus be sure each item in your syllabi is correct. This would include all dates, pagination of readings, special reminders (such as an upcoming break, an online library tour, when to register for final exams, etc.) And if you have one or more syllabus supplied from your school, do not merely copy the wording into another syllabus you are creating: you are plagiarizing another school's work!

UNDERSTAND THE PERSONALITY OF EACH SCHOOL

Many online faculty forget about this, but it can go a long way in helping you in your interactions with students, supervisors, administrators, and support staff for each school where you teach. For example, one school may have a very conservative, don't-use-too-much-creativity, be-very-strict-with-your-students approach, while another may have a more flexible, it's-okay-to-bend-the-rules-when-you-think-appropriate, use-creativity-to-engage-the-students policy. You must fit within the personality umbrella of each school, for all facets of the school—including your online course and your long-term association with the school—fall under this umbrella.

TAKE ON SOME "ASSISTANTS" FOR EACH CLASS

This is a very cool tip: quickly learn which students in each of your classes are especially adept at computer technology, have a solid understanding of all parts of the class (e.g., course delivery system [Blackboard, eCollege, etc.] and syllabus), appear to have a better understanding of the class subject, et cetera. Ask these students to help out other students when they have basic problems with the items mentioned.

This not only saves you time but also is a surefire way to keep more students actively engaged in your class. (Of course, be sure all is posted in class so you can check for accuracy, language, etc.)

THOROUGHLY KNOW EACH SCHOOL'S COURSE DELIVERY SYSTEM

There are many of these: WebTycho, WebCT, Blackboard, Angel, eCollege, and others schools purchase, as well as those designed by individual schools. The more familiar you are with each the easier your class times will be: time saved, questions quickly answered, and shortcuts to take. And if you have any interest in teaching for additional schools, knowing more than one course delivery system is always a plus.

KNOW THE RULES AND REGS ON ALL CAMPUSES

Again, one suggestion that seems obvious, but it is quite easy to overlook something important in one school when teaching for more than one. A suggestion: have a separate "rules and regs" file for each school, and copy and paste all important info for each school; from this develop a checklist of what you do and when to do for each school—this way, you will always be on top of all requirements for each school. Also: constantly check for e-mail from each school for updates to rules and regs.

TRY TO WORK OUT A "BEST DAYS TO TEACH THERE" SCHEDULE

This is crucial: by getting to know your weekly due dates of all assignments, postings, etc. in each school you can work out a weekly schedule that gives you "the most bang for your buck." As an example, if School X requires you post to discussion 4 days per week, and School Y mandates you post 3 days per week, rather than do your postings so they overlap work it out

so you do one school on a day you don't do the other. There is also a flip side to this: do your postings for all schools at the beginning or end of the week—if you have that option—to allow more time for other duties, such as grading assignments. Whatever works best for you, it is important you work out a weekly schedule that is not overwhelming to the point of drowning you!

TEACH AT EACH SCHOOL AS IF THAT IS YOUR ONLY SCHOOL

Each school that employs you pays you ... and you are getting paid because you are expected to give that school your all—so do it! You were the one who decided to teach for more than one school online, yet each school must get your full attention—as if that school was your only employer. And a key thought to remember: *never* have a mindset that you are only teaching for the money. Hopefully, you are teaching because you have a true passion to help others effect positive change in their lives—and perhaps the lives of others—through increasing their knowledge and improving their critical thinking. You are the one they depend on to do this—and do it well, so whether two schools or five schools or more, *always* give each school your best effort.

BE ON TOP OF GRADING AND FEEDBACK AT EACH SCHOOL

Students want to know the progress they are making in your course, and thus they look for your feedback and grades to tell them this info: be sure these are on time. It can be easy to mix up due dates of when you need return student assignments—and many instructors can quickly become overwhelmed with a large number of assignments to grade. This goes with the territory, however, of deciding to teach for more than one school, so it is mandatory you work out a schedule that allows you to

return all papers—with detailed feedback—in a timely manner.

DEVELOP A “COMMENTS BANK” TO SAVE YOU TIME

While having preset comments for feedback is helpful when teaching for one online school, it is a must when teaching for multiple schools—these save you time while allowing you to give each student the in-depth feedback he or she expects. But if you are teaching the same subject yet at multiple schools, pay attention to any differences (e.g., APA vs. MLA, one economic theory vs. another, etc.) and don't confuse these in your comments. And always be sure your comments are up to date (if applicable), and don't hesitate to add personal text to fit your school's needs.

EMPLOY A MAJOR STRESS BUSTER OR TWO ON A REGULAR BASIS

This is important for any facet of our life, of course, but it becomes especially necessary when teaching for multiple schools, as the pressures of deadlines, daily tasks to complete, and—at times—7-days-per-week work schedules can bring on major doses of stress. A host of approaches to relieve stress can be found on numerous online sites—but just doing something that interests or relaxes you works just as well (if not better).

ADJUST TO EACH SCHOOL'S DIFFERENT LEARNING LEVELS/ WRITING ABILITIES OF STUDENTS

Depending on your school, you may find your class(es) in one school comprised primarily of older adults, another might have more fresh-out-of-high school students, and a third could focus on military students—each of these might require a different level of writing, different teaching strategies (to match different levels of learning), and varied amounts of course

information. Know these well, as confusing one school's student demographics with another can make for unhappy and unsatisfied students—something you never want.

BORROW, ACQUIRE, APPROPRIATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MATERIALS

Most schools offering online courses have orientation programs for new instructors; presented in these is extensive information on how to teach and facilitate online, on learning theories and strategies, etc. For the most part, this is valuable—save all, for what is offered from one school might help you at another. This also is true for workshops, readings, and professional development courses offered by these schools. Finally, be sure to keep an ongoing list of what you can change, what you can strengthen, and what you can add to your courses based on experiences from all your courses: use these to better teach your next round of courses for all your schools.

BE SURE YOU HAVE A COMFORTABLE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Your computer, desk, chair, and surrounding environment should all work to help you have as relaxed, smooth, efficient, and

enjoyable time as possible during the many hours you spend teaching online. If your chair is not the best you could have back problems. Keep your desk uncluttered and neatly organized. Be sure your computer is working optimally (especially available memory, anti-virus programs, up-to-date software programs, nice-sized monitor, and back-up software, as well as a good printer—and, if possible, fax machine and scanner). Have the environment set up to relax you. The more you focus on your “office” the more enjoyable will be your experience of teaching multiple courses at multiple schools.

EAT WELL, EAT HEALTHY

This may sound obvious, but it's crucial you eat well (the more fatty foods the more sluggish you'll feel: never good, but especially when you need spend more time in front of a computer because you have multiple teaching gigs) and eat at the right times (i.e., eating a full meal late at night can equate to weight gain and feeling tired the next day). And when you snack and/or drink at your computer keep your snacks light, don't overdo the caffeine and sugar, and leave behind any alcohol.

Remember: A juggler succeeds because of excellent planning, coordination, focus, and practice.

“IT'S NO SECRET THAT MANY ADJUNCTS TEACH ONLINE COURSES FOR MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL.”



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Ask Errol!

Errol Craig Sull

Ah, the questions regarding online teaching keep pouring in, and that's a good thing, for it gives many in the United States and abroad an opportunity to benefit from your problems, concerns, and queries. This column's selections:

While my classes are going fine, and I receive excellent reviews from my supervisor, recently my supervisor wrote me, indicating one of my students had complained



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about me (regarding a low grade she had received). Although the student never mentioned anything to me, and I have a record of always responding to student posts in a timely manner, this still bothered me. (My supervisor backed me up, and I was found to have done nothing wrong.) Your thoughts? Am I just being overly sensitive?

Let's begin by what's at the heart of most folks who teach online: your contract extends only as far as the class session in which you are teaching, thus you don't want anything untoward to happen that could possibly result in you not getting asked to teach the following session. Such a mindset is enough to make anyone look at what for a tenured professor would be a mosquito bite but for you makes it into a shark chomp. Beyond this, however, you must keep in mind that no matter how good of an online instructor, you will have students who don't understand all the procedures and rules, who will blame you for their problems in the course, and who will "make noise" to the school about you. As long as you have covered all your bases—ongoing and timely communication, returning student assignments when due, and following your own rules and the school's expectations in the classroom—you can rest on this foundation of being a solid instructor. Sure, it's inconvenient and annoying—but then being an online teacher will never be a Walt Disney cartoon.

As I write this I am in the midst of an orientation class as a new online instructor for an online school where I was recently hired. Getting deeper and deeper into the orientation I am surprised—perhaps shocked would be a better word!—as to how the school micromanages every step, every word of the instructor. Although orientation will be over when this comes to print I'd like to know your thoughts on my reaction to this school's approach to its instructors.

I'm constantly amazed at how so many online schools go overboard in developing what they believe to be the ideal molds in which to place their instructors. (If someone is new to teaching, and the type of orientation you mention is this person's first introduction to teaching online, I'm sure it would give this person pause to continue his or her decision to teach online.) Of course, these schools are fighting for student enrollment, and thus they try to develop what they hope will be the "perfect" online instructor—almost robot-like—so each student can be guaranteed an excellent learning experience in any online course the student takes at X school. My experience in teaching online—and I've been doing it for 16 years—tells me that once the orientation ends and the usual probationary period (of someone observing the newbie online instructor in his or her first class or two) ends, there is a relaxation of the "it-must-be-done-this-way" approach. But do keep two items in mind: (1) What may seem like a whole bunch of confusing "stuff" will soon give way to a "Hey, it's no big deal!" attitude because you simply get used to doing all that is required of you. (2) Not to sound calloused, but you did opt to teach for this school, you were selected, and now you must go through their requirements if you want to get paid as an online instructor. You can seek out other online teaching opportunities if, no matter what, your school's approach is too confining for you!

My school bombards me with notices of faculty in-service online seminars, faculty websites to visit for discussion with my colleagues, and informational emails about school policies and teaching strategies. Perhaps if I were teaching full time for the school or at least getting paid a healthy salary I would find this all worthwhile to explore, but as an adjunct with a typical adjunct's pay I find myself shying away from any of this. While my lack of involvement has never been pointed out to me, and attending/reading any of this has never been required, I wonder if I should start being more involved.

In one way, you are fortunate to have your school extend so many opportunities to you for professional development—and let me quickly add: no matter how long we have been teaching online each of us can still learn new online and educational strategies, activities, information, and theories; if we take away but one new item the training has been a positive experience for us. Can schools go overboard with their efforts at professional development? Sure, but the schools also want faculty they can believe are at the top of their game and offer the type of learning experience that retains students (think bottom line profits), thus the more professional development opportunities offered their online instructors the better the schools can assume they are doing the right thing, i.e., not letting instructors stagnate with their own professional development once hired. And here's one other important item: in all those opportunities being presented to you to learn more there will be, I assure you, new information relating to updates or changes in your school's policies and procedures, and if you miss any of these you can really end up in deep doo-doo!

More and more of my online colleagues are using social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to stay in touch with their students; also, several of them encourage their students to IM them whenever their stu-

dents see the faculty members online. And while my school has never required it, the school does matter-of-factly mention social networking sites and IMs as a way to have more communication with students. I feel that my communication efforts in the online classroom—using email, announcements, live chats, and phone calls—keep my communication very active and show me as an interested instructor. Your thoughts on this pressure to push me into these new areas of communication would be appreciated.

It's the twenty-first century, my friend, and that means your grandfather's online teaching experience is not going to be yours ... and your child's will not be yours, etc. Online education has, at its heart, computer technology, and as this technology continues to develop new software, programs, and hardware will be introduced into online teaching—whether mandated by a school or simply transitioned by other online educators into their classes. And because constant, enthusiastic communication with students is the bloodline that keeps that computer technology alive, connecting you with students and vice versa, it stands to reason that anything with a chip, a byte, or a bit that can help that communication process will be recommended for you—if not required. With all this said, there is a “however”—if you are not required to use sites such as Facebook and Twitter; you still maintain ongoing, timely, and motivating communication with your students; and your supervisor has no complaints about your student communication, then just keep on doing what you are doing. But do be prepared: the time is not too far off when online schools will begin to require its instructors to incorporate one or more social networking sites into their toolbox of student communication approaches.

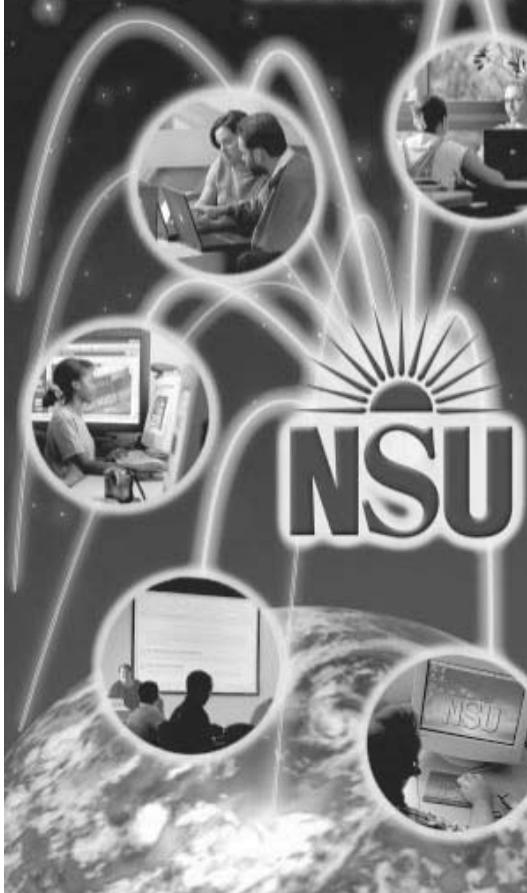
Okay, I'm getting a bit worried about the future of online education, as I received an article from Forbes magazine indicating that many online for-profit schools enroll-

ments have gone down. Teaching online is important to me for both professional interests and the pay—can you offer any insight on the future of online education?

Online education began in the 1984, through a school called American Open University of NYIT (New York Institute of Technology), and since then has grown at an exponential rate (at the end of 2009 there were approximately 12 million post-secondary students taking some form of online class, and this figure is expected to reach 22 million by 2014). Yet obstacles have been placed in the paths of schools offering online courses: the so-called 50/50 rule, enacted in 1992, was a U.S. government restriction that required schools to offer at least 50 percent of their classes in physical classrooms (rather than distance or e-learning) before qualifying for federal financial aid program; it was repealed in 2006. More recently, the U.S. Department of Education has proposed legislation—the Gainful Employment Rule—that would require for-profit colleges eligible for federal aid to have at least 45 percent of their former students paying down the principal on their loans. While the former had and the current proposed one is having negative effects on enrollment at online schools, the sheer number of students wanting—and in many instances needing—online courses is very much like an army of ants overrunning any barrier placed in front of it. And one other item to keep in mind: schools—obviously for-profit but also not-for-profit—find online courses big moneymakers by having lower expenses than traditional postsecondary schools (pay less to faculty members and no buildings to maintain, for example). So while there will be valleys, to be sure, the peaks will remain.

REMEMBER: *Questions asked are like vitamins for the mind: the more we present them the stronger our mind becomes, and thus the healthier we are in taking on everyday tasks.*

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- review the credentials of instructors and permit only those to teach whose qualifications have been carefully screened; and
- establish a brand, a visibility, even a prestigious reputation in the academy of similar institutions.

This list could be expanded. Without doubt there needs to be research about the concept of the diploma mill in a distance

education environment. There is much to be learned, and much to be prevented.

And finally, we should not use double negatives—diploma mills love confusing language so we must be clear—diploma mills are not acceptable!

REFERENCE

Carey, K. (2010). Why do you think they're called for-profit colleges? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 56(42), A88



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What Diploma Mills Are Not

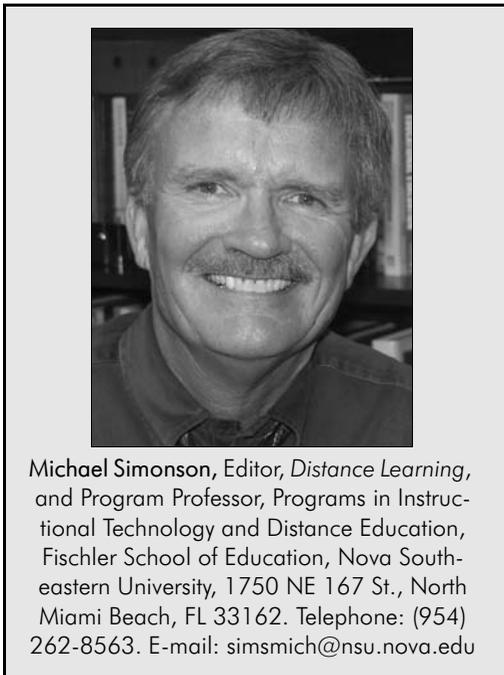
Michael Simonson

A diploma mill is an institution that pretends to be legitimate but actually is a fake, sells diplomas, and misrepresents itself. Recently, many have become concerned with the apparent proliferation of diploma mills (Carey, 2010). While it may be easy to root out diploma mills, another approach is to evaluate an educational institute by what it is and what diploma mills are not. Here is a list of what

diploma mills are not, and what legitimate educational organizations are:

Diploma mills are not organizations that:

- are accredited by one of the regional accrediting agencies;
- are schools with one, infrequently changed address, website, and phone number;
- require a well-documented and widely published admissions process that normally does not allow student admissions at the last minute with unbelievable offers;
- offer courses and programs that can only be completed in what most would think is a reasonable period of time, based on some established criterion such as the course/Carnegie Unit;
- permit, offer, and encourage interaction among students and between students and easily identified faculty;
- have a clearly established and rigorously followed process of faculty oversight of the curriculum, usually by a curriculum committee;
- rarely, if ever, provide course credit for life experiences, or work-place responsibilities;



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