Technology, E-learning and Distance Education

Second edition

A. W. (Tony) Bates

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Technology, E-Learning and Distance Education is the essential guide for anyone wanting advice on how to choose the right technology at the right cost for a course or flexible learning programme.

The underlying principle of this new second edition is unchanged from the first – technology is not inherently good or bad for teaching – it's the way that teachers and administrators use it that matters.

Fully updated to include all the latest technologies in this fast-moving field, this second edition presents a user-friendly model to help you to make your decisions, and explores the spectrum of media available, including print, radio, video, online learning and synchronous conferencing. Exploring the strengths and weaknesses of each medium, the book considers issues such as cost, pedagogy and usability.

Technology, E-Learning and Distance Education will be a valued tool for any teacher, educator, trainer manager or administrator wanting to ensure that they provide a learning programme that is tailored to the needs of their learners.

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Preface to the second edition

Harold Wilson once said: 'A week is a long time in politics.' Ten years is an eternity in educational technology. For example, the first edition of *Technology, Open Learning and Distance Education*, published in 1995, makes no reference to the World Wide Web. It is hard to believe that there were no educational programmes using the Web before 1996. What is more remarkable about the first edition though is that it has continued to sell steadily over all this period. There lies an important lesson.

Technology is constantly changing and new technological developments can have profound effects on education, as in the case of the Web. Nevertheless, there are underlying constants in educational technology that do not change, and which, if understood, can help decision makers in their choice and use of technology for teaching. This book re-examines and applies the fundamentals discussed in the first edition in the light of new technology developments since that book was first published.

All books are hard to write and this one is no exception. The main challenge has been deciding what to keep from the old edition and what to add, without making the book so long that it would be unreadable. Should we forget about television, radio, audio-cassettes and print, now that the Internet and the World Wide Web are seen as the future of distance education? The examples and data used in the first edition are sometimes over 20 years old. Does it make any sense to include them now?

Certainly, much of this book is completely new. Five chapters, one an overview of developments in distance education and e-learning in the last ten years, two on Web-based learning, and two on synchronous conferencing technologies, are completely new. Four chapters, on print, television, and radio and audio cassettes, and the final chapter (previously the executive summary), have been revised. Two chapters, the introduction, and the chapter on selecting technologies, have been edited and slightly revised, but are basically unchanged.

I have resisted the post-modernist tendency to believe that everything new is good and that there are no lessons to be learned from the past. Indeed, I believe quite the opposite. There are many useful lessons from the past that

apply with as much force to new educational technology developments, and we ignore those lessons at our peril. Chapter 2 illustrates that point in particular. Furthermore, this book is really about a methodology for decision making. If the method stands the test of time, and works just as well for new technologies as for old, then it has strong validity.

Then there is the choice of title. I have substituted 'e-Learning' for 'Open Learning' with some regret, because over the last ten years, distance education has become more closely identified with the commercialization of e-learning than with open access. E-learning has had a dramatic effect on both campus-based teaching and distance education. However, I wanted to address in particular the confusion between e-learning and distance education in many people's minds. Neither distance education nor e-learning is dead. Despite what critics say, both are thriving, but although there is considerable synergy between them, they are different concepts.

The acknowledgements in the first edition still apply, but I want to add my thanks to others. I will always be indebted to Lord Perry of Walton, the first Vice-Chancellor of the Open University, and Glenn Farrell, former President of the Open Learning Agency. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of my former colleagues in the A/V Media Research Group at the Open University, and later colleagues at the Distance Education and Technology unit at the University of British Columbia. Special thanks go to Janice Picard, without whose substantial contribution I could not have written the chapters on synchronous conferencing technologies. Also, I must give thanks to a series of editors at Routledge who have shown amazing patience with my continual procrastination in getting this revised edition finished. Lastly, my wife, Pat Porter, has had to suffer continuously from my frustration and bad temper when I have been stuck or unable to do the writing for this edition. Thank you, Pat, for sticking with me!