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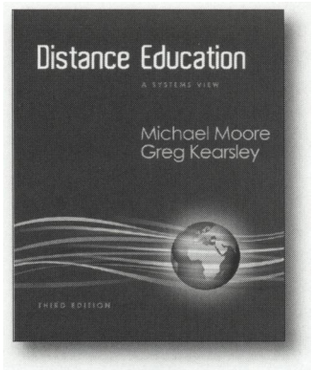
Book Reviews



Distance Education, Learning, Research

Book Review: Michael G. Moore and Greg Kearsley. ***Distance Education: A Systems View of Online Learning*** *(3rd edition). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning; 384 pages; 2012; $104.25; Kindle Edition, $84.36).*

Reviewed by Zane Berge

The first impression that struck me when I received the 3rd edition of the Moore and Kearsley book was the title: *Distance Education: A Systems View of* ***Online Learning*** (**bold** is not in the original). This last phrase, "of online learning," is new to this edition. I wondered why there had been a change in title.

Scope of the Book

Backing up for a moment, it is important to "unpack" the concepts in the book title and describe Moore and Kearsley's perspective. *Distance education* is defined as "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). I will leave it to the reader to explore these concepts more thoroughly in the book. Suffice it to say here that early in my learning about education at a distance, it was a turning point in my understanding to hear Michael Moore explain the difference between *distance education* and *distance learning*. Distance education is the responsibility of the sponsoring educational institution/organization and the instructor; distance learning is what students do, and therefore students' responsibility.

The dozen chapters in this book discuss major threads in the field: the historical context, course design and development, technologies, the roles of the instructor, the distance student, research, management, and so forth. A "systems view" indicates that it is not enough to know about each of these components separately, but rather to know how they all interact with one another. It also indicates that the delivery of distance education involves an entire system that must be in place and functioning for the enterprise to be successful. One acknowledgment of the authors is that while this book gets the reader started in learning about major components of distance education and the interaction among them, the underlying idea is for the readers to discover what they don't know and to seek further knowledge.

Finally, there is the concept in the title: ***online learning***. It is recognition by the authors that, today, most distance learning in the developed world is online learning of one form or another. Discussion with the authors determined that Moore and Kearsley wanted to be sure that those readers who only know about distance education as online learning would understand, from the title alone, that the book is relevant to them, too. While the technologies used for delivering distance education are new, much of what goes into designing and developing distance education is not new—activities such as deciding on policies for the allocation of resources, and the research and theoretical basis for what is done in carrying out the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities of teachers and learners. It is the integration of all these elements that is a major theme of this book. Still, one of the strengths of all editions of this book, including this one, is the information on the large part of distance education that is *not* online learning.

Designing Distance Education

Chapter 1 discusses basic concepts. It is an important academic exercise for students to get the basic concepts and semantics straight in their heads. For instance, two phrases that are used synonymously—and incorrectly—by many people are *distance education* and *distance learning*. Then *e-learning* is often added to that mix, too. Are these three terms really synonymous? The answer to this is discussed, along with other terms, such as *design, delivery, interaction, learning,* and *management.*

Moore and Kearsley conceptualize the history of distance education (Chapter 2) in the developed nations as evolving through five generations: correspondence, broadcast radio and television, open universities, teleconferencing, and the Internet/Web generation (p. 24). From the early days of home study in the 1880s to today's online courses, the authors describe the technologies that characterize each generation and the concomitant change in the capabilities for interaction between students and teacher and among students. Chapter 3 goes on to discuss the major venues or contexts in which distance education is active. Examples for each type of institution are given: the private "for-profit" schools, public universities and community colleges, consortia and different institutions, K–12 education, corporations, the armed forces, and professional continuing education. Together these institutions combine to overview the scope of distance education.

Education at a distance requires, by definition, some kind of technology to mediate communication between and among students and the instructor. Chapter 4 emphasizes that different technologies have different characteristics

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and, therefore, different technologies promote different media and forms of communication. Discussed in the chapter are the characteristics and pedagogical aspects of print, audio, and video media, and computer-based learning, including computer Web-based learning systems, Web 2.0, and mobile technologies. With each of these media having their own strengths and weaknesses, it becomes critical that sound judgment be used when combining technologies for course design. Media selection, as part of the design and development of distance education (Chapter 5), must be effectively chosen among these different technologies. The authors describe some basic principles of a planned approach to design instruction. Additionally, the strengths and weaknesses of two common models for developing instruction are presented: The Author-Editor Model and the Course Team Model. As discussed in a 1988 paper by Steve Yelon and me, *The Secret of Instructional Design*, in either model, the key is to align the goals/objectives of the course, the content, the instructional activities, and the evaluation. Moore and Kearsley outline the critical elements in this alignment as: sequencing and structuring materials, developing clear learning objectives, chunking the material into small units, careful media selection, planning student participation, completeness, repetition, synthesis, stimulation and variety, open-ended assignments, and feedback and evaluation. These elements are presented as the authors discuss developing various materials used in instruction (e.g., study guides, Web courses, direct learning).

Changing Roles in Distance Education

Education, the process of teaching and learning, can be thought of as communication between instructors and students with a particular goal: student *learning*. The goal of education is *not* teaching. Teaching is an input into the system, albeit an important one. Over the years, I have thought a lot about the changing roles of teachers. These roles can be categorized into four main functions: pedagogical, managerial, social, and technological. While these functional areas remain constant, the composition of a particular teaching activity varies for many reasons, such as the instructor's educational philosophy, the number of students in the class, the characteristics of the students, and dozens of other factors. In Chapter 6, Moore and Kearsley highlight the roles of online teachers and how critical it is to attend to several factors in distance education to create effective teaching and learning environments. Chapter 7 goes on to describe the changing roles of the distance education student. Emphasized here are selected characteristics of students studying at a distance and the predictors of success for those students.

The roles of teacher and student are not the only roles that affect learning success in an educational system. The roles played by the institution or organization are also very important. Chapter 8 examines the impact of management, administration, and policy to learner success. This includes such things as strategic planning, staffing issues, quality assurance, and policy at the institutional, state, and federal levels.

Distance Education Research

Through the early history of distance education there was little research conducted in the field. However, in the 1980s that changed. Professional journals, conferences, associations, and graduate study emerged. Chapter 9 gives an overview of some of the most prominent theories and the pioneer theorists who shaped the field. Chapter 10 reviews some of the research regarding effective course design and teaching, along with research on cost-effectiveness and policy issues. While not an exhaustive list by any stretch of the imagination, there are enough examples of research within these areas to give the reader many starting points to begin to drill down into further reading.

Global Span and Change in Distance Education

One of the more interesting chapters, even for the not-so-novice reader in distance education, deals with the global span of DE (Chapter 11). Moore and Kearsley open this chapter stating, "In this chapter, we would like to give you a sense of the amazing worldwide scope of distance education. It is impossible to do more than give an impression, because today distance education is found in every country of the world, and a book could be written about the history and scope of every one of these" (p. 242). I could not agree more. While most educators involved in distance education can spend their entire career with a quite ethnocentric view and focus on the country in which they work, it is only possible to adequately give a taste of all the distance education that is occurring in other countries or continents in one book chapter.

The final chapter (12) concerns distance education and change—change involving technology, the supply and access to information, organizational change, and how such change affects the design and implementation of distance education.

Concluding Remarks

The editions of this book are, and always have been, primarily for beginners in the field. The themes discussed are painted in broad brush-strokes, giving the reader an overall sense of the field of distance education as if from 30,000 feet: where distance education has come from, where it is today, and how the many pieces work together. The idea is that the reader can then begin to drill down in the resources mentioned in the book (references; descriptions of research journals, organizations, and scholarly conferences; questions for study; glossary; case studies; a companion Website with tools and resources for further study), and elsewhere for in-depth study.

The stated audiences for this book include students in colleges of education and practicing teachers, educational administrators, people who develop distance programs as well as those who use programs developed by others. In *Distance Education: A Systems View of Online Learning*, Moore and Kearsley have addressed the needs of all these audiences.

To sum up, this is a well-written book, excellently presented and edited by the publisher, and authored by two of the world's most experienced and renowned distance educators and researchers. I will continue to use the 3rd edition of their book in my classes, as I have done with the previous editions. □

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