

DISTANCE LEARNING MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

"technology does not teach students; effective teachers do"
Improving Distance Learning Instruction In Eastern New York

From the Editor



Welcome to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter!

Distance Learning instructors are educating students using innovative and unique methodologies. Therefore, Distance Learning instructors are ingenious and exclusive in their own right. For this, they deserve recognition.

The epitome of receiving recognition is teaching, helping, and sharing ideas with others.

The Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter provides a space for DL instructors to inform, advise, and assist other DL teachers; **Welcome to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter!**

The Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter was developed to connect, facilitate, and encourage DL best practice discussion. *It was designed and is edited BY A DL INSTRUCTOR.* This is a peer-to-peer resource and serves to cultivate our DL community.

As a DL teacher you probably feel excited and special. However, you might also feel anxious, frustrated, overwhelmed, and isolated. These feelings are normal and are often ignored when shared with your traditional education colleagues. "Sink or swim" never seemed like a more appropriate phrase when we began instructing in front of cameras.

Continued on page 6



In This Issue:

From the Editor:

Welcome to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter

Special Feature:

The Roots of Distance Learning

Feature Article:

Making you a more effective DL instructor by understanding and applying Transactional Distance Theory

Part 1: 6 Steps to Understanding Transactional Distance Theory

Give This a Try!

Getting your students familiar with the class website

Tell Us How You:

Learned to use the technology

For the Facilitators:

Where students should sit

**Do you need help problem solving?
Ask for it here!**

*Distance Learning Network:
130 courses
57 schools
14 counties*

Contribute to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter. See the last page of this issue for details.

Special

The Roots of Distance Learning

Education has embraced Distance Learning for the core value it demonstrates: transport content, not people. We are fortunate to have videoconferencing technology available because it provides a seamless student-instructor synchronous interaction. Distance Learning was not always this transparent.

Distance Education (educating students that are physically separated from the primary instructor) is not a new methodology and began in the United States in 1874. Then termed "Correspondence Study", this method of instruction fits the definition of Distance Education because a college (Illinois Wesleyan University) was able to educate learners at a distance (Grimes 1993 as found in Motamedi 2001).



Using television technology to send content appeared in the 1940s and 1950s when content was sent through television broadcasts (Ham 1995). While updating and disposing old periodicals in her public library, a close friend stumbled across the above newspaper article from 1961. The article describes a DE class where students receive instruction that is transmitted through a plane's 24 foot long antenna as it circled above the school. I guess you can't put a price on relevant education !

Continued on page 6

TRY IT

Give This a Try!

"At the start of each semester, I have my students send me a student information sheet. They are required to navigate to our shared website (blackboard.com), download the information sheet, complete it, and email it to me. They are essentially practicing assignment submission and I have a chance to learn about them! The excuse of not knowing how to get the assignments never arises after that point!"



Student Information Sheet

Attached Files:  STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET.doc (1.228 MB)

Click on the link and download the "Student Information Sheet" to your desktop. Complete it. Save it. Email it to me as an attachment. This is PRACTICE for real labs- but you will receive credit. Put your name and "Student Info. Sheet" in the Subject line of the email



Making you a better DL instructor by understanding Transactional Distance Theory

Part 1: 6 Steps to Understanding Transactional Distance Theory

“How does distance education differ... why do you and your DL colleagues deserve special recognition and appreciation when all you do is teach on a television?”

“Well, um... you see, it is different because...”

I was essentially left speechless. I was at a conference discussing best practices in science laboratory technique when another professor caught wind that I taught a DL course.

How do you describe something that you come to intimately understand by only participating in the activity in question? **How can you describe the difference in DL education to someone that doesn't have the “DL feeling”?**

In 1973, Michael Graham Moore began developing the Transactional Distance Theory (TDT). It describes the processes that occur in the virtual bubble of a DL course. It attempts to explain the issues surrounding DL at its pedagogic roots. **Transactional Distance Theory can be used to explain the seemingly indescribable difference that separates traditional education with Distance Education. We are going to put a name to the elephant in DL discussion classroom.**

Step 1: Understand the need for an advanced definition of Distance Education

Distance education was described in language that was specific to defining the “distance” aspect of the experience. The definitions until 1973 described the *process* and ambiguous facts surrounding DL; *remote learners were the focus*. Moore realized there was an aspect to DL that often was being over-looked. The elephant in the DL classroom that Moore identified was the psychological aspect involved with the teacher-student separation. **TDT incorporates the cognitive sense of distance and describes the virtual mental chasm created by the very real physical separation.**

Step 2: Internalize TDT: Define Transaction and identify the variables

Transactional Distance is defined as the psychological boundaries created by the physical distance between the instructor and learner. *The greater the transactional distance, the more the learner has to take the learning into their own hands* (something we want to avoid...this is NOT a learner centered approach to education because it LACKS facilitation). The variables incorporated into the definition change the description of DL from discrete and absolute to being more continuous and relative because TDT incorporates the feelings of the learner. There are three variables that form a web of interaction; each variable can be viewed as either the cause or effect of another. The three variables are: Dialog, Structure, and Learner Autonomy.

The purpose of understanding TDT and the interaction of the variables is to decrease Transactional Distance. Decreasing Transactional Distance results in greater learning. *Continued on page 7*

“This separation leads to special patterns of learner and teacher behaviors. It is the separation of learners and teachers that profoundly affects both teaching and learning” (Moore 1993)



share

Tell Us How You...

Tell us how you learned to use the technology:

“Being one of the first DL teachers in the area, I learned through trial and error. In fact, I am still learning how to use certain components and need more help to be a more effective DL instructor”

“I was lucky to have an existing DL teacher working in my building. She spent several hours walking me through all of the different buttons and settings. ”

“I learned the basics from simply hitting buttons. Currently, and since the start of the 13/14 school year, I have been learning from the technicians as they update our equipment. They have been very helpful.”

For February: Tell us how you distribute course materials

Facilitator

Where students should sit

“I find it helpful when my remote facilitator positions my students in the front corner of the remote classroom (if there are only a handful of students). With the students grouped together, they are able to zoom in. When zoomed in, I see more of the students and less of the classroom space. With the students larger on the screen, I am able to observe changes in their body language. The remote students also feel more involved when I see larger versions of them.”

“For quick questions, I ask my remote facilitator to NOT adjust the camera to zoom in on the student. It often takes unnecessary time and takes away from the flow of the lesson”

“I ask the facilitator to avoid the back rows if possible. Having rows of empty students in the front of the classroom makes me feel like the students at my remote sites are not interested.”

QUESTAR III
PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST



Need help solving an issue? Ask for it here and find out how other DL teachers deal with the same issue!

“How do you keep your remote students from using their phones during class (I find it different from my host students using their phones)?”

“I feel that my administration sometimes lacks fundamental understanding of what a DL class is- without being abrasive, how do I communicate to them the true differences in the environment?”

(The Roots of DL, Continued from page 2)

The current usage of Videoconferencing (and largely what we now consider Distance Education) began receiving attention in the early 1980s. It was then termed “telecommunication” (U.S Congress, Office of Technology Assessment 1989). Interaction was limited to one-way video and audio communication via a telephone (Anderson and Kent 2002).

Considering the aviation alternative, our current form of DE using Interactive Television (ITV) is more practical and probably more effective. Notable usage of ITV services began in the 1990s when education institutions began to make it common practice to offer content to students physically separated from campus (Pool 1996). Usage of ITV in New York began around the same time. However, while there were pockets of use of ITV, widespread instruction began growing rapidly five to six years ago. During the 2014/2015 school year, there are 130 courses taught to 57 schools.

As Distance Education has evolved from “Correspondence Study” to Interactive Television, the core objective has not changed: transport content, not people. As DE continues to advance, it is the goal of the *Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter* to keep all parties informed and to improve DL instruction.

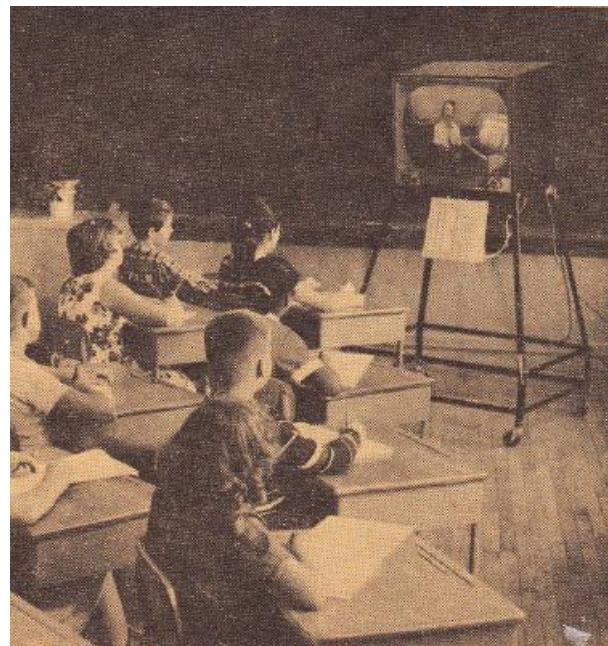
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(From the Editor, continued from page 1)

The DLMN will be your open space to share and learn. It will act as your mentor and keep you connected to your DL colleagues. Most importantly, you will receive something every DL teachers deserves: **RECOGNITION**. Contribute to the DLMN and share your thoughts and ideas to help develop our community of DL instructors.

Embrace teaching on television!
Contact the DLMN with any questions, comments, or concerns.
dlnn.pd@gmail.com

-Chris

Step 3: Incorporate “Dialog” into our own definition of DL

TDT incorporates the importance of *meaningful* communication. Dialog can come in the form of teacher-student, student- student, or student-self (in ones own head, self reflection). Dialog need not be restricted to synchronous spoken communication though this form of dialog should be prioritized. As the amount of synchronous dialog increases, the Transactional Distance decreases.

Dialog must be constructive and positive. At all times, dialog needs to lead to a greater understanding by the learner. As meaningful dialog increases, Transactional Distance decreases.

Step 4: Incorporate “Structure” into our own definition of DL

Structure refers to course logistics. The design, learning objectives, evaluation methods, and pace all determine course structure. **Structure is the level and ability of the instructor to be flexible and adaptive to better serve student needs, attitudes, and interests.** Courses that are low in structure are high in flexibility. Courses that are high in structure are low in flexibility. “Less Structure” does not imply that the instructor is not prepared. A less structured course, or a flexible course design is desirable in DL because it allows the learner to feel “connected” to the learning process. The learning process becomes more individualized. **As learner connectedness increases, Transactional Distance decreases.**

Step 5: Understanding the role of learner Autonomy in TDT

An experience that has a high Transactional Distance requires higher learner autonomy. In this respect, learner autonomy refers to the fact that to be successful, the learner needs to take a proactive position and look out for themselves. Autonomy is often (and rightfully so) regarded as a positive aspect to productivity. However, autonomy in our sense is the result of neglect; the autonomy is forced and not facilitated.

Step 6: Ask the important question: How can I, as a DL instructor, decrease Transactional Distance?

Less dialog results in the learner feeling unconnected and results in a high Transactional Distance.

More dialog results a higher feeling of learner connectedness and therefore decreases Transactional Distance.

More structure results in the learner feeling less “responded-to” and leads to a high Transactional Distance. **Less structure leaves more opportunity to be responsive to learners and therefore decreases Transactional Distance.**

With the above in mind, the next step is to incorporate that knowledge into our methodology, but how?

To summarize:

-TDT incorporates the psychological aspect and unique communication involved with DL instruction.

-TDT has three variables that work together to determine Transactional Distance: Dialog, Structure, and Learner Autonomy.

-As dialog increases, Transactional Distance decreases.

-As structure decreases, Transactional Distance decreases.

-As Transactional Distance increases, (forced) learner autonomy increases.

-Increase dialog and decrease structure to decrease Transactional Distance.

Next month we give rational steps to increase dialog and decrease structure.

Contribute to the Distance Learning Monthly Newsletter and Be Recognized

TEACHING DL IS DIFFICULT AND YOU DESERVE RECOGNITION. CONTRIBUTE TO THE DLMN AND BE RECOGNIZED.

THE DLMN IS A LEARNING COMMUNITY WHERE DL TEACHERS SHARE BEST PRACTICES.

SUBMISSIONS ARE NOT LIMITED TO LISTED TOPICS. FEEL FREE TO SUBMIT USEFUL LINKS, VIDEOS, OR A PICTURE OF YOUR DL CLASS!

Though everything submitted will be read and considered, the editor has final discretion.


Quick Opportunities to contribute to DLMN:

Some features of the DLMN are interactive and require reader participation while other features ask for quick thoughts and experiences. Many of the topics are time sensitive; please adhere to the submission deadline shown below.



Opportunities that require research and DLMN correspondence:

Feature Articles are research based and serve as literature based best practices. Submitting an article of this nature requires time, research, and DLMN correspondence. Topics are variable and the DLMN is willing to include anything you feel is important. Start by proposing a Feature Article topic to DLMN!




Share your views, thoughts, or experiences regarding each monthly topic!



Ask a question or respond to another reader's question!



Respond to the poll with a 1-2 sentence description! Poll results are published the next month.



Do you have anything you wish that your administration knew or understood about DL?



Share something with the DL community that you are proud of! Encourage others to try something new!



The remote facilitator is one of the important pieces to the DL puzzle. Share your facilitator best practices!



There are a variety of unique topics that warrant discussion. Find one that you are passionate about, research your idea, and share it!



Anything and everything that does not fall into a specified category- any length discussing any content. Have fun and be creative!

Please send all material to dlnn.pd@gmail.com

