Online Education as an Academic Discipline
by Steve McCarty

Online Teaching Japan Summer Sessions
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Zoom recording of this presentation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgt6glGRKw8
Abstract

This presentation places online education in a disciplinary context, charting historical, pedagogical, institutional and cultural dimensions of e-learning. The evolution of online academic conferences will be of particular relevance to this event. Online education will be seen in a broad sense, and as a pan-disciplinary set of meta-skills beyond subject matter expertise. After the presentation per se, questions and comments are welcome, particularly about the current emergency remote teaching situation and what new structures are forming for online educator development events and organizations.
What is Online Education as a discipline?

- An academic discipline has a canon of cited literature, journals and other publications; certain research areas in the field, grants; auxiliary disciplines, interdisciplinary relations; university departments educating students in their major subjects, conducting faculty development, and stewarding the professions in society by upholding standards and ethics.
- In the broadest sense, online education can be any truly educational (not just training) activities conducted through the Internet, whether formal, informal or self-education.
- In a disciplinary sense, online education means teaching and further curricular activities of universities and other educational institutions conducted through the Internet wholly or partly, including blended or hybrid learning.

The following interview passages address the current situation:
“Is the online educational sector ready to cater to the increasing needs during this pandemic?”

“Online education should not be a sector of technical specialists separate from educators, but rather a pan-disciplinary set of meta-skills that educators develop on top of subject matter expertise.

“… teachers and learners all need to rely on ourselves in a new world of online inquiry and communication …

“Because online classes offer flexibility of time, place, and pace, there is a demand for them even when teachers and learners are near each other” (McCarty & Panhathodi, 2020, p. 4).

“What kind of online education policy best suits the post-pandemic world?”

“… the closest we have to an adaptable model for post-pandemic education is blended learning. That is, many of the technological solutions employed in online classes for emergency remote teaching will carry over into enhancing face-to-face classes with a supplemental online dimension available anywhere at any time.

“… the study skills to navigate information and communication technologies (ICT) are some of the same skills needed in the future workplace. ICT can serve as both subject matter and medium of instruction” (Ibid, p. 5).

“How is this going to affect the teaching community?”

“Now that educators worldwide are forced into emergency remote teaching, it is no longer the duty or responsibility of someone else. Blended learning and lifelong online learning are here to stay, so it is up to each educator to develop the skills to make online education effective, whether we have the luxury of face-to-face classes or not” (Ibid, p. 6).
“Remote communication and teaching cause a physical and psychological gap between students and teachers. Will this permanently redefine ‘teaching’?”

“Remote communication is not a cause but an effect of physical separation, and it provides an avenue for solutions to the tyranny of distance. Rather than remote teaching causing a psychological gap, it should aim to fill the gap” (Ibid, p. 6).

“[S]hould 'emergency remote teaching' be compared with regular online learning?”

“The term ‘emergency remote teaching’ has arisen precisely to avoid a judgmental comparison with professional online education.

… Educators who are suddenly thrust by a global pandemic into an unfamiliar mode of teaching … should be held to neither traditional standards nor expectations in the online education field that face-to-face outcomes can be equaled or even surpassed by leveraging the affordances of new educational technologies” (Ibid, pp. 6-7).
“Webinars and online conferences are plaguing the online learning environment during the pandemic. Should there be regulations to maintain quality of e-learning content?”

“[P]eople need more experience and experimentation, which may be unsatisfying at the moment but is part of the learning process. The relevant regulations should be academic standards and ethics, not rules and restrictions imposed from above educational circles” (Ibid, pp. 7-8).

“The educational community now has the global community in our purview, hence a greater responsibility to engage in professional development, international collaboration, and sharing” (Ibid, p. 6).
Levels of involvement with ICT

- **User level**
  - Non-users, partial users, or fluent users of ICT
  - Example: students use the latest mobile apps

- **Knowledge level (how technologies work)**
  - Technical terms, successful business models

- **Developer level (IT)**
  - Hardware, software, coding, making Websites

- **Academic level (ICT studies or education)**
  - Contextualization, analysis, evaluation of ICT
  - Explanatory concepts, theoretical frameworks
  - Research methods, publication style & format
History of e-Learning


1993 The Web [WWW, HTML markup language; later: online publications]
1994 Learning objects [reusable, sharable educational resources]
1995 Learning Management Systems [LMS, platforms for teaching online]
1996 Large-scale completely online international academic conferences
1998 Mobile devices [mobile Internet; later: m-learning, MALL, u-learning]
1999 Learning Design [Instructional Design (ID)]
2000 Gaming technologies [gamification of learning]
2001 Open Educational Resources [OER, protocols for free sharing]
2004 Social & participatory media [Web 2.0, podcasting, social media]
2005 Virtual worlds [3D software; later: virtual/augmented reality VR/AR]
2006 Google acquires YouTube; 2008: used by non-profit Khan Academy
2007 e-Books & smart devices [smartphones; 2010: iPad tablet computer]
2008 Massive Open Online Courses [MOOCs]
2010 Learning Analytics [optimizing student progress; smart learning; AI]
Examples of Conceptual Frameworks

Emergency Remote Teaching

Community of Practice
For discussing levels of participation in an online community, or why and how an online conference for practitioners can have a more or less open and free model: Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

How are each of these different? Which is the umbrella concept?
- Distance Education
- e-Learning
- Online Education
- Blended Learning

How do we know? Which definitions are better? See the next slide.
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<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Institutional / Cultural Context</th>
<th>Disciplinary Context</th>
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| Educational Technology / e-Learning | - Cultural attitudes toward educational technology  
- Campus IT infrastructure  
- Learners’ ICT skill levels  
- Computers, media players, hardware available to learners  
- Mobile Internet, e.g., smartphones, tablets and e-books  
- Ubiquitous computing                                                                                     | - Correspondence / Distance Education  
- e-Learning (electronic, actually digital technologies)  
- Online Education (including blended courses)  
- m-Learning (mobile)  
- u-Learning (ubiquitous learning) via sensor networks                                                   |
| Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) | - Cultural attitudes toward foreign language learning / willingness to communicate  
- Institutional culture (of the university or school)  
- Language / Computer Labs  
- Learners’ foreign language levels and individual concerns  
- Learners’ use of their own mobile devices for language learning and communication                                                                 | - Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) for language learning  
- Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)  
- Network / Internet-Based Language Learning  
- Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)  
- Ubiquitous Language Learning                                                                                                                                   |
Original source for the “Defining by Contextualizing” method:

https://www.academia.edu/37986336/Implementing_Mobile_Language_Learning_Technologies_in_Japan

Zoom recording of this presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgt6glGRKw8

e-Portfolio of Steve McCarty: https://japanned.hcommons.org

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