

## **DISTANCE LEARNING: PRACTICE AND DILEMMAS**

*Ph.D. Nevenka Tatković*  
*Teacher Training College / Faculty of Philosophy, Pula*  
*Ph.D. Jusuf Šehanović*  
*Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Mijo Mirković", Pula*  
*Maja Ružić, prof*  
*Faculty of Philosophy, Pula*

### **INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE EUROPEAN DIMENSIONS OF REFORMS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

collections of proceeding  
14-16. decembar 2006.  
Novi Sad, Srbija

page: 201-205

#### **Abstract**

In accordance with the European processes of integrated and homogeneous education, the paper presents the essential viewpoints and questions covering the establishment and development of DL in Republic of Croatia. It starts from the advantages of distance learning versus traditional education taking into account some pedagogical terms of reference for distance learning, arguments for organizing and systematic development of distance learning.

Key words: distance learning, advantages, practice, dilemmas.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The terms "distance learning" (DL) is widely accepted and applied by many different researchers to a great variety of programs, audiences, and media. Moore and Kearsley state that DL is planned learning which is normally performed in a place distanced from learning institutions, whose results require the application of special education and communication technology, and is executed through the application of electronic and other technologies (Moore, M. and Kearsley, G., 1999, pg. 6). Its hallmarks are the separation of teacher and learner in space and/or time, giving student the opportunity to learn almost anytime and anywhere, mediated by print or some form of technology, as: regular mail, Internet, tele course, CD ROM, Pocket PC Mobile. It is an experience that leads to comprehension of new skills and knowledge, strategies and methods. Instructional design for DL has been perfected and refined over many years using established teaching principles, with many benefits to students. As a result colleges, universities worldwide now offer their students fully accredited online degree, vocational, and continuing education programs in abundance.

#### **2. SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE LEARNING**

If we want to develop DL in systematic way, the teacher must consider the goals, needs, and characteristics of students, the content requirements and technical constraints (Harvey, F. (2000). If unusual delivery systems are required, they must be made accessible to

all participants. Revision based on feedback from instructors, content specialists, and learners is an ongoing process. Provisions must be made for continually updating courses, which depend on volatile information, to keep the subject matter current and relevant. Flexibility should be also encouraged, allowing teachers to develop their *personal teaching approach* utilizing the variety of options offered by technology. Some students may be enroll in courses to meet graduation requirements, which their own districts are unable to offer; some can take advanced placement, or vocational classes; others may be homebound or disabled. In many instances, talented or *gifted* high school *students* should be selected to attend distance classes because of their high academic ability and capacity for handling independent work. Effective DL requires extensive **preparation**, as well as adapting traditional teaching strategies to a new learning environment, which often lacks visual cues. There are triad consisting of the student, the teacher, and the site facilitator, all of whom must function as a team. The distance learning **teacher**, or studio teacher must be certified for the appropriate grade level, knowledgeable in subject area, and trained in effective distance education strategies. She/he must be responsible for knowing the subject matter, determining the degree of student interaction, and selecting the form of distance evaluation or assessment. A studio teacher must be better organized than an ordinary classroom teacher. This requires ongoing training in the use of carefully selected print, audio, graphics, and video materials, hands-on hardware training, and the chance to network with other teachers and facilitators on course progress. **Students** must also quickly become aware of and comfortable with new patterns of communication, and take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers must enable students to establish contact with them, as well as interact among themselves. Strategies, which are effective in DL are: developing appropriate methods of feedback and reinforcement, optimizing content and pace, adapting to different student learning styles (Anderson, 2000). Anderson and Garrison (1995, pp. 27-45) talk about the significance of interaction between teachers themselves, as well as the interaction between the various forms of content. Terry Anderson (2000, pp. 79) considers it important to emphasize the social dimensions of learning, not to mention advancement through interaction with the environment. Social interaction is formalized through various types of learning that is to say as collaborative and cooperative learning. Cranton, P. (1998, pp. 87), stresses the importance of the varying needs of students, including the need for personal interaction with other students and the feeling of belonging to a group or community. Successful distance education systems involve **interactivity** between teacher and students, between students and the learning environment, and among students themselves, as well as active learning in the classroom (Brigham, D., Jarmon, C., & Paist E., 2000).

## 2 ARGUMENTS FOR ORGANIZING DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning has successfully overcome the shortcomings of traditional methods of teaching and learning. It has provided the answers to many questions regarding education while posing new ones: how can technology be used to achieve learning goals, how can we identify students own learning goals, how can be maximize learning success and achieve maximum results (Dringus, L.P. 1995, pp. 10)? In DL students have the opportunity to choose a learning strategy most suited to their abilities, while education is streamlined to meet the needs of the individual in question. There are many compelling arguments for organizing DL: online learning enables student-centered teaching approaches, course material is accessible all day 7 days a week, students have the ability to read and re read lectures, discussion, explanation and comments, students can access the library from their PC's, DL increases student interaction and diversities of opinion, online instructors may be from any location across the globe. This allows students to be exposed to knowledge that can't be learned in books and see how class concepts are applied in real business situations. The online

environment makes instructors more approachable. Using the Internet to attend class, research information and communication with other students teaches skills in using technologies that will be critical to workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century business community that works with colleagues globally and across time zones. Online classrooms facilitate team learning, because there are no geographic barriers to online learning, students can find a diversity of course material that may not be available to them where they live or work (Coleman, S, 2003). Distance learning can be offered at all levels, but is most frequently an option for university-level studies.

### 3. DISTANCE LARNING IN CROATIA AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

As a future member of the EU for entry into European integration and the process of general globalization, Croatia will have to follow a planned strategic objective of increasing the use of modern form of education. Croatia will also have to make a change in the structure and organization of education in order to overcome the risk of falling behind countries already developed in the employment of computer technology in education. Endeavors made in the Republic of Croatia towards the increase of computer literacy at all levels of education as well as the projection of informatics development in the coming years are the basis for the realization and affirmation of DL, which would greatly assist in overcoming the shortcomings of traditional methods of teaching and learning, as well as opening the way to obtaining and reciprocating knowledge bases in Europe.

Over the last few years there has been increased activity by Croatian institutions towards the formation and application of new development strategies that would bring Croatia closer to the developed world in: high and continuing education, business and industry, government and the military, vocational and technical education, non profit organization, educational consulting, community based education et al. We will take this opportunity to site the most prominent examples:(1) Proposal of development strategies for the Republic of Croatia, "Croatia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century", (2) e- Croatia; Proposal regarding informatics strategies in the Republic of Croatia; (3) Strategy elements for the development of an information society in Croatia, as a supplement to Development Strategies of the Republic of Croatia, "Croatia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century"; (4) Croatian Programmes for the development of innovative technology.

By increasing the rate of computer literacy and availability of education in Croatia DL would offer a realistic chance for the realization of the planned strategies. The computerization of educational institutions has become an important segment of general social development, because Croatia is dominated by enterprises, freedom, initiative and openness towards new ideas. Financing, which come from the nation's budget, has been planned for the introduction of computers with Internet access in all educational institutions (in phases, from elementary to university level schools), the inclusion of courses and curriculums in schools for the express purpose of educating and creating a computer literate population, as well as major increases in resources and capital invested in the foundations of all knowledge societies – education and science. In this manner a hypothesis is created for the realization of the numerous advantages that DL has to offer, such as: greater efficiency in education and a reduction of the time spent on educating, increased capacity of educational institutions, education adapted to meet the needs of education with work, balanced distribution of education and accessibility to areas outside the realm of educational and economic centers, increased access of smaller educational institutions to educational resources.

There are many **justifiable reasons for the organization of DL** in Croatia entering in EU. Some of the most significant being: it's numerous islands and other badly connected and isolated regions, many smaller educational institutions would be able to improve their quality of education by being affiliated with educational institutions in the larger centers through DL,

the great number of employed and unemployed citizens who wish to or are in need of supplementary education but cannot attend courses at traditional educational institutions due to time restraints or distance from these places, hospitalization of students who cannot attend regular classes due to illness, etc. In Croatia only big university and high educational institution can develop distance education in accordance with local resources, target audience, and philosophy of the organizations. Some institutions offer university courses for self-motivated individuals through independent study programs. It is necessary to put forward the following **questions**: how much has been done in regards to the organization and implementation of DL, under whose supervision is the organization and implementation of DL being conducted, are enough resources being allotted for DL, are there enough competent institutions involved in the effective realization of DL, are there enough competent personnel for realization of DL? In terms of post-secondary education, we indisputably have enough experts whose quality does not lack behind other experts in the same fields of education throughout the world. The above questions pertain more to educators in the elementary and secondary schools throughout Croatia. Our researches has indicated that very few elementary schools have personnel on their staffs that are capable of working with or teaching the use of modern computer technology (Tatković, N., Ružić, M. 2005, Tatković, N. 2004). Taking into account Croatia's needs and the many advantages of this form of education, DL becomes ever more attractive, especially for long life learning process.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

However, many unanswered **questions and dilemmas** related to DL remain, such as: do the laws and regulations of Croatia recognize and make possible DL, and if so, how and in which manners, will other institutions recognize DL diplomas and certificates, how does the aspect of privacy affect DL users, how does DL influence and / or affect the culture of educational institutions?

#### 5. LITERATURE

1. Anderson, T. (2000): Models of Interaction in Distance Education: recent Developments and Research Questions. University of Alberta, p.p. 48
2. Anderson, T.D., & Garison, D.J: (1995) Transactional Issues in distant Education; The impact of Design in Audioteleconferencing. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 9(2), p.p. 27-45.
3. Cranton, P. (1998). No One Way Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.:Toronto, ON: Wall& Emmerson, Inc.,p.p. 87-94.
4. Dringus , L. P.(1995). An Interactive Usability Evaluation Procedure for Interactive Online Courses. *Journal of Interactive Instruction Development*, 7, (4), p.p. 10-14.
5. e- Croatia-Prijedlog strategije informatizacije Hrvatske, www. predsjednik. hr/radne-skupine/strategija-i-hrvatske/dokumenti-Ihtml, 20.7 2000.
6. Harvey, F. (2000). Challenges faced by institutions of higher education in migrating to distance learning. *Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Papers Presented at the National Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology* . pp. 37-42.
7. Tatković, N., Ružić, M. ( 2005): Interactive Communication by Applying Contemporari Media in Higher Education. In: *Interactive communication in Education, Visoka učiteljska škola u Puli*, p.p.101-115.
8. Tatković, N. (2004): The Vision of Readenees of Teacher Training colleges for accepting new Educational Technologies and Models on the Way to Europe, *Proceeding of the 23rd International Scientific Conference on Organizational Science Development, Slovenija, Portorož*, 24-26- 03. 2004. Management, knowledge and EU, pp. 102-110.
- 9., Coleman, S (2003)..
10. www.mzt.hr/mzt/hrdjelatnost/tehnolog/tehnno\_hm/28.82000

