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COURSE NAME: TPO287 – THE POTENTIAL OF ONLINE EDUCATION AND HOW TO FULFILL IT

Assignment Title: An Overview of Online Distance Education

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Introduction – a brief overview of the history of education

The history of education can be traced back to the oldest written chronicles that have been

discovered and retrieved from every ancient civilization. Education was not always staged in a

formal setting, such as a classroom, but was imparted in any situation where life skills were

needed for survival. In hunter-gather societies, the elders would teach the younger generations to hunt for food and other skills necessary for survival. Each generation was dependent on learning from their elders in real-life situations.

With the advent of the industrial revolution, the idea of learning changed – just as everything else was being mass produced, so too could learning. The website "Reference" states the following: "The Industrial Revolution brought several important changes to the field of education by making education accessible for children of all socioeconomic backgrounds and setting laws making education a requirement." Before the 1800s, affluent families had access to education, paying for private educators to educate their children. Children from underprivileged families were not educated due to the lack of financial resources.

The classroom

Teaching in a classroom setting is efficient but the challenge is how to make the teaching process more effective. A major problem is that teaching in a classroom is not action-oriented or hands-on and is not delivered person-to-person creating a deficit in engagement. Education models in the classroom are inadequate, unsatisfactory, and require improvement.

Third-world countries are particularly affected by appalling classroom settings where, for example, students are sitting 3 children to a desk with up to 80 children in a classroom and basic structures are non-existent and some classrooms are in the open air with no furniture.

Photos from Colleen Jennifer Shepherd. 2018 Kiutine, Kenya - visit with Maranatha Volunteers International

There are many barriers to accessing education and include, but not limited to, factors such as gender, ethnicity and nationality, religious beliefs, financial situation, and culture. UNESCO website states: "the Education 2030 Framework for Action which emphasize inclusion and equity as the foundation for quality education."

Online education

Online education has been in existence for more than a decade now with institutions such as Harvard University offering free online courses through its education provider, edX, Future

Learn, Khan Academy, etc. The website Research.com states: "Leading MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) platform Coursera alone was reported to be worth well over $1 billion as of 2019." Online education is growing steadily but the dilemma is that it is also resembles classroom teaching with a distinct lack in engaging learners.

Rudimentary online platforms have been in existence for a few years but with the advent of the recent pandemic starting in 2020, new technologically advanced online platforms have been developed. However, online teaching needs to be person-to-person, it needs to be action-oriented in order to engage the learner in the learning process. These two factors alone are the most inherent basic requirements to produce engaging learning experiences for students.

Each year, with the graduation of high school students, there is the possibility that many of them will consider online tertiary education programs, such as studying short courses or pursuing an undergraduate Bachelor's Degree to qualify themselves for the career they have chosen.

Strategies for educators to improve online teaching skills

Technology

Migrating to an online teaching platform will require a new set of skills and an understanding of how to navigate and utilize the features of the platform and associated technology for both the teacher and the students. Teachers will need to be skillful before they can help their students with any difficulties encountered online.

Online teachers can connect with their students at regular times and provide person-to-person teaching experiences by holding lectures or providing instruction time through video conferencing. Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams and Zoom are some of the most popular and well known options available.

Teachers can also pre-record videos of their lessons and use this as an alternative to video conferencing for their students. Videos can be created using a video recorder, a camera with a recording function or a webcam. Teachers can upload their recordings to various applications, free of charge, such as YouTube, Microsoft Teams and Vimeo and students can watch the lectures when they have free time.

Screen capture provides technology allowing teachers to capture their computer, laptop or mobile screen as they are working. This technology is very useful for demonstrations to define concepts, step-by-step procedures, etc. Bandicam, Camtasia, Debut, Loom and Snip & Sketch are some of the applications available and many have a free option with limited functions but still capable of providing quality screen capture.

Teachers will need to rethink how to manage their online classroom, courses that they offer or how they connect digitally with their students. A classroom management system, such as Google Classroom, Blackboard and Canvas are popular online control applications. Teachers are able to schedule lessons, assign tasks, send notes, share information in digital format and receive homework creating a well-organized online classroom. Student/teacher interactions are also possible allowing for discussions, quick chats and opportunities to grow and improve relationships, among other features.

Curriculum and lesson planning

Curriculum and lesson planning may also need to be adapted and modified to circumvent any limitations or restrictions of the eLearning class and application, for example, in the physical classroom one would handout printed worksheets but online, one must make worksheets available in digital format. Educators must think about the differences between the two scenarios and must know how to overcome any foreseen obstacles.

Learning methods

As teachers and educators rethink their lesson plans, they will also have to rethink learning methods that can be applied in the online environment. The website Western Governors

University states the following about a flipped lesson: "This teaching method involves learners viewing video lectures and instruction as homework after school, and then during class time when they are online with the teacher, they go over problems and do assignments." In this learning model, students spend most of their lesson interacting with their teacher and any questions they may have are answered directly by the teacher.

Collaboration

Depending on the online application the teacher is using, opportunities for collaborating and socializing with other learners is possible and is a necessary aspect of learning, especially for younger learners who enjoy such activities in the physical classroom. Some applications allow the teacher to assign pair or group work and the students can complete tasks with the help of their peers.

The role of parents in online teaching

Parents of primary school and middle school students will, in all likelihood, have to have a significantly larger involvement in their children's online learning. There are many factors to be considered such as ensuring that children attend class and that their online encounters are safe and controlled. Moving away from the physical classroom and into an online classroom also requires parents to be responsible for some aspects of their child's learning such as completing

tasks, assignments and homework. Parents will need to enforce learning discipline and will take over once the lesson is finished. Closer teacher/parent relationships will need to be fostered and contact and communication will have to become more regular to ensure the best online learning experience for the student.

High school and college students will by this age, need to have established a learning timetable in which homework, research, reading, etc. are completed independently of the teacher and parental involvement.

Conclusion

Person-to-person teaching that is hands-on and has practical application engages the learner. Teachers must make use of technology that emulates face-to-face encounters, such as video conferences, videos and screen recordings. Nurturing relationships with students and parents are of great importance in the online teaching world where contact is all done electronically and digitally.

In a website article by the University of Central Florida, it is stated that: "As more and more students reap the benefits of online learning, the future of online education will be shaped by augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and courses that teach skills that can't be automated,

such as emotional intelligence and creativity." These concepts expand on already available technologies that can be used to make learning a hands-on, engating experience.

What I have learned

With UNESCO stating that "20% of children and young people face exclusion from education on a daily basis", great efforts will have to be made to reach the millions that are affected by this situation. Infrastructure, technology and finances are needed in many countries to meet UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4, namely; quality education. In affluent countries, online education will consistently take on more importance and become the preferred means of learning. Online education must be engaging and it must be one-to-one.

I understand from the courseware that online education providers are deemed to be reputable. This is of course true when one considers institutions that were established many years ago and have a good reputation. However, there are many enterprises that are not regulated, especially in the 'Teaching English as a Second Language' category. Students are charged exorbitant fees and teachers are paid incredibly low wages, as low as $2 per hour. These companies' requirements are for persons with a degree or higher, a TEFL/TESOL/CELTA or other qualification and availability must be between 16:00 up to 23:00 seven days a week. I speak from experience and have witnessed this first hand.

Colleagues have expressed concern that some English as a second language online platforms are becoming the new vehicles of teacher "slave labor". In developed countries, governed by laws, there are set minimum wages for skilled and unskilled workers, and defined wages for regular and irregular hours. Having a degree and other qualifications makes the person a skilled worker, worthy of an appropriate wage. By any account, definition and common understanding, hours after 18:00 and weekend hours are irregular hours and warrant a higher pay separate from other regular hours of work. I encourage all who are looking for online courses and teachers to ensure that the providers are ethical, regulated and meet acceptable employment standards.

This course has helped me realize my privileged position because I have access to online study with Atlantic International University and in my experience, I agree with the presenter, George Greenbury, that having face-to-face lectures in video format is very engaging. I have been reminded to do more for my fellow mankind and will explore ways how to do remote volunteer work.

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