

MY DEFINITION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education, as I have always understood, differs from an online education. This concept is important to understand. An online education is a broader category of distance education and is delivered via the World Wide Web. An online education involves education that can be accessed at any time and any place, and where the responsibility of learning is placed on the individual learner because all the content is available online.

Distance education on the other hand, involves instruction, learning groups, and resources that are separated by geographical distance but that connect all three elements in real time. This type of synchronous learning is connected by technological systems that may include but are not limited to, the World Wide Web, television, video calling (not voice telephones), email and in some cases, the postal system. Computer apps and other hosting platforms may be included. The responsibility of learning is shared among the individual learner, the learning group and the instructor through constant interaction via interactive telecommunication. Accredited institutions will host the instruction and approve the course and curriculum and also ensure that instructors are capable of teaching the content that is being taught.

The definition offered above is similar to Grenville Rumble who defined distance education to include "... a teacher; one or more students; a course or curriculum that the teacher is capable of teaching and the student is trying to learn;... in which the learner is physically separate from the teacher... [and] physically separated from the institution that sponsors the instruction... [and that] [l]earning be undertaken individually or in groups" where the teacher is physically absent (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p. 35). Although Rumble's definition, in large part, involved the geographical separation of teacher and students, there was one key element that was missing from his definition. As such, my definition differed from

Rumble and borrowed from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvements definition of distance education which included a missing element of telecommunication and electronic devices that are crucial to distance education (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p. 34). In addition, my definition also emphasizes the four components of distance education as outlined by Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek (2012) which include institutionally based education, separation of teacher and student, interactive telecommunication systems and sharing of learning experiences through data, voice, and video.

My definition of distance education may stand the test of time. First, a proximity of distance exists between the teacher, the institution and the learners. The distance between players has always been an important concept to distance education. Second, the mode of delivering the instruction/learning is conveyed via technology and backed up by regular postal mail which still covers communication between distances. I also made reference to the fact that these modes may include but are not limited which leaves room for new technology that will be emerging. Third, the sharing of knowledge is still shared between the instructor and students and still requires some responsibility on the part of the individual. Last, the accredited institution would alleviate some doubt as to the worth of the education being conveyed and received. Because the education would involve an accredited institution, the idea that distance education is just another diploma mill would be extinguished since accreditation requires meeting standards that all colleges and universities must meet.