Supporting Distance Learners

2017

Welcome to Saide's Supporting Distance Learners

Are you...

- A tutor using electronic and Web 2.0 methods (in combination with other methods, for example print-based materials, face to face tutorials, etc.) to support distance learners?
- A tutor using electronic and Web 2.0 methods to support learners in large classes at a face-to-face institution?
- A tutor wanting to explore Web 2.0 for teaching and learning in either distance or contact situations?
- Or a tutor trainer using electronic or Web 2.0 methods to support tutors who are responsible for supporting learners enrolled on conventional distance education programmes?

And do you...

- Work in Higher Education, in a corporate setting, a government institution or NGO that is implementing distance education or blended learning?
- Live in a developing country or a place where computers and the Internet are not yet widely accessible to the learning and teaching community?
- Want to improve your own skills as a distance educator in the technology-enhanced world of the 21st century?
- Want practical advice underpinned by theory, rather than an in-depth discussion of theory?

Then these course materials are for you...

How can you use the course materials?

Because the materials are Open Educational Resources, you can use them in courses of your own. Please see the copyright notice on the Acknowledgements page if you would like to copy or modify the materials.

You can simply read the course material in this course on your own, but because online learning is most effective when there are possibilities for interaction with others online, you'll learn the most if you organise to do a course based on these materials with others with whom you can practice using the available tools. This requires using a learning management system or community site with a range of tools to facilitate interactive learning.

If you would like support in doing this course with others, please contact us at SAIDE: info@saide.org.za, or +27 11 403 2813 in South Africa. We have a Moodle site which can be used to host and manage the delivery of the course. Login as a guest to have a look at the sample course site!

 What do you need to know before starting?

- We assume that you already know a fair amount about how to teach adults.
- We also assume that you are knowledgeable about your subject area.
- You need to have basic computer literacy skills, such as using the keyboard and the mouse, and finding your way (or 'navigating') through a simple website such as this one.

What can you expect to learn?

Please see the section on learning outcomes for an overview of what you can expect to learn. However, you will be encouraged to select the learning outcomes which are most relevant for you in your own situation.

It's not only outcomes that help you direct your learning. The material supporting the achievement of the outcomes needs to be organised into a learning pathway. If you are doing the course along with others, your course facilitator will design a learning pathway through the course that is suited to your needs and the needs of the group. In online courses, the learning pathway is typically organised around key activities. Please see the recommended learning pathway and activities - which you can be adapted for your context.

Support for 'newbies' to the Web

If you are new to using the Web for learning and teaching, you will find some helpful videos and suggestions in the Support for tutors section.

Learning Outcomes

Which ones apply to you?

Which of the following things would you like to be able to do?

- Prepare yourself and your learners for distance learning with technology at the start of a course (Unit 1)
- Access communities or resources for your own support and ongoing professional development (Unit 1) Also see 'Support for tutors' section)
- Understand your role as a tutor in supporting learners involved in open learning, distance education and e-learning (Unit 2)
- Discuss the factors typically linked to success or failure of e-learning programmes, with reference to case studies (Unit 2)
- Identify possible uses of mobile technology for learner support in your context (Unit 2)
- Support your learners in the individual and collaborative construction of knowledge (Unit 3)
- Support your learners in moving successfully through the five stages that online learners typically go through (Unit 3)
- Use a range of web-based tools for asynchronous communication (e.g. blogs, wikis, discussion forums, social networking, social bookmarking) in your personal or professional life (Unit 4)
- Support your distance learners effectively through the use of asynchronous communication tools - especially discussion forums, wikis, blogs and podcasts (Unit 4)
- Use face-to-face tutorials effectively to support the learning process (Unit 5)
- Use a range of web-based tools effectively for 'live', synchronous communication with your learners (Unit 5)
- Use assignments effectively as a teaching tool (Unit 6)
- Give learners constructive feedback on their assignments (Unit 6)
- Take action to prevent plagiarism (Unit 6)

Once you have identified which of the above outcomes are most appropriate to your needs, you can use that information to help you decide which sections of the learning guide to focus on in the most detail.

Learning pathway and key activities

As you will see when you look at the Units, they are organised according to the topics that we think are important for online tutors supporting distance learners. Each unit has

1. A list of outcomes for you to choose from, to help direct your reading and thinking
2. An overview of the key issues related to the topic of the unit, often including an illustrative case study or scenario
3. A set of web pages relevant to the theme of the unit
4. Reflection activities within each page for you to think more deeply about these issues.

But it's not only **learning outcomes** and that help you direct your learning. In order to be a course, the material supporting the achievement of the outcomes needs to be organised into a learning pathway which establishes sequence, coherence and a cumulative experience that results in effective learning. In online courses, the **l**earning pathway is typically organised around key activities. The distance education principle that 'the course is more than the materials: it is learning designed into the materials' [see *Saide* 1994, Well-functioning Distance Education] holds good for online learning as well. The learning pathway is one of the main expressions of learning design.

A learning pathway and activities are designed with particular learners and contexts in mind. This learning pathway and series of activities assumes that that you are:

- a computer literate prospective online tutor with a personal computer/laptop and internet access
- working through this course together with others
- using a learning management system or community site.

It also assumes that there will be a course facilitator to manage the process and model the facilitation skills described in the course materials.

Most of the activities are designed according to Gunawardena's *Wiscom model*. Key to this model is building 'wisdom communities' through mentoring and learner support in order to achieve knowledge innovation. It is the activities that drive the process of engagement. Each activity typically has five stages:

1. The challenge – the tutor or course writer sets the task/poses the problem
2. Initial exploration – the learners explore resources relevant to the challenge
3. Share ideas/consult with your peers – they discuss their views/discoveries with each other
4. Reflection and reorganization – they adjust their ideas/approach in response to what they hear from others
5. Negotiation and preservation – they summarise/synthesize or in some way make available their learning and knowledge to others.

(Please see Charlotte Gunawardena et al. New Model, New Strategies: Instructional Design for Building Online Wisdom Communities. Distance Education, vol 27, no 2, August 2006, pp217-232 for a full explanation of the model.)

In addition to being based on social constructivism, this model also gives expression to Etienne Wenger's notion of learning as involving both 'participation' and 'reification' (See

Etienne Wenger. 2001. *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.63).

In a Web 2.0 environment, there are many more opportunities than in conventional distance education not only for 'participation' (communication, engagement with others); there are also more varied opportunities for 'reification' (publishing, making an artefact of your thoughts and learning). Activities in online learning situations need to create opportunities for both 'participation' and 'reification'. The five stages of the Wiscom model provide a structured way to do this.

Click on the "Before you start" button below to start your journey on the learning pathway we have developed.

[Unit 1](#)

Introduction

In order to support your learners well, you need to spend some time understanding what they are going through.

The first unit will help you:

- focus on what your learners may find easy or difficult about learning at a distance and using technologies that may be new to them.
- think about how you can support them in the type of e-learning they are engaged in in their institutions.

In this unit, we also look at some of the resources that are available to support a special kind of lifelong learner - the distance educator.

Outcomes

Tick the things you would like to be able to do by the end of this unit:

1. Identify the aspects that your learners are likely to find easy and difficult about learning at a distance and using technology in their learning.
2. Establish a friendly, inviting atmosphere at the start of a programme.
3. Clarify expectations with learners at the start of the learning programme.
4. Discuss the different ways in which learners can be supported in three different kinds of e-learning programmes: [web-supplemented](#), [web-dependent](#) and [fully online](#).
5. Reflect on your tutoring role in relation to standard criteria for quality learner support in distance education (see [Learner support criteria](#)).
6. Identify some resources for your own professional development.

Use your selected outcomes to help you decide which parts of the unit to focus on in the greatest depth.

Reading and Reflection

Click on the following links to access the materials for this unit:

- [Learners speak about learning online](#)
- [Clarifying expectations with learners](#)
- [It's not about computers - it's about people!](#)
- [Netiquette and other niceties](#)
- [Supporting learners in blended and fully online environments](#)
- [Case studies: delivering e-learning in South Africa](#)

[Unit 2](#)

Introduction

In this unit, we look at the ways in which adults can benefit from [open learning.](#) We explore the ways in which emerging technologies are helping to make open learning a reality for ever greater numbers of learners, and we also look at some of the ways in which the concept of open learning has been misunderstood, or misused, in recent years.

We also discuss '[e-learning](#)' and '[e-learning 2.0](#)', and look at some case studies of successful and not-so-successful e-learning.

Outcomes

Tick the things you would like to be able to do by the end of this unit:

1. Discuss the relationship between distance education and the principles of open learning, and the role played by [Open Educational Resources](#) (OER) and Web 2.0 in opening learning.
2. Discuss the possible pitfalls for learners in being offered courses with no learning support.
3. Discuss the factors that are likely to lead to success or failure of e-learning programmes.
4. Discuss ways in which [mobile devices](#) are – or could be – used to support learners in your teaching context, if at all, and possible pitfalls related to the use of mobile devices.
5. Consider the ways in which you can prepare your learners for e-learning at the start of a course.

Use your selected outcomes to help you decide which parts of the unit to focus on in the greatest depth.

Reading and Reflection

Click on the following links to access the materials for this unit:

- [Empowering learners through open learning](#)
- [E-learning and e-learning 2.0](#)
- [E-learning case studies](#)
- [Using mobile technologies for learner support](#)
- [Case studies - mobile technologies in use](#)

Unit 3

Introduction

Education and training institutions around the world used to be driven by a belief that teaching simply involved imparting knowledge to learners. This was based on the notion that a learner's brain is an 'empty vessel', into which knowledge can be poured, and that if you poured in the right information, in the right sequence, the learner would automatically learn whatever you wanted her to learn.

Although most educators would now disagree with this notion, it is still the case that most educators/ trainers in higher education and workplace training are appointed on the basis of their subject knowledge and not their ability to teach in a learner-centred way.

In recent years, the concept of constructivism has helped many educators to go beyond traditional rote learning techniques, and to engage their learners more fully in the learning process. In this unit, we take a bird's-eye look at the many ways in which you can support distance learners in their learning from a constructivist perspective.

Outcomes

Tick the things you would like to be able to do by the end of this unit:

1. Explain how the concept of constructivism can help educators make the learning process engaging for learners
2. Explain the typical stages that learners go through in the online learning process
3. Discuss ways of supporting learners at each stage of their learning that are consistent with a constructivist approach to teaching
4. Find out which stage your learners are at in their journey towards knowledge construction in an online or blended learning environment

Use your selected outcomes to help you decide which parts of the unit to focus on in the greatest depth.

Reading and reflection

Click on the following links to access the materials for this unit:

Approaches to teaching
Constructivism
The five stages that learners go through in an e-learning programme
Case study - the five stages in action

Unit 4

Introduction

In distance education, most of the learning activity takes place in learners' own time, at their own pace. Before the arrival of digital technology, learners generally studied entirely alone, apart from perhaps attending occasional face-to-face tutorials. Today there are a great many tools and techniques available to learners to enable them to communicate with one another asynchronously - in other words, to communicate by participating at different times.

Examples of tools for asynchronous communication that are explored in this unit are e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis and SMSs (or mobile phone text messages). We will consider the implications of using these tools for our teaching practice.

Outcomes

Tick the things you would like to be able to do by the end of this unit:

1. Familiarise yourself with a range of tools for asynchronous communication, including the following: e-mail, discussion forums, wikis, blogs, podcasting and other voice tools, social networking sites and social bookmarking sites
2. Identify the main asynchronous tools that are available to you within your institution's learning management system for supporting learning
3. Identify the most useful asynchronous collaboration tools that are available to you for supporting learning in the public domain
4. Discuss a range of ways in which you can provide scaffolding for your learners using asynchronous tools
5. Reflect on your approach to facilitating asynchronous communication and explore ways of making it more productive
6. Devise some strategies for boosting learner participation in asynchronous communication.

Use your selected outcomes to help you decide which parts of the unit to focus on in the greatest depth.

Reading and Reflection

Click on the following links to access the materials for this unit:

Getting to know your institution's asynchronous tools
Asynchronous tools on the Web
Case studies - using asynchronous communication
Guidelines for mediating asynchronous communication

Unit 5

Introduction

Most distance courses have some opportunities for learners and tutors to work together in real time, or synchronously. In some cases, this synchronous communication takes place in the form of face-to-face tutorials; in others, learners meet online using web-conferencing technology. In some institutions, tutors also offer one-to-one telephonic tutorials.

Unit 5 looks at the many ways in which synchronous communication can be managed to provide maximum support for learners.

Outcomes

Tick the things you would like to be able to do by the end of this unit:

1. Reflect on your approach to running tutorials – both face-to-face and online – and identify the ways in which you are currently providing scaffolding and support for your learners
2. Identify ways in which you might be able to make your tutorials even more productive in future
3. Identify the main synchronous tools and techniques that are available to you for supporting your learners in their learning, including face-to-face meetings, the telephone, instant messaging (IM), web-conferencing and virtual worlds, and discuss the main considerations for facilitating communication using each of these
4. Discuss a range of activity types that can be used in synchronous sessions, both online and face-to-face, and identify ways in which each of these can be used in your own context
5. Discuss the main principles of facilitating synchronous discussions, and give examples of how you apply these principles in your teaching
6. Discuss some of the possible benefits of online learning from a learner's point of view

Use your selected outcomes to help you decide which parts of the unit to focus on in the greatest depth.

Reading and Reflection

Click on the following links to access the materials for this unit:

Why tutorials?
Collaborative learning activities for face-to-face and synchronous online sessions
Leading face-to-face tutorials
Telephonic support and instant messaging (IM)
Leading online tutorials
Dipping into virtual worlds

Unit 6

Introduction

Aaargh! Assignments! For many learners, assignments are associated with strong emotions, ranging from mild anxiety to blind panic. For many tutors too, assignments are an emotional matter. Assignments test not only the learners, but also the educators. They test our professional judgment; our ability to be fair; our ability to be both objective and supportive at the same time. Ultimately, they test our ability to enable learners to learn, or in plain language, our ability to teach.

The way in which assignments are designed says a lot about the educator's philosophy of how people learn: collaborative or individual work; multiple-choice or open-ended questions; regurgitating content or showing that you know how to access information, critically evaluate it and apply it.

In this unit, we will look at the kind of assignments that challenge learners to go beyond mere regurgitation of facts. We will look at ways of constructing assignments so that the assignments themselves provide the scaffolding through the course. We will explore options for encouraging collaborative learning while still ensuring that each individual pulls his or her own weight. We will also look at the use of e-portfolios as a teaching and assessment tool.

And finally, we will discuss ways to prevent every educator's nightmare – plagiarism – from occurring. (Well, at least from occurring often!)

Outcomes

Tick the things you would like to be able to do by the end of this unit:

1. Discuss the role of assignments in supporting the learning process
2. Create assignments that enable learners to show what they can do, not what they can't
3. Structure an assignment in such a way that it promotes constructive participation in the discussion forum and provides scaffolding for learners
4. Consider ways that e-portfolios may be useful in your context
5. Take steps to help prevent plagiarism
6. Provide constructive feedback to learners on their performance

Use your selected outcomes to help you decide which parts of the unit to focus on in the greatest depth.

Reading and reflection

Click on the following links to access the materials for this unit:

The role of assignments in supporting learning
Building collaboration into assignments
Case study - a collaborative assignment
Giving constructive feedback on assignments
Giving audio feedback via podcasts
Using e-portfolios for assessment
Preventing plagiarism in the digital era

[Learner Support](#)

NADEOSA Learner Support Quality Criteria

The following criteria for quality learner support are taken from the [NADEOSA Quality Criteria](#) (2005).

The NADEOSA quality criteria were developed to describe the requirements for quality distance education in South Africa but now are used for self-evaluation purposes not only by institutions in South Africa, but also elsewhere in the world. There are thirteen criteria, each with a number of elements that describe the overall criterion in more detail. The thirteen criteria are:

1. Policy and Planning
2. Learners
3. Programme Development
4. Course Design
5. Course Materials
6. Assessment
7. Learner Support
8. Human Resource Strategy
9. Management and Administration
10. Collaborative Relationships
11. Quality Assurance
12. Information Dissemination
13. Results.

Criterion 7 contains key elements relating to the role of tutors in supporting distance learners.

7: Learner Support

Learners are provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling (both remote and face-to-face), and the stimulation of peer support structures. The need of learners for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision-making is also taken into account.

Elements:

Academic support
7.1 Learners are encouraged to create and participate in 'communities of learning' in which the individual thinks and solves problems with others engaged in similar tasks. This is facilitated through a range of learner support mechanisms - peer support sessions, tutorials/ contact sessions, teaching on assignments, support in the workplace (mentoring), email and Internet communications, for example.

7.2 Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.

7.3 Learners are carefully oriented to the teaching and learning methods on the programme, particularly if electronic learning methods are used.

7.4 Where appropriate, the development of competence in the use of information and communication technologies is built into the learning outcomes of the programme.

7.5 In selection of venues and times for contact sessions, travel time and expense for learners are considered. Care is taken to place suitable sites of learning close to where learners live/ work.

7.6 Tutors are selected and trained for their crucial role in encouraging active engagement of each learner in the course/ programme through:

- Establishing and maintaining a supportive relationship with each learner in their group;
- Mediating learning from the course materials;
- Teaching on assignments by giving constructive feedback.

7.7 Tutor training places particular emphasis on equipping tutors to analyze and assist learners with language and learning difficulties.

7.8 The tutor/learner ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners as individuals, be able to support them in their studies and monitor their progress.

7.9 There are sufficient contact sessions to ensure that the learners are able to achieve the outcomes of the course.

7.10 Contact sessions are integrated into the course design, rather than being an add-on extra.

7.11 The teaching and learning activities at contact sessions acknowledge learners' existing knowledge and experience, and provide opportunities for guided integration of the new knowledge and skills as contained in the course materials.

7.12 There are opportunities for individual academic support for learners either by telephone, by appointment, or online.

Counselling
7.13 Learners have access to counselling for personal difficulties/ advice related to their study before and during their course or programme, as well as after its completion.

Administrative Support
7.14 Administrative staff are trained to be helpful, clear and consultative in the way they relate to and make arrangements for learners.

7.15 The obligations and responsibilities of learners and the educational provider are made clear at registration. It is clear what resources and equipment the provider will supply, and what the learner will have to supply personally.

7.16 Where possible, arrangements are made to meet learners' needs for physical facilities for study, tutorial and resource space.

7.17 Learners have access to facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.

7.18 Learners are provided with technical support for educational technology hardware, software and delivery system required in a programme.

Learning centres as part of learner support
7.19 Both academic and administrative functions of learning centres are taken care of in the way that learning centres are managed.

7.20 Learning centres, to the extent that they become fixed structures, and particularly fixed structures with technological equipment, are accessible to the broader community, rather than merely to a provider offering a formal programme.

Monitoring/ Quality Assurance

7.21 Before each phase of a course/ programme (for example, before the first assignment, contact session, examination), each learner is contacted and encouraged to participate.

7.22 Learner performance is monitored and learners at risk identified. Timeous educational intervention is provided for such learners.

7.23 Performance of tutors and attendance of both tutors and learners at contact sessions is monitored regularly. The work of mentors in supporting and assessing learners in the workplace is also monitored by the provider. Monitoring data is analysed and acted upon.

7.24 Feedback is sought from tutors/ mentors as well as from learners for the review of courses and programmes.

7.25 Learner structures, such as learner/student representative councils and faculty associations, are established, recognised and empowered to represent learners on structures of institutional governance.

Additional resources

NADEOSA website: http://www.nadeosa.org.za.

Welch T & Reed,Y. 2005. Designing and Delivering Distance Education: Quality Criteria and Case Studies from South Africa. Johannesburg, NADEOSA

The online facilitation course developed by the Centre for Educational Technology contains a very useful table entitled Capabilities of Online Facilitators. It identifies the following categories of skills: Supporting online learning, Social skills, Online communication skills, Technical skills, Social networking skills and then spells out beginner, intermediate and expert levels within these categories. The full reference is: Carr T, Jaffer S & Smuts J.2009. *Facilitating Online: A Course Leader's Guide*. Centre for Educational Technology Series, Number 3 –
see http://www.cet.uct.ac.za.
Preventing plagiarism in the digital era

Support for Tutors

If you are new to the Web

If you are not a very experienced Web user, you might like to start by looking at 'The Web in plain English' section of this site, which contains several short videos from CommonCraft, explaining in plain English how blogs, wikis, search engines and other web tools work.

Resources on the Web for educators

You will find useful links to resources for educators at the end of the page on 'Empowering learners through open education' in Unit 2.

In addition, you may find the following resources useful and inspiring. These links represent just a few of the many thousands of online communities and organisations available to support educators.

If you don't find anything helpful in this list, try searching the internet and talking to your colleagues – you may be surprised at the amount of support that is just a mouse-click away.

- South African Institute for Distance Education's website: This site contains many useful articles about distance education in Southern Africa, and also has a newsletter you can sign up for.
- The Commonwealth of Learning website contains a wealth of useful and interesting resources for educators in open learning.
- SchoolNet SA is South Africa's leading innovator in professional development programmes in ICT integration and school ICT leadership.
- The E-learning Guild is an American based organisation that provides support to professionals in e-learning. Associate membership is available for free, and once you have signed up you can access many reports and discussion forums on e-learning and related topics.

Open Educational Resources (OERs)

See the section in Unit 2, 'Empowering learners through open learning', for a list of Open Educational Resources that you might find useful in your teaching. (You need to scroll down to the bottom section of this page.)

Communicating online with other educators

Maggie's blog, 'School 2.0', is at http://maggiev.edublogs.org/ and contains loads of useful information and links.

Edublogs hosts hundreds of thousands of blogs for teachers, students, researchers, professors, librarians, administrators and anyone and everyone else involved in education. This is a free site where you can communicate with other educators around the world, share information about how you use the Web for teaching, and also set up blogs for your learners.

Facebook is a social networking site that has hundreds of groups for educators to join. You can also create your own group and invite educators with the same interests as you to join.

Ideas for a team

Here are some ideas for staff members to become acclimatised to using Web 2.0, engage intellectually with each other in different ways on matters of core professional interest, and use Web 2.0 critically in and for projects and other work:

1. Podcast staff meetings. Spend a little time editing the best ones to place on the organisation's website.
2. Individuals subscribe to RSS feeds, and then save useful information through Furl, Delicious, Diigo (or any other social bookmarking site) for shared use. Remember to tag the resources when you bookmark them.
3. Team members develop their CVs into e-portfolios. Good examples could then be presented/discussed in staff meetings.
4. Integrate the use of the various tools into your daily work routine. For example, when developing a proposal for a pilot project, create an e-portfolio.
5. Use Google Docs, PBWorks, WetPaint (or other wiki tools) to manage processes that need input from a variety of team members – such as the agenda for team meetings, or jointly prepared reports/ proposals.
6. At the next conference/workshop you attend, capture panel sessions and audience discussion on video and post to You Tube. Make it possible for people who did not attend the conference to experience it digitally.
7. Team members can take photos when out in the field, or at a workshop/conference, and store them on Flickr closed group for use in the organisation's newsletter or website.
8. The person with the IT leadership role (or another staff member that is interested) starts a blog on the educational use of Web 2.0 in a developing context, and staff members have a period of time to read and react. Then, collecting up all the comments, the blog host chairs a meeting to discuss implications for organisational projects. The ideas from the discussion are summarised, and the blog continued from that summary. There are as many iterations of this as people have energy for.
9. A particularly good/provocative article on emerging trends in education is identified and staff all read same article and discuss through a discussion Forum (e.g. on Ning or Elgg). The discussion could be public or it could remain as an internal discussion but available to a broader audience. For example: comment on the following 10 big shifts that the Read/Write Web is creating in how best to teach (according to Will Richardson - see Additional Resources below)
   * Open content
   * Many, many teachers and 24/7 learning
   * The social, collaborative construction of meaningful knowledge
   * Teaching is conversation, not lecture
   * Know 'where' learning
   * Readers are no longer just readers
   * The web as a notebook
   * Writing no longer limited to text
   * Mastery is the product, not the test
   * Contribution, not completion, as the ultimate goal.

10. For the purposes of identifying support needs for professional development purposes, design an evaluation process to look at barriers to/facilitators of use of Web 2.0 on a daily basis. Particularly important would be engaging with individual staff to track e-habits including blocks. Observation and interviewing as well as personal journaling and/or daily logs are methods that could be used.

Useful books and journal articles

The following resources are highly recommended if you would like to delve deeper into the principles of e-learning with a practical focus.

1. The e-merge 2008 virtual conference was for practitioners in Africa 'to share good practice and knowledge about educational technology innovation within the further and higher education sectors in the region, as well as to strengthen communities of researchers

and practitioners.' The proceedings are available
at: http://emerge2008.net/programme.html.

2. Stride (Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education), an initiative of the Indira Gandhi National Open University in New Delhi, India, has produced several handbooks for distance educators which can be freely downloaded from their site at http://www.ignou.ac.in/institute/frame.html.

3. Anderson, T., 2008. The Theory and Practice of Online Learning. Athabasca: Athabasca University Press. Can be downloaded as a free e-book under a Creative Commons license at http://www.aupress.ca/index.php/books/120146

4. Commonwealth of Learning, 2008. Education for a Digital World: Advice, Guidelines and Effective Practice from Around the Globe. Vancouver: BCcampus and Commonwealth of Learning. Can be downloaded as an e-book under a Creative Commons license at http://www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/Pages/edDigitalWorld.aspx

5. Harasim, L., Hiltz, S., Teles, L. and Turoff, M., 1995. Learning Networks: A Field Guide to Teaching and Learning Online. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. An excellent description of knowledge construction through online discussion.

6. Richardson, W., 2008. Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms 2nd ed., Corwin Press.

7. Salmon, G. 2004. E-moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online, Kogan Page, London. www.atimod.com

8. Salmon, G. 2002. E-tivities: The Key to Active Online Learning 1st ed., Routledge.www.atimod.com.

Glossary

Asynchronous communication: Asynchronous communication is communication that takes place over a period of time, usually in writing. A good example of asynchronous communication is an online discussion forum: participants go in at different times and write their thoughts in response to what others have written.

Avatar: An image chosen by a computer user to represent himself/ herself to other people. This may be a simple photograph or line drawing, or in the case of games and virtual worlds, an avatar may be an animated character.

Blended learning: Learning through a combination of e-learning and face-to-face sessions.

Blog: A blog, or 'web-log', is a website containing a journal, usually written by an individual. Members of the public are able to comment on the blog, and many blogs contain lively discussions amongst readers.

Citation: Reference to a source.

Constructivism: A theory that says the way humans learn is by actively constructing knowledge and meaning from their experience. In other words, learners do not 'receive' knowledge from a teacher. 'Each of us constructs our own meaning and learning about issues, problems and topics.' [Ref: Department of Education (2000) Curriculum 2005: Towards a Theoretical Framework. Pretoria. P.11.]

Discussion forum: An online discussion site, in which members of a community can post their thoughts in writing, and respond to others in a 'conversation' that usually takes place over an extended period of time. Contributions to a discussion forum are called 'posts' or 'postings', and are organised in topic-based 'threads'.

E-learning: Any learning experience that is enabled or enhanced by the use of computer-based technology. The 'e' stands for 'electronic', which includes the Internet, CD ROMs, software, other media and telecommunications.

E-learning 2.0: 'E-learning 2.0 is e-learning that involves collaboration between learners using Web 2.0 technologies. E-learning 2.0 assumes that knowledge is socially constructed, and that learning takes place through conversations about content and grounded interaction about problems and actions.' (Adapted from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_learning) In this learning guide, 'e-learning 2.0' is used interchangeably with 'online learning'.

E-portfolio: A collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web. Such electronic evidence may include inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. E-portfolios are both demonstrations of the user's abilities and platforms for self-expression, and, if they are online, they can be maintained dynamically over time. [Ref: Wikipedia]

Flexible learning: A set of educational philosophies and systems, concerned with providing learners with increased choice, convenience and personalisation to suit the learner. In particular. flexible learning provides learners with choices about where, when and how learning occurs. The term 'flexible learning' is often used in New Zealand and Australia.
(Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flexible_Learning)

Fully online programmes: These programmes have no face-to-face component. All interactions with staff and students, educational content, learning activities, assessment and support services

are integrated and delivered online. The term 'fully online' is usually used in contrast with the terms 'web-dependent' and 'web-supplemented'.

Headset: Headphones combined with a microphone that plug into your computer.

Immersive environment: An artificial, interactive, computer-created scene or 'world' within which you can immerse yourself.

Instant Messaging (IM): Communication between two or more people in a 'live' (synchronous) conversation, using text rather than voice.

Learner-centredness: An approach to teaching that places the learner, and the learner's needs, at the centre of the learning process.

Learning management system (LMS): Software for delivering, tracking and managing e-learning. LMSs range from simple systems for managing training records, to more complex software for making courses available over the internet and offering features for online collaboration.
[Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_management_system].

Lifelong learning: Continuing to learn throughout one's lifetime, for either personal or professional reasons

Mobile technologies: Wireless technologies such as hand-held PCs, PDAs, mobile phones, iPods and other MP3/ MP4 players.

Netiquette: Online etiquette; respectful communication within an online community.

Online learning: Learning using a computer connected to the internet, usually with the implication that Web 2.0 technologies are being used - hence this term is generally taken to mean the same as 'e-learning 2.0'.

Open Educational Resources (OERs): Open educational resources are educational materials and resources offered freely and openly for anyone to use and under some licenses to re-mix, modify and distribute. (Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_educational_resources). See OER Africa What is OER?

Open learning: In open learning, learners are given a choice over what, where, when, at what pace, and how they learn.

Plagiarism: A piece of writing that has been copied from someone else and is presented as being your own work (Definition from Princeton WordNet Search, http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn).

Podcasts: Podcasts are audio files containing voice recordings. Some podcasts also contain video materials. They can be produced at home using inexpensive digital recording equipment, and listened to (or watched) on a computer or any MP3 player, including most mobile phones. The verb 'podcasting' refers to making podcasts using sound recording equipment and podcasting software.

PDA: Personal Digital Assistant - a handheld mobile device that operates like a very small computer.

Portability of credits: the ability to have educational credits obtained from one institution recognised by another.

Recognition of prior learning: Formal acknowledgement of previous learning from formal and informal learning situations.
(http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/recognitionofprior.htm)

Search Engine: Search engines are designed to search for information on the World Wide Web. Information may consist of web pages, images, information and other types of files. (Ref: Wikipedia)

Social Bookmarking: A method for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of web pages on the Internet with the help of metadata. (Ref: Wikipedia)

Social networking: A social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services. (Ref: Wikipedia)

Social presence: A learner in an online course has 'social presence' to the extent that s/he is perceived by other learners in the group to be a real person.

Scaffolding: anything in the learning environment that supports learning, including tasks, learning materials, and dialogue with other learners and the educator/trainer. As the learner becomes more competent in the subject, the amount of support provided is reduced. The concept of scaffolding was made popular by Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist who has been extremely influential in the development of constructivism in education.

Synchronous communication: Synchronous communication is a 'live' conversation that takes place using technologies such as instant messaging, web-conferencing, teleconferencing or video conferencing. In synchronous communication, all participants are taking part at the same time.

Technology steward: A member of an online community who helps his or her peers with technology advice and support.

Transparency (in assessment): Making all the necessary information available to learners so that they are not 'caught out' by surprises in an assessment.
Virtual worlds: A virtual world is a computer-based environment which simulates a real environment of some kind. Users immerse themselves in this environment through the use of avatars. (See also 'avatars' and 'immersive environments').

Web ('the Web' or World Wide Web): A system of interlinked Web pages, accessed via the Internet. Web pages contain documents and a range of multimedia items, such as music, photographs and videos.

Web 2.0: A view of the World Wide Web as 'a collaborative network characterized by the participatory and cumulative experience of users'. (Definition from Tim O'Reilly, who popularised the term: http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html)

Webcam: A camera connected to your computer, or built into your computer, that enables you to stream video footage of yourself during a web-conferencing call.

Web-conferencing: A technology that enables two or more people to have a live conversation via the Internet. Many web-conferencing tools allow for video as well as audio communication.

Web-dependent programmes: In these programmes, online participation is required for one or both of the following:

- Accessing course content
- Communicating with staff and or other learners
- Other methods are also used, such as face-to-face instruction. (Contrast with web-supplemented and fully online programmes)

Web-supplemented programmes: In these programmes, online participation is optional for learners. Enrolled learners have the option to access information about the course and other

online learning resources. This information supplements face-to-face instruction, and also print-based distance education. (Contrast with web-dependent and fully online programmes)

Wikis: A wiki is a collection of web pages which can be edited by members of a community. Some wikis are open to the public (such as Wikipedia); others are private and can only be accessed with a password. The aim of most wikis is to enable collaborative thinking, planning or knowledge construction.