Session 1: Creating and Implementing Distance Learning Programs Across Borders

Summary

Hiroshi Kato
National Institute of Multimedia Education, Japan

The theme of session 1 was 'Creating and Implementing Distance Learning Programs Across Borders'. Topics of the session included various kinds of cross cultural issues, such as the digital divide, collaborative learning across borders, educational assistance to the developing countries, and alliances / consortia of international universities.

Colin Latchem talked about recent trends of e-Learning in higher education, focusing on international collaboration in distance education and research. He introduced many cases of alliances / consortia, and discussed their benefits, risks, and keys to success. He emphasized, in particular, the importance of bridging the digital divide among countries.

Eileen Tuimalealiifano talked about her experiences in USPNet2000 such as the enabling of multimodal and flexible delivery of learning opportunities at the University of the South Pacific, which covers 12 island states in Oceania and spreads across 33m square kilometers of ocean including the broad ethnic groups. She reported the transformations that resulted from the USPNet2000 technology in different aspects, such as organization, educational practice and learning.

Yoshiyori Urano brought up examples of several international distance education projects between ASEAN countries and Japan. In some examples, he pointed out his struggles with problems peculiar to the rural areas in developing countries such as the acquiring of power supply. Through his experience with these projects, he realized the challenges that must be met, for example: (1) Flexible styles of e-Learning, (2) Interactive communication, (3) Raising opportunities for sharing experience, knowledge and wisdom, (4) Language difficulties and (5) Financial support for sustainable development of e-Learning projects.

Robin Maison demonstrated her know-how to nurture a cross-cultural online community of learning in distance environments. Her class in the Open University was an online course, half of whose members were non-native English speakers from a variety of countries. She reported her findings from the course and some devices for keeping the online community active.

Michihiko Minoh reported lessons learned from his TIDE project between Kyoto University and UCLA since 1998; one of the pioneering projects of international distance education. As a research
project, it produced some new technologies such as an automatic shooting system. He introduced the project and discussed its evaluations and organizational issues.

In summary, in these cases the authors were looking for optimal solutions under their own constraints, choosing alternatives such as synchronous or asynchronous, collaborative or self-regulated, distance or schooling, and on-line or face-to-face. In each case, however, their goals seemed to be unified: to build a learning community, in which learners collaborate with each other, engage in their practices, and develop their identities. (Fig. 1)

![Beyond the Dichotomy](image1)

Fig. 1

![Toward the Culture of e-Learning](image2)

Fig. 2

The common problems reported in the session had more to do with social factors, rather than technological issues. They included issues of financial and human support, organization, and cultural differences between organizations, varying from the level of the learner's community to the organizational alliance / consortia level. To stretch a point, the real problems reside in politics. This is partly because concept and expectations toward e-Learning are divergent. Therefore, nurturing the culture of e-Learning is necessary to share common understandings for sustainable development and the cultural adaptation of e-Learning. (Fig. 2)