

# Michel\_A1\_bcl

*by* Heather Michel

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## Distance Education

### Introduction

There is a variety of definitions of distance education in academia today. The one that seems to be used most often is from Chapter 1 of Moore & Kearsley (2012), where the authors explain, “Distance education is teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organization.” (p. 2). In fact, the only definition of distance education offered in “An Introduction to Distance Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning in a New Era” is a quotation of the definition above (Kanuka & Brooks, 2010, p. 84). Some texts and scholarly articles begin discussing distance education without defining it. The examples this author researched seem to implicitly use the widely-accepted definition of distance education offered by Moore and Kearsley (2012).

### Relational Aspects

Moore and Kearsley (2012) define education as “a relationship that has two sides, teacher and learner” (p. 2). Therefore any definition of distance education must necessarily reflect that two-way relationship. There are other relationships that exist in education as well, especially student-to-student, student-to-content, and student-to-institution, where the student agrees to a course of studies and policies in exchange for a degree. The learning must be planned also, rather than happenstance, for it to be regarded as education. (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 2). Of course, in order to define an education involving distance, one must require the teaching to be at a distance from the learning, although Moore's and Kearsley's (2012) definition does allow for

the possibility that the teacher and learner meet for a small amount of education. This separation creates a new relationship between the student and communication technology.

### **Institutional Aspects**

The definition of distance education specifies that this education has special needs for communication. Though technologies change with the times, the concept of technology is needed for communication in distance education to occur. The goal of the emerging communications technologies is to allow for the strengths of classroom communication while diminishing the weaknesses of it. There has to be an institution supporting and organizing the distance education; without this institution, it is not formal education. The institution's organization and support of distance education is similar to other structures of the industrial period, according to Otto Peters (2001). The specialty of this organization includes division of labor, a concept that can raise the quality and scope of distance education as each team member specializes in his/her expertise. Also, distance education, according to Moore & Kearsley (2012), "has a long history... [that] includes a distinctive philosophy of opening access to learning; and it has distinctive organizational forms" (p. 3). For example, it must include an institutional system of planning and delivery. Defining distance education requires inclusion of all the afore-mentioned factors in order to be complete.

### **Other Terms**

Some terms are used synonymously with distance education, though they do not share the same definition, such as open education and home study. Other terms, such as distance learning, online learning, distributed learning, e-learning, or flexible learning are specific types of planned distance learning and cannot be used interchangeably. Bates & Sangra (2011) seem to favor

some of these other terms since the first place distance education is mentioned in their book, *Managing Technology in Higher Education*, is on page 42 where it is not even defined.

### **Conclusion**

Moore & Kearsley's (2012) definition of distance education seems to be the one used most often in textbooks and scholarly articles, whether specifically or implied. According to Moore & Kearsley (2012), this is because the term captures the concept's "multidimensional nature" (p. 1). It covers both <sup>2</sup> the teaching and learning parts of education, the distance requirement between said <sup>2</sup> teaching and learning, and the technological and institutional support needed to make it functional. It seems to be all-inclusive, and therefore the best definition of distance education.

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