

FROM CHAUTAUQUA TO THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY: A CENTURY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Michael Grahame Moore. (2003). Information Series No. 393. Columbus, OH: Center of Education and Training for Employment, Ohio State University, 64 pages.

In his monograph, Michael Grahame Moore seeks to inform readers of the decades of development and growth in Distance Education from its inception in the 1890s to the present. Moore conducts a broad-brush review that ignores many fine details, focusing instead on the rise of distance education as a response to the changing needs of adult education. He draws attention to those events and people which have shaped and impacted distance education, such as the invention of radio and television and the influence of personalities like Charles Wedemeyer. As a summary, the monograph provides useful information about major developments in distance education within the United States. Furthermore, the publication is unique because it includes three "reaction" papers written by Von Pittman, Terry Anderson, and Cheris Kramarae. These three papers offer the reader extremely useful reviews of Moore's essay and also broaden and address his discussion of pedagogy, technology, and access.

Moore's monograph attributes the rise and growth of distance education to the increasing demand for adults to receive further formal academic credentials beyond those used to enter the work force. He writes that distance education was a nineteenth century invention created as an "adult form of education" with the purpose of providing opportunities for vocational education, independent study, and social change.

Moore also explores the partnership between technology and education. He asserts that even though we try, in our statements about pedagogy and teaching goals, to minimize the role of technology, it has been the "emergence of certain technologies that has brought about the changes in education organization and teaching practice" (p. 3) that characterizes distance education today. While Moore agrees that technology has shaped distance education, he also asserts that little that is fundamental to distance education has changed as the technology has changed. He believes that the approach to teaching and its organizational structure are largely the same whether the delivery method is print, teleconference, educational television,

or the computer. A defining characteristic of distance education is “the fact” that instructional decisions have always been held hostage by institutional policies that “required preference” for a particular technology.

Regarding pedagogical choice, Moore regards computer technology as giving us the appearance of choice, but that in reality there is little difference between the pedagogical approach between the early days of correspondence teaching and today. He writes that learning at a distance is still “the pursuit of solitary individuals, nearly always adults, using their discretionary time and carrying a great deal of responsibility for deciding what, how, when and where to learn” (p. 36).

There are three reaction papers following Moore’s essay. Two of these, one by Terry Anderson and one by Cheri Kramarae, respond to Moore’s views about the pedagogical approaches used in distance education. The third reaction paper, written by Von Pittman, credits Moore with providing readers with an important link to past practice and cautions that distance education should not be “regarded strictly as a technology-driven narrative” (p. 50).

While Pittman’s focus is on the wealth of background information provided in the essay, Anderson and Kramarae pay closer attention to assumptions and omissions in Moore’s essay. Anderson’s focus is on three of Moore’s views:

- An assumed equivalence of distance education with independent study;
- An alignment of principles of adult learning with independent study pedagogies;
- A belief that there is no discernible difference in practice between now and the early days of correspondence courses (p. 54).

In his discussion of Moore’s perspective that the pedagogy of distance education has remained the same even though the tools have changed, Anderson specifically addresses the three issues above and concludes that he and Moore have differing opinions on “the impact of technology and pedagogy on past and especially the future of distance education” (p. 56).

Kramarae focuses on the students who many educators claim are the beneficiaries of distance education (i.e., women and those with mobility impairments or other disabilities that might make travel to a post-secondary institution onerous), but who, according to Kramarae, are further hampered rather than helped by the technologies employed today. Through her reaction to Moore’s essay, Kramarae advances her own belief that there are issues within the developments of distance education that have never been

adequately addressed by those who plan, teach, or administer distance education courses. These issues include: isolation, emphasis on learner-centered programs, software advances, and chatrooms as part of course design.

Taken together, Moore's monograph and the three reaction papers provide readers with an interesting overview of the history of distance education in the United States and its strong ties to certain types of adult education. It also provides a sample of the issues currently in the forefront of discussions arising from that field of education. Overall, the historical overview and discussion makes it a useful publication in a course reading list for an adult or distance education program. Furthermore, the publication can be extremely useful to those who are researching either the field of distance or adult education because it provides references and includes a lengthy bibliography.

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