

Foreword

AN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT HAS AN ABILITY

It is my great pleasure to share my thoughts in this Forward section for IJONTE Volume: 1 Number: 3 October 2010 issue, on the innovative distance learning scholarship provided in the new International Journal on New Trends in Education (IJONTE).

I have been fortunate to publish, review and share editorials for the Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education (TOJDE) for the past several years, which has provided both a venue for my scholarship, as well as a prime source for maintaining an updated sense of distance learning throughout the world. It is apparent that IJONTE has quickly become an insightful addition to the arena of relevant, meaningful, action research, which is highly sought in the literature. Timely, essential topics have been shared in the first several issues, which include E-Portfolios; Predictors for adopting E-Learning modules; Distance Education Evaluators; Interactive Video; Psychological dimensions of E-Learning; Quality Assurance; Librarians role in distance education; Reflective Practice; and Peer Review. It is exciting to see that teacher-scholars around the world are tackling and resolving many of the same challenges, which we have found common across the cultures.

Originally, the term Distance Education presumed location as a defining characteristic. This geographical distinction often reminds us of correspondence courses, and creating tapes, which were sent to students through postal systems. However, today terms such as On-Line learning, E-Learning, Blended Learning, and more have helped the academic community view distance education more broadly. An online learning environment has an ability to provide a highly variable, un-sequenced area where learners are frequently intrinsically motivated, and engage people of all ages and diverse backgrounds. In addition, these constructive environments attend to an ever expanding group of individualized learning styles, aptitudes, and perspectives. In the United States, two major groups, which facilitate the emerging use of instructional technology in higher education, are Educause (<http://www.educause.edu>) and the New Media Consortium (<http://www.nmc.org>). Both groups provide an on-going source for updated ideas, materials and recommendations for those of us who are creating high quality online programs.

In addition, many of their resources are open source, which is a primary mission of the IJONTE, and aligns with many of the major movements for accessibility of information throughout the world. One of the most famous cases of open source occurred when Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) pioneered the movement in 2002, placing many of their courses online and open access (<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>). MIT provide courses from many disciplines, from Engineering to Science and Humanities, with associated Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds.

Finally, an active movement towards virtual worlds has opened a learning environment which continues to build authentic bridges across countries, cultures and languages. For example, our university has created an island where our students interact with native Chinese speakers, which includes students writing, reading and speaking in Chinese. Examples of virtual worlds include There.com, Multiverse, OpenSim, Fortera Olive, Habbo and the new Blue Mars.

However, at this point in time, by far the biggest player is the originator, Second Life (SL). I believe that just as more dynamic, interactive, graphically intense learning environments will be developed and deployed, inspiring journals such as IJONTE will be a viable avenue for scholars to share the effectiveness of these worthwhile contexts.

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