**OSI Network Library Program**  
A Distance Learning Initiative for Professional Development

 lyn robinson  
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**Overview**

- In this session, we will look at the concept of distance learning, particularly in the context of professional development
- We will look at the theoretical bases of the topic, and try to elucidate some practical consequences

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**What is distance learning?**

- learning (mostly) at a distance from the teacher
- learning (mostly) at a distance from other students
- study is guided, in contrast to self-learning

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**How is distance learning different from traditional learning?**

- limited support of study group
- limited “face to face” interaction with the teacher
- need to set own goals and take responsibility for learning
- (Moore 1980)  
  – learning is self-directed, independent and autonomous

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**Why is distance learning so relevant today?**

- technological advances?
- changes in society?
- changes in the place of learning within society
  - emphasis on continuous and/or professional learning
  - convenience of distance learning
Jarvis, Holford and Griffin (1998)

- list some recent changes in our approaches to learning:
  - from childhood to adult learning
  - from the few to the many
  - from liberal to vocational learning
  - from theoretical to practical
  - from welfare provision to market demand

- they also observe changes in the way learning occurs
  - from education to learning
  - from teacher-centered to student-centered learning
  - from rote learning to reflective learning
  - from learning as a process to learning as content

- and finally changes in the content of what is learnt
  - from single-discipline knowledge to multi-discipline knowledge to integrated knowledge
  - from knowledge as truth to knowledge as relative
  - from a classical curriculum to a romantic curriculum to programme

The rationale.....

- Knowles (1975)
  - “rapid change will be the only stable characteristic...”
  - the ability to learn on one’s own (to think critically) has suddenly become a prerequisite for living in our world today

Critical thinking

- Brookfield (1987)
  - recognising and challenging assumptions
  - recognising the importance of the context
  - being willing to explore alternatives
  - becoming relatively sceptical

So......

- self-directed learning is more than just choosing which resources to use and what to study - it should be a process of reflection on the nature of society and the individual’s place in it, leading to personal growth
What does this mean for distance learning?
- the education process should make it possible for learners to reflect on the material they are studying, and to relate it to their own situation and experience

Adult learners
- rich in experience, with attitudes relevant to the subject
- goal-orientated
- self-aware
- ‘haunted’ by memories of school
- diverse in beliefs about learning
- concerned about money, family, work
- expect value for input of time and money

Consequences.....
- asking adults to follow unchanged college courses is rarely effective -

Competencies
- (Knowles 1980)
  - learners can specify what new things they will understand, or be able to do, after the learning
  - this popular approach forms the basis of most vocational training, which offers a promise of ‘learning outcomes’
  - this approach, although valuable, has its limitations

Expectations of learners
- Rowntree (1988)
  - learning as memorising
  - learning as understanding
  - learning as application
  - learning for personal development

Distance learning courses should facilitate:
- some memorising
- understanding and application
  - (knowledge and skills)
- critical reflection
• content should be set within a framework of communication and interactions
• to some extent, this will depend on the technology available
  – email
  – web pages
  – video

• Moore (1993)
  – learner-content interaction
  – learner-instructor interaction
  – learner-learner interaction

Design of materials
• (Holmberg 1995)
  – presentation should be easily accessible
  – colloquial language
  – personal style of writing
  – explicit advice
  – encouragement for critical thinking
  – free exchange of viewpoints
  – careful structuring of material
  – relevant to learners situation

• different styles of learning suit different people

Role of the teacher?
• learning is self-directed, not dictated by any one individual
• teachers should be facilitators and enablers of learning (Jarvis, Holford and Griffin 1998)
• teachers should themselves engage in critical reflection on their activities

A strategy for distance learning course design
• Colour code activities:
  – Blue
  – Pink
  – Green
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Blue</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pink</strong></th>
<th><strong>Green</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>focus on:</strong></td>
<td><strong>focus on:</strong></td>
<td><strong>focus on:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– competencies of understanding</td>
<td>– competencies of practice or skills</td>
<td>– critical reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>enables students to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>enables students to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>enables students to:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– read and discuss relevant material with understanding</td>
<td>– carry out professionally relevant tasks, for example, internet searching, evaluation of resources</td>
<td>– integrate a variety of skills and knowledge, and apply it to their professional situation, for example, the design of a training course, preparation of a requirements document for a library management system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>taught by:</strong></td>
<td><strong>taught by:</strong></td>
<td><strong>taught by:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– lectures, seminars/tutorials, course notes, reading lists, non-interactive online tutorials</td>
<td>– demonstrations, practical exercises, interactive online tutorials</td>
<td>– individual work, seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>assessed by:</strong></td>
<td><strong>assessed by:</strong></td>
<td><strong>assessed by:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– multiple choice questions, essay assignments, presentations</td>
<td>– practical skills</td>
<td>– written and/or oral presentation of student work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- in theory blue activities will precede pink, and pink will precede green
- in practice the learning process will probably be cyclical
- we shall see........

www.osi.hu/nlp
lynrobinson@cs.com