Participating in the Future: Shared Leading, Collaborative Learning, and Creatively Deciding

Roger Hiemstra
Senior Research Associate, American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC)
University of Nebraska

Janet Poley
President and CEO, American Distance Education Consortium
University of Nebraska

Leading and Learning in Distance Education

Leading and learning in today's fast changing distance education environment can be enhanced by visualizing and planning for any future that is desired. Important, too, is establishing collaborations with a multitude of institutions and organizations both domestically and globally in creating critical mass and necessary change systems. This involves such techniques or relationships as alliances, collaborative endeavors, cooperative agreements, multi-organization coordination, networking, strategic partnerships, and even working through a non-profit organization 501(c)(3) or other legal frameworks.

It also is important to envision how to involve learners in collaborative activities so they can maximize their involvement, especially in light of increasing communication and knowledge acquisition through broadband Internet. This involves establishing an effective self-directed learning environment. Valuing and creating such learning environments that are more effective involves new attention to what the learner brings to the learning table. In this collaborative learning setting, "learner" and "learner to learner" considerations must be at the center of future distance education decisions.

In addition, various digital resources are available to support such distance learning approaches. Appropriate decision making, therefore, facilitates future planning efforts. This session helps participants think through a host of leadership techniques, decision-making approaches, policy development needs and strategies, and technology uses appropriate to create a more effective distance education environment for learners, leaders, and organizations.

Leadership for the Future of Distance Education

Effective management within the complex dynamics of operating successful distance education requires acting on what we know about leadership. For example, the Positive Power and Influence Model involve maintaining a repertoire of styles and techniques to influence others while building positive relationships. This style flexibility becomes crucial when working with such diverse audiences as central administrators, instructional designers, technical specialists, online teachers, and even online learners. Conflict resolution, influencing others when you don't have positional authority, mobilizing scarce resources and support from others, and building bridges with various organizations or people are important means for obtaining commitment by others to support your distance education efforts.

This requires leadership that embraces shared learning about vision and goals, both short and long-term planning, and sustainability expectations. Role shifting from being the boss as decision-maker to a person who has an ability to work with many different kinds of people and in various kinds of capacities is very important, too. The distance education leader needs good technical knowledge, an ability to manage money, to be able to understand investment strategies, and to recognize the tremendous and varied value that different people bring to the table. Putting on a journalist's hat to talk with reporters about your program or to write a news release, being able to give a powerful speech before multiple organizations,

Copyright 2006 The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Duplication or redistribution prohibited without written permission of the author(s)
and The Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning

writing grant proposals and managing successful projects, planning productive meetings, and, at times, staying in the background to nurture others are some of the multiple tasks that are required.

It means knowing how to partner or collaborate with these multiple organizations. It involves working with staff as well as with volunteers in collegial ways. There are times, too, when taking a risk and daring to step outside the box and do something different is necessary for success. This requires leading, managing, and learning ethically, flexibly, creatively, cost effectively, relevantly, and even futuristically. In this session we talk about these various approaches.

We also talk about some of the tools that can be used in such leadership efforts. For example, mind-mapping can be a highly productive tool for getting many ideas out on the table, prioritizing needed activities, knowing where you are in the planning or implementation process, understanding where you have been, and gaining insight into where you are heading. Computer software is available to facilitate mind mapping strategies and approaches. Another useful tool is appreciative inquiry where a leader searches for the best in the people and organizations with which she or he associates. It involves learning how to ask questions that actually strengthen you and your organization's capacity to understand and enhance potential through discovery, dreaming, and designing according to available strengths and competencies.

We will discuss, too, how the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC) employs the Internet as an information provider, collaboration tool, communication structure, organizational transparency device, and decision making aid through its mammoth Web page, Wikis, collaboratories, audio and video conferencing, multicasting, streaming video, chat rooms, year calendar creation, and an e-Store. However, we also describe when and how the Internet is not effective for some leadership activities. Concurrent session participants also will be involved interactively as we explore such leadership issues.

Creating a Self-Directed Learning Environment

Making good leadership choices is very important in developing a successful collaborative distance education program, but learners also need to be involved both as collaborators in the educational process and in assuming increasing responsibility for their own learning activities. The research actually is very clear that learners want and thrive in self-directed learning environments (Brocket & Hiemstra, 1991; Hiemstra, 1991; Hiemstra & Brockett, 1994; Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Helping learners accept increasing responsibility for their own involvement pays multiple dividends in distance education settings. Boyer and Kelly looked at students who blended online learning with face to face learning and found evidence of such dividends: "The self-directed framework challenged participants to step beyond comfort zones into tasks that generated further competence and self-confidence" (2005, p. 12).

There also are a growing number of digital possibilities for improving and enhancing the ability of learners to find resources needed for their distance learning efforts. This includes resources like the following: Digital libraries, digital repositories developed by such museums as the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum of the American Indian, and a host of educational resources at locations such as eScholarship Repository at the University of California, the Open Courseware repository at MIT, iBiblio (a collection of collections), ADEC, and the Sloan Consortium.

The Web also can be used more effectively in serving the needs of distance learners. For example, increasingly Internet content comes from many countries and includes historical and contemporary research, publications, art, and graphics from around the globe. In the future these rich resources can be used by distance educators in new learning designs certain to change teaching and learning in fundamental ways.

Copyright 2006 The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Duplication or redistribution prohibited without written permission of the author(s)
and The Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning

Research associated with a recent ADEC National Science Foundation project revealed various ways people living in rural, remote, and minority settings are using the Internet to meet their learning needs. In the session we share various findings from the research associated with this project and involve participants in detailing back home examples that are similar in nature or in describing ways they might use some of our findings in their own programs.

In essence, we advocate for getting out of the technology drive box characteristic of many distance education efforts and creating a more sophisticated self-directed learning environment that people want and will "purchase" in terms of enrollment, involvement, and even enhanced mastery. We believe that becoming a technology smart consumer at the individual, program facilitator or administrator, and even community level is crucial for success in designing a future for learning that is both inclusive and comprehensive (Hiemstra & Poley, in process). Our session will close with the decision making needed for such success by providing decision and policy making frameworks and engaging participants in developing "back home" plans for employing such frameworks.

References

Boyer, N., & Kelly, M. (2005, Spring). Breaking the institutional mold: Blended instruction, self-direction, and multi-level adult education. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning, 2*(1), pp. 1-17. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from http://www.sdlglobal.com/docs/IJSDL2_1-2005.pdf

Brockett, R. G., & Hiemstra, R. (1991). *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research, and practice*. New York: Routledge. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from http://www-distance.syr.edu/sdlindex.html

Hiemstra, R. (Ed.). (1991). *Creating environments for effective adult learning* (New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 50). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from http://www-distance.syr.edu/leindex.html

Hiemstra, R., & Brockett, R. G. (Eds.). (1994). *Overcoming resistance to self-direction in adult learning* (New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 64). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from http://www-distance.syr.edu/ndacesdindex.html

Hiemstra, R., & Poley, J. (in process). *Building an inclusive future for learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hiemstra, R., & Sisco, B. (1990). *Individualizing instruction: Making learning personal, empowering, and successful*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from http://www-distance.syr.edu/index.html

Biographical Sketches

Roger Hiemstra is Senior Research Associate with the American Distance Education Consortium, NSF Project, University of Nebraska. He is Professor and Chair Emeritus, Adult Education, Syracuse University and Elmira College in New York. During a 40-year career, his scholarship has focused on older adults as learners, self-directed learning, and distance education. He is recipient of the Malcolm Knowles Memorial Self-Directed Learning Award. He was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2000 and currently serves on the organization's Board of Directors. He is co-author of *Toward Ethical Practice*, Krieger Publishing, 2004.

Copyright 2006 The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Duplication or redistribution prohibited without written permission of the author(s)
and The Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning

Address: 318 Southfield Dr.
Fayetteville, NY 13066
E-mail: rogerhiemstra@hotmail.com
URL: www-distance.syr.edu
Phone: 315.637.3527
Fax: 815.333.1360

Janet Poley is CEO/President of the American Distance Education Consortium. She develops collaborative distance education initiatives with 60 land-grant university members. She was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2002 and serves on the organization's Board of Directors. She received the Charles Wedemeyer Award for Outstanding Practitioner in Distance Education in 2000 and serves on the Editorial Board for the *American Journal of Distance Education*. She is a professor in the College of Journalism at the University of Nebraska. Dr. Poley is the author of a number of journal articles and book chapters.

Address: C218 Animal Science
P.O. Box 830952
Lincoln, NE 68583-0952
E-mail: janetpoley@yahoo.com
URL: http://www.adec.edu/
Phone: 402.472.7000
Fax: 402.472.9060

Copyright 2006 The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
Duplication or redistribution prohibited without written permission of the author(s)
and The Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning