

INTERVIEW 3

THE ROLE and FUNCTION OF OPEN and DISTANCE EDUCATION WORLD FROM WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE:

Interview with Emeriti Professor Dr. Linda HARASIM for intWOJDE

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Distance education -DE- has an increasingly powerful impact on the education systems around the world and plays an especially vital role in the education of developing countries. It enables a large number of populations to access educational opportunities which would not be otherwise possible through conventional systems of education. This semi-structured interview aims to benefit from her experiences, feelings, and perceptions about distance learning/education by eliciting her deep insights on the issue. As being a member int.WOJDE team,

Harun SERPIL has interviewed with Professor Linda HARASIM.



The topic for her life *".....was "Women and Computers in Education", dealing with gender issues and educational computing. This is a wonderful and noteworthy issue on its own, because the course dealt with the gender bias and lack of interest by girl students and women teachers in educational computing...yet, by its very design and implementation, it became a very notable first...the first fully online Internet course ever"*.

Int.WOJDE: Who is Linda HARASIM?

I am Dr. Linda HARASIM, and among the things that I am most proud of in my professional and personal life is that I am one of the pioneers of online education.



**Int.WOJDE: What are your views about distance education?
How does distance education support the education system of your country?**

L. Harasim: Canada has been a pioneer in distance education and especially in international distance education since the early 20th century with such innovations as the Farm Radio forum, which also supported collaborative learning. Groups of farmers would come together at someone's home to tune in to the radio broadcasts to hear new information which would then be discussed within the local group.



As a Commonwealth country, Canada was not only an innovator and contributor, but also had significant exposure to distance education: the distance education activities in England, Australia, Africa, India, Hong Kong, etc. And also Canadian distance educators participated with their colleagues internationally. My views about distance education are that Canada (and I as a Canadian educator) have significantly benefited from the worldwide distance education movement and discipline. The benefit has become especially clear in recent years, given the American over-excitement with the MOOC and their lack of context in terms of understanding research and development, and practical experience. On the other hand, I do not define myself as a distance educator.



I view myself as an educator, and a specialist in online education. I do not study nor profess about distance education. Online education, I have long argued, has a distinct theoretical, epistemological and pedagogical framework from that of traditional distance education, whether postal or online. And this is a very important issue, I would like to suggest.

Distance educators have much to offer online education, but it is essential that they gain insight into the new and more effective ways of teaching and learning that online environments offer and require.

Int.WOJDE: How has your job experience been at your current workplace regarding distance education/learning?

L. Harasim: I am a full professor in the School of Communication, that is part of the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology. I do not teach as a distance educator, although I do teach a portion of my courses online. What this means in practice, is that I have introduced online education into my own courses without the assistance or the problems of working with distance education administration in my university. I have created, taught, and technologically supported all my online courses. There is currently, as far as I have been told, no administrative place for a professor to teach entirely online (which SFU refers to as Distance Education). Courses designated as distance education are typically taught by a sectional instructor, who follows an instructional design developed by a professor. This is an odd situation.



Int.WOJDE: What are the advantages of distance education model of learning over traditional model of learning?

L. Harasim: These questions have been answered many times by others, and also by me in the early years.

Int.WOJDE: Why do you think people prefer attending distance education instead of traditional education?

L. Harasim: These questions have been answered many times by others, and also by me in the early years.

Int.WOJDE: What are your suggestions for distance learners?

L. Harasim: I think that distance learners should expect and demand more in terms of the environments, tools and pedagogies---and especially in the teaching models and approaches. Online and/or distance education has tremendous potential for powerful new learning experiences and enhancements, yet the field is not actively promoting or seeking these innovations and potential. Unfortunately, the field is becoming boring rather than exciting, because too many teachers, administrators and even learners are setting the bar too low.



Education should be more than merely content transmission, yet few teachers or institutions are seeking a higher standard. Hence the really key issues about learning online such as how to collaborate online?

How to engage in informed discussion and debate online? How to moderate and facilitate collaborative learning and knowledge building online, are not understood nor implemented by teachers, not emphasized by administrators, and not demanded by learners. Online learning should be far more enlightening than merely the action of watching a 8 minute video or taking autograded quizzes. Humans should be augmented by online technology, not be automated by the same. Education should be about discourse, not just sitting, watching, and clicking. We should be emphasizing the opportunities and potential of active discussion and collaborative learning,

not individualized e-watching and clicking. Distance learners should voice the importance of active engagement and peer collaboration rather than simply accept passive compliance. Technology should support learning, rather than turning learners into automatons.

Int.WOJDE: What are your suggestions for distance education instructors?

L. Harasim: My major suggestion and call to action for educators is "Teachers: DO What Robots Cannot Do". The introduction of MOOCs which replace the role of teacher with programmed video lectures and autograded quizzes should be a warning. Since the rise of automation, inventors and investors have been seeking technologies to replace or reduce the role of teachers. Didactic pedagogies such as lectures and other instructivist approaches lend themselves to automation. As MOOCs have shown, in terms of efficiency of content transmission, MOOCs deliver content+quiz to millions of learners at any time, place or pace. So education as knowledge transmission is a poor model for teachers, because it has been automated. What AI and robotics cannot do, is to teach or facilitate: skills in thinking, innovation, collaboration, and problem-solving. This is where teachers should focus their energies, both in terms of their professional future and even more urgent, maintain the emphasis on human thinking and agency for the future of mankind and civil society.

Int.WOJDE: What are your suggestions for distance education administrators?

L. Harasim: Administrators need to seriously reflect on their mission. Is their mission to ensure the efficiency of distance education as content transmission and to keep costs as low as possible? What are the costs of such a narrow vision? On the other hand, distance education administrators could envisage a role as promoting a stronger and more effective educational role such as encouraging equity of access to pedagogies,



environments, teachers, and technologies that encourage and support high quality thinking, analytical abilities, knowledge sharing and knowledge building.

Administrators should be visionaries to help make education as effective, powerful and accessible as possible, and to create better humans for our world. Emphasis on technologies was to enhance and advance human learning and pedagogy rather than mere efficiency of transmission.



Int.WOJDE: Which areas of distance education have you been involved so far, and what are some of the lessons you have learned from them?

L. Harasim: Visionary of online education; inventor of Online Collaborative Learning theory, pedagogy, and evaluation; inventor & designer of 1st environment customized for online education and collaboration (the Virtual-U); online teacher for 30 years; researcher of online learning; CEO of \$50 million Canadian R&D program on online learning (Canada's Telelearning Network of Centers of Excellence 1995-2002); published author, International Speaker and consultant.

IntWOJDE: Did you have supportive practices/programs for the education of women and girls through your work at University of Toronto, University of Phoenix, Virtual-U, TL*NCE and Simon Fraser University?

L. Harasim: *Next time* (Idid not understood? Why italic and "next time" Maybe one or two sentences were enough Ugur)

Int.WOJDE: As a woman, what do you think should be done for a more effective distance education of women?

L. Harasim: *Next time* (Idid not understood? Why italic and "next time" Maybe one or two sentences were enough Ugur)

Int.WOJDE: You must have had interesting experiences during your work in distance education. Could you

please tell us about some of those?

L. Harasim: *Next time* (Idid not understood? Why italic and "next time" Maybe one or two sentences were enough Ugur)



Int.WOJDE: Have you ever faced gender discrimination at your institution?

L. Harasim: There is major gender discrimination at the university level for female academics, staff and students. At SFU, the Academic Women's society and the newly formed faculty union are currently fighting a battle for pay equity. Women in Canadian universities are paid approximately 70% of the male salaries.

Academic leadership at Canadian universities remains a male bastion. At every level of academic professional work, female academics fare the worse: in hiring, promotions, recognition, support, and authority. It is much the same around the world. More recently the issue of sexual violence has gained public attention and last week our provincial government announced that it would investigate violence against women on University campuses in our province. I find that female academics are

shocked and awakening to the reality and depth of abuse that is every day life at the university. It is neither loud nor aggressive, but it exists in every shadow. Perhaps most amazing, or possibly least amazing, is the message that technology is a male field where female professors do not belong.



So it is a great time to be a female academic, especially in the field of technology. Because the need for change is so loud and clear, and in Canada, even our Prime Minister declares pride to be a feminist. It is a time to advance a more equitable agenda, pedagogy, and educational model and motto!

Int.WOJDE: Our thanks go to Dr Linda HARASIM for sharing her invaluable distance education/learning experience as a female professional with the int.WOJDE readers.

L. Harasim: Thanks to intWOJDE so much...

