

INTERVIEW

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

**Interview with Professor Dr. Gila KURTZ, MA program on ICT and Learning
at the school of education at the College for
Academic Studies, Israel 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 Gila Kurtz. She is currently MA program on ICT and Learning at the school of education at the College for Academic Studies, Israel.



Professor Gila KURTZ is currently MA program on ICT and Learning at the school of education at the College for Academic Studies, Israel. Gila Kurtz is currently Head of MA program... (Also, the last pic is not looking good.)

Int.WOJDE: Who is Professor Dr. Gila KURTZ

G. Kurtz: I am a woman, researcher and a teacher. For the last seven years I am Head of MA program on ICT and Learning at the school of education at the College for Academic Studies, Israel. Since 2001, I serve as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) Graduate School, at the MA in DE and E-learning Program. I am still an Editor-in-Chief of The Interdisciplinary Journal of e-Skills and Lifelong Learning: (IJELL), I also love jogging and to dance Zumba.

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

G. Kurtz: I prefer the term online education as the use of web technologies in the educational process can be done any place any time and not just from a distance. We are facing exciting times concerning online education. The rapid proliferation of new technologies and social networks -such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Wiki, Blog, mobile devices, OER, digital games and Augment Reality,- is having a dramatic impact on online education by changing the conventional ways in which students learn and faculty teach. We are just at the beginning and much need to be learnt.



For many decades, the Israeli Open University was leading the development of advanced distance learning methods, and reaching out to the geographical and socioeconomic periphery.

In the last 15 years almost all educational institutions, from k-12 to higher education integrate online learning components within their program either fully online or blended courses. And this is a growing trend.

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

G. Kurtz: In our graduate program, we use the blended learning model in which the students learn at least in part via web technologies with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace. The face-to-face meetings on campus focus on discussion, collaborative exercises, and discourse by what students learnt before coming to class.

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

G. Kurtz: It is well known that distance learning offers flexibility in terms of time and place. It allows students to fit their learning around their work and personal life. Another benefit, especially for me as an online instructor, involves the luxury of living in Israel while teaching students in the US or any other country all over the globe. No doubt, meeting diverse students (even if from a distance) enriches my online and face-to-face teaching.

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

G. Kurtz: I think that distance learners need to understand that learning from a distance is different from face-to-face. They need to have the ability to learn independently and cope with an autonomous and self-directed study. Moreover, distance learners need to be responsible for their learning process and to be digitally literate. They need to know the benefits of emerging technologies such as social networking in communicating and connecting with the community of other. In particular, with the rapid development of online social networking sites, successful distance learners need to acquire competencies to manage personal information and connections with others, manage diverse interpersonal interactions with others, and generate and share ideas with others

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

G. Kurtz: My first suggestion for distance education instructors is to be present and actively involved with their class. Either using communication tools to all students or contact them individually. This gives students the feeling that the instructor cares about their learning and that they not abundant. Another tip is to make student learning paths to them clear as well as setting clear expectations. This will reduce feelings of uncertainty and anxiety of students that might affect their decision to drop out from class.

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?

G. Kurtz: I have been working at the Distance Education field for several years. Starting at 1995 as director of a synchronous e-Learning unit at the Open University of Israel; five years director of Bar-@-Learn Center including responsibility for developing and assimilating new e-Learning methods in academic setting; I serve as member of peer review board of a number of academic journals; I served as a member of Steering Committee of the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN) and a Secretary of The International Board of Standards for Training, performance and Instruction (IBSTPI).

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

G. Kurtz: A recent report that was published in Int.WOJDE My call is to policy makers to provide educational opportunities for women either face-to-face and/or online. The mode of learning is not relevant rather advancing women through the process of acquiring education and unlocking their potential at the workforce.

Int.WOJDE: You must have had interesting experiences during your work in distance education. Could you please tell us about some of those?

G. Kurtz: In all positions I served I learnt that technology is not the driving factor for a success but the human factor is. Teachers, students and administrators are the leading force behind the implementation of the technology within the educational process.

(http://www.wojde.org/FileUpload/bs295854/File/03rp_53.pdf) states that gender equality in Europe is yet to be achieved at all types of education. This fact affects women's economic growth and social inclusion.

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

G. Kurtz: In my college, we insist on treating men and women equally. Personally, being a woman was not relevant in my career path. I was evaluated only by my academic work, research, and publications.

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

Thanks (TODA) to intWOJDE very much!