Discussion Postings

Chapter 1 Reflection

The true story consisted of four schools with high speed Internet and a fiber optic network between the schools. They definitely had the "mere vehicles" to connect. When Clark describes the media/hardware in this way, he makes an important point as to say that the hardware isn't going to do the produce successful learning alone. However, the word "mere" might also lend the idea to some people that these tools could be a waste of money and that public schools could benefit more by using the money in other ways. (just a thought about budget planning and the ways research is used to make decisions)

Those chemistry teachers demonstrated well that they possessed great abilities in the planning and use of problem-based learning to successfully teach the students. I have seen something similar and on a smaller scale. Middle school classroom teachers are constantly under pressure teach computer skills due to the mandatory NC Computer Skills test that is now required before graduation. They wanted more equipment, got a new computer lab, and have all the necessary hardware and software support that they need. However, some of the best lessons have come from a simple set of classroom activities involving and overhead projector and handouts!

The questions asked on p. 6 about whether funds should be appropriated to improving traditional settings of education or more toward telecommunications systems is an interesting one. I sometimes feel as if the wish lists for hardware makes people forget that they must have content and instructional methods improved as well. I worked with one department in a university who spent thousands to create online courses and yet most of the online instructors had no idea how to teach their content online. This can cause a high amount of frustration for both the instructor and of course the student.

So let's go back to my earlier points about how a great teacher doesn't need the high end equipment. Once they get the fiber optics and network to do video conferences, possibilities are endless….IF and only IF the quality of the instructor is there FIRST.

So in the WORLDWIDE Examples p. 11 (which I am absolutely surprise by the incredible numbers of distance ed students) aren't those graduation rates extremely low? I wasn't sure about what the avg. graduation rates are so I hope you can give me some feedback on that. It would seem to me that with extreme quantity you would lose quality of instruction and therefore get a low grad rate and high dropout rate.

Chapter 2 Reflection

Think of this phrase for a moment. "How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?" (feel free to hum the tune from the Sound of Music. Starring Julie Andrews ☺) Then you might be able to understand my personal analogy of DE. It is a cloud that the world is trying to contain and organize into a package that can be distributed and shipped all over the world. As I read the various definitions and theories, I thought at first that it all seemed well thought out and scrutinized by the experts and theorists. But after a while I realized that it isn't that way at all. DE is not going to be an easy one to pin down and formalize because it involves the MIND of a human being, which cannot be understood or simply filled with knowledge in one or more ways.

When defining DE, the chapter divides it into 4 categories. Even these categories have many questions, for example:
1. Institutionally based – what then constitutes the "institution"? Is it an accredited university? I took a 6 week online course with LEARNNC (www.learnnc.org) It isn't a college or university but it was an incredible class from which I gained more knowledge and skills than I thought was possible from LEARNNC. It was due to the delivery of the course, interaction with technology,

interaction with other students, and overwhelming support from the instructor. No college credits were given.

2. Separation of Teacher and Student – human interaction is VERY important as we all know. So the variations in an entirely online course with no video or audio as compared to a video conference course is huge and must be defined separately as well! Think about the influence of voice and sound on a person's actions and responses… what happens to learning when there is an absence of that? Don't' think it can be clumped into one item for a definition.

3. Interactive Telecommunications – It states that this should be available commonplace and relevant, but that still leads to confusion. Does interaction mean with fellow student, instructor, software, a web site, or a simple quiz online?

4. Sharing of data, Voice, and Video – and here is the clincher, you could take an entire online course and view nothing but PowerPoint presentations and tests. Or on the other hand it could be highly interactive as we have seen in ROOM 266.

In addition to the variations in the above components, there are social aspects to consider. Because each environment, language, religion, culture, and MIND exists in more various forms than even politics and economics can influence, the concept of HOW to disseminate education to it in a systematic manner goes beyond what I think one or even a group of persons can fathom.

Once you consider all these factors and THEN introduce the evolving world of technology, distance education becomes another universe all its own and I just don't think it can be conquered.

Chapter 3 reflection

I had a lot of questions about the research results in this chapter.
Learning Outcomes: Since so many different studies were given I wanted less results and more explanation about each study. When a result was listed that revealed that the telecourses produced higher achievement, I wanted to know more about the course design, instruction, learners, etc. (All of the areas focused at the DE Research Symposium. I also want to know what type of achievement is being recorded in some of the studies.

Learning Perceptions: In these cases I am glad that anxiety was discussed. Dr. J mentioned in the syllabus many times certain issues related to stress and asked that we not complain in the discussions and if we have ANY issues to contact her immediately. There are various ways to get support in a very timely manner and information about course procedures is very precise. All of these factors lead to a better connection between instructor and student. On p. 66 the research results described cite that reasons for problems were sometimes related to not having the ease of interaction with the instructor or other classmates.

Learner Attributes: I have an issue with these types of studies in distance education because I think you have to take into great consideration at times the region and culture from which a student lives in order to assess their online behavior. It could have more of an impact on it that most people realize. I know it does in the F2F environment. The one thing they did state was that Motivation is important and well, I just want to say that was a given for me. What did you think?

Interaction: Souder stated that the learners gained more from working with others across distances. There was mention of bonding and supportive classmates. In our case it has only been a few day and we are already active and supportive in our digital world. I have gone entire semesters with some classmates and not interact at all with them in the F2F world. Haven't you?

Myths 1, 2, 3: These were eye openers because I actually believed them all before now. I thought that the only way to motivate was to force students to interact but now I realize that it may just be my preference for learning online. I tend to disagree a bit with Myth 3. Anyone else with me? OF COURSE I believe content knowledge is extremely important. However, with distance and F2F, the teacher as a facilitator not just and expert, can do a great deal for their students. It takes a lot of skill to be this kind of instructor. And I don't think all experts in content can do it well.