
Emerging Leadership Roles in Distance Education: Current State of Affairs and Forecasting Future Trends

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Abstract

This paper discusses the enormous impact distance learning has had on traditional higher education and addresses emerging leadership roles. The writer will address and discuss qualities that are necessary for leaders and the success of their distance education initiatives. Topics discussed include critical issues relating to the evolution and continuation of distance learning programs such as globalization, consistent lack of federal and state educational funding, a growing student population, and the emergence of the Internet. In addition, new technologies in distance education are highlighted. Finally, the writer will provide considerable information for institutions of higher learning as well as those individuals associated with the advancement of online learning modalities.

Introduction

This paper discusses the enormous impact distance learning has had on traditional higher education and leadership roles. The writer will address and discuss critical issues relating to leadership in higher education with a distance learning focus, current and future distance education modalities, and future leadership trends. This paper will focus on transformational leadership qualities that are necessary for current and future successful distance education programs. Finally, the writer will provide considerable information for institutions of higher learning as well as those individuals associated with the advancement of online learning modalities.

Globalization has affected many areas of society and will continue to shape the future of education and content delivery indefinitely. The impact of globalization has led to exceedingly higher enrollments for many universities and colleges. It has become increasingly apparent that individuals need to consistently learn new skills in order to remain employed and competitive in a knowledge and digital economy. Those individuals who cannot or will not learn new skills will have more difficulty finding employment and remaining competitive.

Leaders in distance learning must constantly be aware of how to adjust, evaluate, and assess the validity of programs, content, and emerging technologies to remain competitive and viable in this new society. Educational leaders will benefit from collaboration with business and industry leaders and vice versa. Beaudoin (2002) states that education has benefited from insight and inquiry but might adopt practices from business and industry. In addition, faculty and administrators should work collaboratively in the practice and theory of online delivery methods

(¶ 4). With the increasing changes happening throughout the world, higher education leaders need to be aware of these mutable circumstances and influence their colleges and universities to be able to adapt and transform accordingly. Higher education will need to service more individuals and educate them based on the skills necessary for employment and success.

In addition, higher education curriculum would benefit immensely if business training practices such as "just-in-time" training and custom training programs are added throughout various departments. As non-traditional and older students continue to increase enrollment figures in higher education, specialized short-term programs similar to those implemented in business and corporate entities can become major sources of revenue. Since older students may not be interested in degrees but rather upgrading their knowledge and skills, higher education can benefit by adding specialized and custom training programs to their curriculum. Distance learning modalities are perfectly suited for these types of students and this type of training.

Innovation, vision, contribution, flexibility, adaptability to change, and lifelong learning agendas are necessary attributes of an emerging leader in distance learning environments. The traditional sage on the stage notion of teaching no longer applies to online learning and the facilitator concept is taking precedence over former methods of content delivery. Online learners have become the new consumers in higher education and are demanding leaders and facilitators that model the new globalized societies and business environments in which they live and work. Beaudoin (2002) outlines several

questions that emerging leaders should be addressing so that their institutions remain competitive such as:

How many faculty will we be needed in ten years? Will the notion of classrooms survive? Is the present structure of the institution appropriate? Will teachers and students need to meet on campus anymore? Can the organization's decision makers respond to new competitors? (¶ 6)

The pervasiveness of concepts such as transition versus traditional, largely defines the new online environments leaders will be managing. Distance education can adopt similar practices that incorporate the transitional nature of business such as adapting to new technologies quickly, having flexibility, and upgrading one's skills and abilities in relationship to newly developed innovative strategies. Traditionally, higher education institutions have been known to move rather slowly when addressing new issues, technologies, policies, agendas, etc. While this has been the case on many college and university campuses, distance education agendas cannot be influenced by slow moving administrators if leaders wish their online programs to remain competitive, relevant, and viable. According to Beaudoin (2002), the research and literature on leadership in distance education is limited, and rather focuses on developing and addressing strategies for distance learning processes (¶ 22). Those facilitators who have transitioned into online teaching capacities are well positioned to play instrumental roles as emerging leaders. The advancement of technology, business, and the onset of globalization are the driving forces that are compelling traditional education institutions to move towards distance pedagogical models. Emerging leaders in distance education should position themselves as contributing researchers to the field, and thus, add to the lack of literature available.

Leadership in Higher Education and Distance Learning

As emerging leaders in distance education, progressive leadership attributes are essential to the

success of a distance learning initiative. An organizational chart in traditional universities can have many layers of bureaucracy and distance education leaders must have the ability to transcend this hierarchy while persuading others to become champions of the program. According to Beaudoin (2002), leadership in distance education requires a set of skills that will allow cooperation from many disciplines within a university setting and the researcher states:

Distance educators should no longer see themselves as protectors and survivors of isolated programs for which they have labored mightily, but rather as valued strategic partners who can enable the larger institution, often long seen as the enemy, to catch up with them and emulate their practices and successes. In short, distance education managers must see themselves, and be seen, as educational leaders who, through less directing and more motivating, facilitate the articulation, development, implementation, and stewardship of a new vision of learning that is shared and supported by a wider academic community. (§ 39)

Beaudoin elaborates on the notion of a macro view perspective for emerging distance education leaders and discusses the importance of becoming part of the academic mainstream in order to bring the entire organization to a new place versus having a micro perspective and being preoccupied with his or her own initiatives. As an emerging distance education leader, one must be wary of involving oneself too closely to daily challenges and should consider Beaudoin's macro view perspective.

Formidable leaders have the ability to develop, change, adapt, and reinvent their own skills and abilities but more importantly, a good leader needs to have the ability to direct and affect these initiatives in others so that a progressive distance learning agenda follows successfully. Highly effective distance education leaders are constantly reviewing market trends and initiating new agendas within his or her realm of influence. Motivation, creativity, and the ability to operate within political, symbolic, structural, and human resources frameworks are skills that are paramount to the success of a distance education leader and the success of his or her distance-learning agenda (Bolman & Deal, 2003). According to Williams, Paprock, and Covington (1999), transitional leadership in distance education requires several factors relating to organizational and administrative elements that include: (a) statements of mission, purpose, and objectives; (b) unified program, curricula, teaching, and learning strategies; (c) well-developed interdepartmental infrastructure, communication, and interaction; (d) the presence of administrative proponents; (e) policies regarding students, tutors, and proctors; (f) engaging additional staff and outside experts as needed; (g) materials development; and (h) disbursement, reimbursement, and evaluation (p. 14). With the many issues relating to the administration and leadership of a distance-learning program, leaders must develop a deeper foundation of balance to manage on-going and future challenges. Managing administrative policies effectively, can be the key to a successful leadership career in distance learning.

Leading wisely involves a balance between personal philosophy, vision, pedagogical knowledge, and a willingness to transcend daily challenges and/or political struggles. Author Kevin Cashman (1998) describes a masterful leader as one whom is focused on “feeding the community” (p. 180). Cashman states that an exceptional leader is authentic, has vision and purpose, and creates value through contribution and action. Based upon these concepts, leading and developing a distance education endeavor requires one to constructively and mindfully balance internal/external factors as well as personal/professional factors. In many instances, a cultural transformation may be necessary for a successful distance education community to evolve and develop favorable results. Existing large-scale institutions of higher education have established histories, modes of operation, politics, and power structures. Pedagogical knowledge is an

essential factor to the success of an emerging distance education leader but conversely, one whom can successfully navigate across a multitude of frames will be most promising.

Emerging distance education leaders can be responsible for part or all of the dimensions and factors involving a distance learning initiative. Depending upon the scope and functions of a specific program, a leader may need outside resources to maintain consistency. Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek (2006) discuss Anthony Kaye's four subsystems of a distance education system that include the regulatory subsystem, course subsystem, student subsystem, and logistical subsystem (p. 318). Within each of these categories exists a multitude of administrative and leadership functions. The authors outline a distance leader pyramid of competencies that include and have been listed top down as visioning, leading, managing, designing, and knowing (p. 318). Within these constructs, an emerging distance education leader must be knowledgeable in various areas such as policy, regulation, state and federal government influences, financial aid, copyright, data gathering, regional, national, and professional accreditation, accessibility, the disabled, intellectual property rights, faculty issues, and finally, the costs and budgetary influences associated with a distance learning agenda.

Assessment of Current and Future Distance Education Modalities

As an emerging distance education leader, one must be aware of the potential obstacle that may occur. Barriers and challenges can develop at any time and can affect the success of the distance-learning program. In a study conducted by Santilli and Beck (2005), graduate faculty were surveyed and asked to pinpoint specific obstacles to effective communication in distance learning courses. The surveyed data by Santilli and Beck (2005) reveals what the educators thought to be student deficiencies in an online delivery format :

65% of faculty consider students' lack of technology skills to be a major obstacle to effective online communication. The second major finding is that 23% of faculty consider timeliness of student responses to be a problem. However, 15% of faculty indicated they had encountered no barriers to effective communication with students. (p. 158)

Faculty must be trained in effective communication strategies so that student interactions within online structures remain fluid and unhampered. According to Santilli and Beck (2005), Nova Southeastern University (NSU) has been involved with delivering “field-based and distance education” modalities for many years (p. 1). The University has been a leader in innovative delivery models while continuing to research and develop faculty, students, curriculum, and standards and practices that are formatively unique to distance learning and this practice is reflected in its mission statement. The University's distance learning systems began its timely practices in audio-conferencing and various blended models that combined audio and video conferencing with computer-assisted instruction (Santilli & Beck, 2005, p. 1). In order to remain competitive, the administration and faculty of Nova Southeastern University submits that online education is its current, future, and main focus of content delivery in its role within higher education. The University currently maintains the use of WebCT as its sole content delivery modality for its distance learning courses.

During a study conducted at Nova Southeastern University of online distance learning modalities and faculty perceptions of workload, several questions were raised regarding student learning assessment in online courses and the authenticity of student achievement and production. The researchers noted that these questions are involved issues whereas there are still no specific

standardized procedures in place and across the board within higher education as a whole. In addition, there is room for the development of course competencies and objectives that meet standardization in higher academic structures. Currently, agreement on these questions by administration and faculty is still being researched and evaluated. The study at Nova Southeastern University revealed that faculty spent most of its time communicating with students as well as building and sustaining learning communities. Moreover, the study revealed that faculty spent more time in the WebCT environment conversing with students and employing effective teaching strategies than time spent in traditional ground teaching modalities.

Although there has been much debate over the quality of instruction students receive in distance education modalities versus traditional classroom environments, researchers are discovering that outcomes are relatively similar in both instances. According to a study conducted by Warren and Holloman Jr. (2005), face-to-face and online instruction faired similar results with few differences in students' outcomes when evaluated between two similar course sections. The assessment tools in this study revealed that both modalities equally support the same quality of instruction as well as achievement level of students. In the past, the transformation and development of distance education encompassed modalities such as videotapes, correspondence courses, television, and radio. Finally, in the 1990s, distance education welcomed the Internet as the latest modality in the area of higher education, high school education, and corporate training. The advancing technologies associated with the Internet have evolved the field of education and have helped to develop new and interesting teaching strategies, assessments, and student/faculty interaction in ways that had not previously existed. Online courses have rapidly increased throughout higher education institutions and distance learning will continue to evolve and validate the field of research. Increasing technologies and the discovery and interpretation of new knowledge along with emerging and progressive leaders will continue to affect and strengthen this modality. While the current trend in higher education is to provide more on-line course offerings, current and future distance education leaders will continue to be in demand as this modality explodes throughout the world.

Other factors relating to current and future distance education modalities include the virtual library, the virtual university, and the concept of e-learning. In e-learning and distance education environments, the structures are learner-centered rather than educator-centered. Alternately, the difference between e-learning and distance learning is that “ A

virtual university (which is distance learning) is aimed at offering higher education studies, while e-learning can be used for all educational levels” (Puustjärvi & Pöyry, 2005, ¶ 20). Resource-Based Learning (RBL) and information retrieval are the latest discussions regarding distance education modalities. Because the Internet can store huge amounts of information and data in various arrangements and styles, RBL is well suited for this type of support system since “RBL has been defined as a student-centered way of learning that exploits various specially designed learning materials, interactive media, and technologies” (Puustjärvi & Pöyry, 2005, ¶ 23). Information retrieval is another factor that requires more attention to technology standardization. As e-learning begins to mesh with virtual libraries/universities, individuals need a standardized computing language so that information retrieval becomes easily accessible around the world, in various forms, and to any student trying to access the data. “The idea of using standardized metadata schemas is being able to develop universally applicable tools dealing with the metadata descriptions of the learning objects” (Puustjärvi & Pöyry, 2005, ¶ 31). Standardizing metadata schemas is an area in distance education that needs future development and is in need of those individuals with technical computing abilities.

E-books are becoming increasingly popular in distance education programs. They are well suited for students that reside in countries where English is not the main language spoken or where a physical library or bookstore may be difficult to access. Having traditional books that can be downloaded or bought on-line has become another industry in publishing that has benefited distance education modalities. Countless plagiarism tools are becoming readily available to both institutions and students to hinder plagiarism since authenticity and ethical issues are major concerns.

Researchers have estimated that online students may experience decreased communication skills in light of the accelerated success that distance-learning environments have experienced. According to Tham and Werner (2005), good communication skills are essential and business enterprises look for this ability when hiring employees, managers, and leaders. Distance education modalities can effectively support many courses in higher education but some content might not be well suited without face-to-face student/educator interaction. Interpersonal communications has been considered the type of coursework that should be taught in a tradition brick and mortar capacity. Although, much of the theoretical content for this discipline can be accessed via distance learning methods with the assistance of webcam technology. This concept is similar to many of the foreign language pedagogical lectures currently sold to new language learners worldwide on CD, DVD, and audio/video modalities.

Distance education is developing at rapid speed and media rich content, animation, PDA and cellular phone downloads, holograms, and audio/video/DVD asynchronous and synchronous lectures are the future of this modality. More recent technology advancements also include the ability to hot-synch and wireless video projectors. Lee, Tiong Hok Tan, and Goh (2004) state, “we need to come up with an innovative and practical learning platform that allows them to do e-learning anytime, anywhere, and most importantly, e-efficiently and e-effectively” (§ 32). The proliferation of distance learning programs, coursework, and new technologies allows the lifelong learner the ability to continually advance his or her skills in a changing knowledge and digital economy anywhere and at anytime. No longer must students wait for class to begin or readjust their professional and personal daily schedules to receive an education. Distance education affords the student the ability to attend class autonomously.

A recent advancement in distance education is an innovative online learning software application called iNTUition found at <http://www.interwise.com> by Interwise Enterprise Communication Platform. This program allows the educator to conduct live lectures without the use of a physical classroom. The lecture is synchronous and can be accessed globally via dial-up, cable modem, or wireless network. Its main attributes allow students and educators the ability to interact and respond to each other immediately and from anywhere in the world. iNTUition's key characteristics include: (1) students can ask questions by clicking the "Ask Question" button on the software application; (2) students can annotate or write over the presentation whiteboard to illustrate a point; (3) the professor can grant a particular student the floor to become a co-presenter or to allow student presentations; (4) the system comes with a polling feature that allows quick questions and immediate feedback; (5) the results are shown as a percentage histogram; (6) this allows the professor the ability to adjust his or her live lecture presentation based on the feedback indicated; and (7) there are indicators from the students' software console to tell the professor in a subtle way that the pace of the lecture is too fast or too slow (Lee, Tiong Hok Tan, & Goh, 2004, § 37). An emerging distance education leader will continue to have more tools that he or she can access for maturing programs and leaders need to stay abreast of changing and developing technologies. This in turn, will attract the lifelong learner to those programs that offer the most viable pedagogical models.

Forecasting Future Leadership Trends

Distance education needs to be interpreted, measured, and compensated in new ways. This delivery method is no longer considered experimental technology. Higher education must meet the growing demands of the consumer/student in a competitive digital and knowledge-based economy. Since online education can service more students, a continued surge in online programs will be the result for many higher educational institutions. The need for trained and educated professionals and leaders will continue to expand worldwide and academics, managers, facilitators, and technologists will be in demand. As the student population continues to increase with voluminous numbers, online education may replace, to a large extent, traditional brick and mortar delivery methods within the next 15 to 20 years or less.

The latest technology nomenclature used in distance learning are terms such as media rich content, interactive, humanizing, synchronous, asynchronous, engaging, responsive, gaming, synergistic, and collaborative. The Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore recognizes the various characteristics involved in building a successful distance education program and they have incorporated many of those technologies. According to a case study conducted by Lee, Tiong Hok Tan, and Goh (2004), the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) experienced momentous growth in the implementation of a distance learning community within a span of three years (p.1). The team of researchers identified measures that were taken to humanize distance learning so that the delivery method would be engaging, interactive, and collaborative. In addition, the interactive modality included lecture incorporating live video-audio and “text chat.” An interesting educational goal of the NTU was to “create an eco-system of lifelong learning in our students and graduates towards the pursuit and establishment of a national digital knowledge economy” (¶ 4). It is increasingly evident that progressive universities and colleges around the world are expanding their educational initiatives and traditional universities have begun to follow suit.

Changes that have recently affected higher education include less governmental funding, the impact of globalization, a growing student population, and the emergence of the Internet. According to Folkers (2005), “Distance education has become a concrete manifestation of the changes in higher education ” (¶ 1). Institutions of higher learning can no longer afford to remain isolated towers of elitism and must adopt new distance learning technologies if they wish to remain competitive and financially viable. Folkers (2005) examines the emerging challenges that universities and colleges will face as they move from the physical "marketplace" to the virtual "marketspace" via the practice and function of distance learning agendas (¶ 4). Because external forces have precipitated the growth of many distance-learning agendas, the impact of distance learning programs will continue to shape and challenge students, educators, administrators, and the cultural direction of higher learning institutions.

Adult learners have been another significant factor affecting the demand and growing need for more distance education programs. Since the onset of globalization, researchers have acknowledged the need for on-going educational pursuits as being a key ingredient to attaining a successful career and standard of living. Researchers have approximated that the practical life of a technical degree (i.e., the elapsed time until skills must be updated in order to remain current) is now less than five years; therefore, today's graduates must continually renew their knowledge, abilities, and expertise (Folkers, 2005, ¶ 5). This need for lifelong learning as a key factor in remaining competitively employed is fueling distance education modalities around the world. In addition, the growing demand for new leaders and educators in distance education is continually expanding. New online competitors include schools such as Pepperdine University , Regis

University, Walden University, Capella University, the United Kingdom's Open University, Motorola's Motorola University, University of Phoenix, and Rio Salado College in Phoenix, Arizona. These schools are taking advantage of the adult learners inside and outside of their communities of influence. Traditional ground universities and colleges are also taking advantage of this new adult learner by adding more diverse curriculums and programs to online modalities. Folkers (2005) asserts, "The growth of new, flexible competitors offering online courses has created the potential for global competition for students. This has caused a weakening of the geographic barriers that used to exist in student recruitment" (§ 11). The latest discussions around the concept of distance learning have anticipated the need for three distinct modalities that include traditional residential brick and mortar focusing on face-to-face instruction, virtual institutions that primarily service the adult nontraditional learner, and finally, "brick and click" institutions which are schools that combine traditional and distance education. The latter modality generally will be those institutions that are well-known traditional universities with established reputations in higher education.

Researchers have hypothesized that only a relatively small group of online education providers will ultimately remain servicing the growing student populations competitively. Despite millions of dollars and prestigious partnerships, several schools have already failed in their attempts to create distance-learning programs such as Columbia University's Fathom and the American wing of the British Open University, namely, the US Open University. For those schools succeeding in online education, adult learners are mainly interested in attaining degrees and professional certifications versus merely taking detached coursework. Programs having the highest success rates include those that service specific needs such as enhancing technical skills, information technology, and business degrees/certifications. The MBA track is an example of an extremely successful online program for many universities. Similarly, master's programs that focus on information technology have also recently added to the success of many online endeavors in higher education.

Emerging leaders in distance education will need to be well versed in the business functions of their universities and colleges so that online systems and structures operate smoothly and effectively for students, faculty, and support staff. "The move to distance education requires that institutions effectively utilize business plans to a greater extent than many administrators are used to doing" (Folkers, 2005, § 29). The implementation of online distance programs can be daunting when considering the areas necessary for support that will incur additional costs such as on-going faculty support/training, course delivery, course design, student support services such as billing/accounting, library services, advising, IT support systems, online processing, online registrations, and course management software (CMS). "The 2002 National Survey of Information Technology in Higher Education, conducted by the Campus Computing Project, found that only 40.5% of the colleges and universities surveyed were capable of processing credit card payments from campus Web sites" (Folkers, 2005, § 30). Course management software (CMS) should be carefully considered since this expense can increase substantially over time. Developing one's own proprietary program or using systems such as ANGEL, WebCT or Blackboard can become more costly than an institution originally presumed, especially when support systems need to be developed campus wide. Another consideration for distance education leaders is that these support systems are able to interface with existing IT systems throughout the institution whereby adding to the value relating to these expenses.

Finding and keeping qualified staff in an online environment in higher education is yet another consideration for the emerging distance education leader. Qualified faculty, instructional designers, graphics specialists, production specialists, and technical typists are in high demand in

corporate, business, and commercial industry enterprises. The distance education leader must be adept at finding these highly qualified individuals and monitoring their progress, success, rewards, compensation, and development/training. "As colleges and universities contemplate the incorporation of distance education, the interpersonal and cultural issues may well overshadow the simple (by comparison) issues of funding and technological infrastructure" (Folkers, 2005, ¶ 39). Power struggles between traditional entities within a university setting and those individuals leading a distance education program can create new leadership dynamics and paradigms. As an emerging distance education leader, one must be able to operate within the political frame when dealing with faculty resistance on a traditional university campus. A leader must understand issues relating to power, control, intellectual property, workload, ownership, copyright law, academic freedom, and faculty/student relationship.

Conclusion

Emerging leaders in distance education not only must be transformational leaders but must also become situational leaders who are innovative visionaries that can motivate, energize, inspire, and induce others to move forward while fully articulating a shared and competitive distance learning agenda. Beaudoin (2002) states that emerging leaders in distance education need a variety of skills that are constantly refined and those include resource mobilization, needs assessment, fitting technology to needs, program evaluation and accreditation, policy formulation, strategic planning, operationalizing ideas, market analysis, implementing online infrastructure, collaborating with partners, training and support for faculty, and mentoring the next generation of leaders (¶ 43). The move towards e-learning along with emerging leaders whom assess the effectiveness of distance education modalities will continue to offer education to a broader market share. Folkers (2005) states:

Distance education challenges higher education partly because its successful deployment can require an attention to business plans, budgets and strategies in a way to which higher education is not accustomed. More importantly, however, it challenges higher education professionals to reach beyond their comfort zones and to question how and why they teach. Distance education also challenges higher education administrators to question how and why they reward faculty. (¶ 63)

It is evident from Folkers research that emerging distance education leaders will not only need to be successful business managers, but will also need to understand concepts relating to the management of human capital.

Leaders must be adaptable to change and facilitators of constantly emerging technologies. Complex enterprises are developing niche specializations as well as collaborating with business entities to create agenda specific training. Pedagogical models will need to stay abreast of ever expanding markets similar to a business model of theory and practice. Educational structures can no longer exist as static environments and must adopt business sensibilities to remain competitive. Lee, Tiong Hok Tan, and Goh (2004) state, "Mistakes in e-learning can be very expensive-for the institution, its community of professors and students" (¶ 54). Therefore, emerging leaders in distance education can prove to be valuable assets to their scholarly communities of learning by becoming funnels of knowledge, servicing via transformational leadership, and by having the ability to operate within complex organizational structures of power.

Students/consumers will have the ability to receive a global education delivered right into their homes, workplaces, and play places. For instance, a Ph.D. student in Tempe , Arizona can take classes from a college professor who resides in Italy and from a reputable accredited educational institution based out of Minneapolis , Minnesota . Institutions that have been in the forefront of distance education delivery will be the emerging leaders in this new globalized economy. Facilitators and students that are currently involved in distance education modalities will be the newest leaders and researchers in the field. The writer believes the future of distance education is extremely bright and will continue to expand in areas that have yet to be discovered. Distance education will affect every area of academic study as well as current business training models. Areas such as k-12 are also currently adding distance education modalities to the established curriculum. Future employment opportunities in distance education will continue to expand and new leaders with insight, vision, and pedagogical experience will be in demand. Other areas for research include curriculum development, standardization models, and access to file sharing materials in virtual libraries and universities.

The writer's vision for distance education includes incorporating the use of holograms to deliver a personal or humanizing feel to curriculum and content. Virtual individuals would be preprogrammed to answer student questions as well as deliver lecture material. These virtual individuals would also be able to anticipate student inquiry and/or focus or redirect when necessary. Holographic delivery or virtual individuals would be available in public libraries, k-12 schools, colleges, universities, and throughout business/industry. Another interesting concept is the ability to access and download information directly into the human brain or senses in a noninvasive manner. Individuals could connect to or insert a bio-mechanism that would allow the brain or body to understand the impulses being sent through the instrument. This concept allows the learner the ability to access information at his or her own speed. Finally, another invention the writer would like to see is the ability for sunglasses or prescription eyeglasses that are able to connect to the Internet and access curriculum or content while the individual is out-and-about doing his or her daily activities. Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek (2006) present similar thoughts in comments relating to their distance education vision in schools, “the network connects the learner to the multisensory multimedia resources that are accessible from school, home, and business. Education is learner- and learning-centered and technology-supported” (p. 23). It is evident that there are many areas of research that need to be addressed and considered. These ideas may seem fantastically unusual and yet many forms of these concepts are in experimental stages at this moment. Moreover, these ideas address issues relating to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences and afford the learner more control and autonomy. Distance education is about the future, and the role of emerging leaders is to envision new pedagogical methods and to accommodate anyone who wants to learn.

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