

A Look into the Future: Transforming the Preparation of Doctoral Students in Early Childhood Special Education



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Higher Education Context in 2011

Distance education (DE) is conceptualized in a variety of ways. Broadly stated, distance education focuses on pedagogy, technology, and instructional system designs that deliver instruction/training that is not restricted by location or space.

The demand for degree programs and elective course offerings through DE has spawned an increasing number of public and for profit private institutions attempting to offer degrees using DE strategies.

Proponents of DE training programs argue that without such opportunities, they are unable to recruit and train both sufficient numbers and the highest quality candidates.

Programs looking to recruit strong and diverse students face the challenge of student immobility (i.e., an unwillingness to relocate), competing career opportunities with higher salaries beyond what future positions even after training might offer.

It is clear that how Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) make educational opportunities available to students is on the cusp of great change. Great variability exists between whether an Ed.D. or Ph.D. is offered through DE, whether the program is fully online or is more blended or hybrid in nature, and how a residency is conceptualized.

Each IHE is blazing new territory and by default, conceptualizing and defining their own unique approach to online doctoral preparation.

The purpose of the poster is to explore how IHEs might offer even the highest degree – a doctorate, through the use of DE technologies

Doctoral Training in Early Childhood Special Education

Kent State University (KSU) is example of a public institution using DL to respond to the special education personnel shortages and to address the demand for highly trained leaders in ECSE

Doctoral Students:

- Most doctoral students work full time and are in a career transition
- Many with families at home
- Many unwilling or unable to move

Blended Teaching and Learning Environments

HYFLEX Model

Hybrid – combines both online and face-to-face teaching and learning activities

Flexible – students may choose whether or not to attend face-to-face sessions ... with no “learning deficit”

HyFlex course design enables a flexible participation policy for students whereby students may choose to attend face-to-face synchronous class sessions or complete course learning activities online without physically attending class. Hybrid courses typically include a blend of instructional activities which include classroom and online components for all students. This is also referred to a blended learning environment (Bonk and Graham, 2006).

HyFlex is a course design model that presents the components of hybrid learning (which combines face-to-face with online learning) in a flexible course structure that gives students the option of attending sessions in the classroom, participating online, or doing both.

Students can change their mode of attendance weekly or by topic, according to need or preference.

In this “flexible hybrid” design, instructors provide course content for both participation modes and can tailor activities for each format. This is not a self-paced model, even though online sessions can be either synchronous or asynchronous (Educause, 2010).

HyFlex Principles:

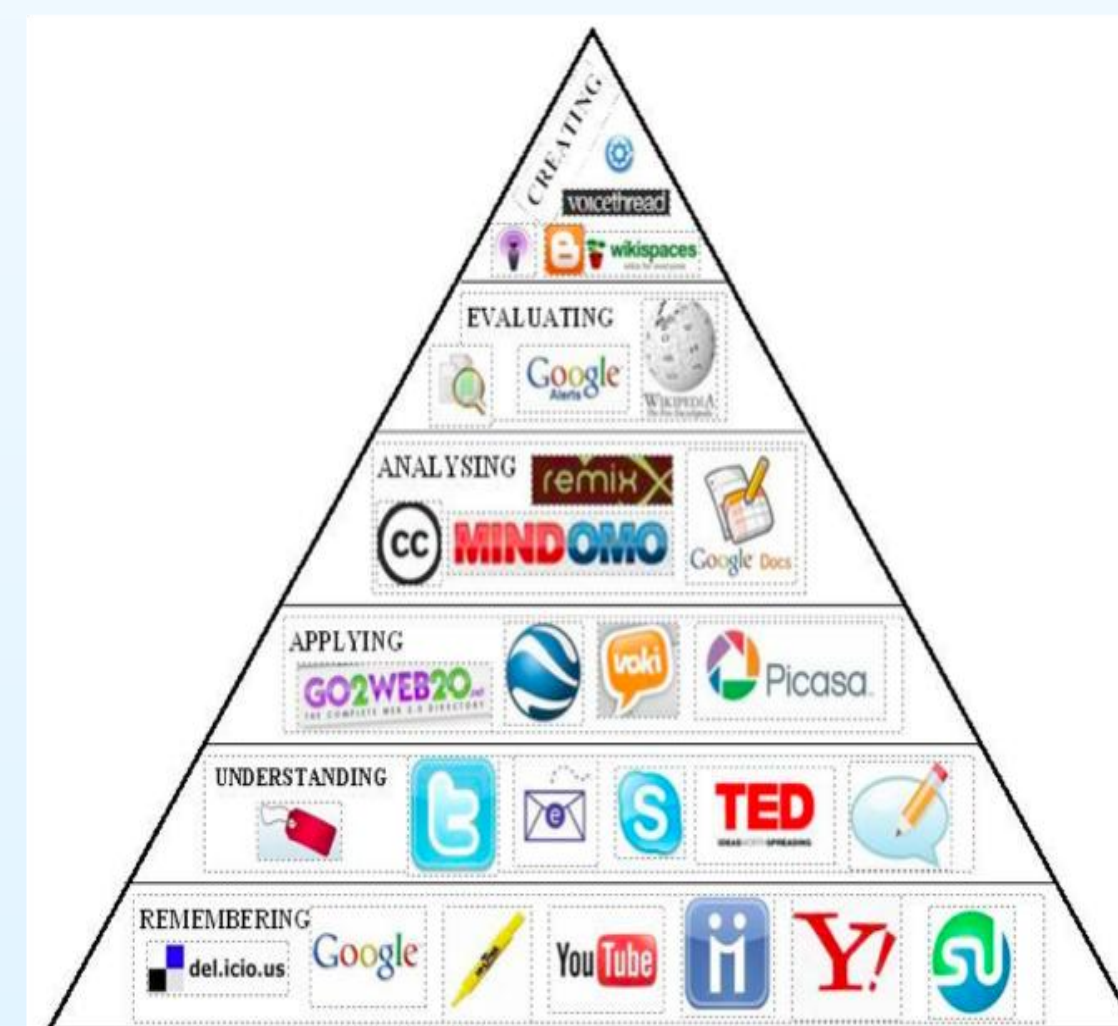
Learner Choice---Equivalency---Reusability---Accessibility

Role of Technology

Delivering instruction that combine good Androgogy, Participation, and Performance

Technology integration must always be based on solid teaching principles, clear objectives, and active strategies to promote both student engagement and active learning

Choosing the appropriate technology requires careful planning and because web based technologies are in a constant flux, we find it challenging to know what might be the best match for a given outcome



Androgogy

Designing Androgogy across the ECI curriculum grounded in academic content and practice (ACCESS)

1. UDL
2. Lower order to higher order knowledge and skills
3. Active participation and engaged learning
4. Collaboration and networking
5. Social Interaction
6. Creation of doctoral level artifacts

Participation

Teaching is a dynamic process that requires active participation

Delivering instruction provides tools, strategies and opportunities for teachers/instructors to support and scaffold student outcomes and learning

1. Two-directional & flexible
 - A. Negotiation and choices present
2. Building connections and interactions with:
 - A. Instructors
Mentoring and feedback critical!
 - B. Content
 - C. Students
3. Full participation in a community of learners



Performance

Did the students meet benchmarks?

1. Courses, comprehensive exams and dissertations
2. Evaluation via Ph.D. level artifacts and measurable outcomes in:
 - A. Research
 - B. Teaching
 - C. Service and Leadership

Technology Prerequisites

Online delivery system
Blackboard, VISTA, Moodle, etc

Content Development/Presentation
PPT, Word, Acrobat, Camtasia, Dreamweaver

Streaming video connection

Client content (plugins and players)
Web browser, PPT Viewer, MP3 player, podcast player (iTunes), Acrobat Reader

Internet connection



Instructional Objectives

Identify learning goals that respond to the needs of future leaders in ECSE

Develop instructional objectives that allow students to gain competencies

Develop and gather content aligned with principles of UDL and multiple means of representation

Select instructional activities that respond to the needs of adult learners

Create (and communicate) clear instructions

Prepare learning supports and opportunities to receive feedback

*How is this different than what we are already doing?
How much more work is this for the instructor?
... for the students?
How do students respond?
Do students take advantage of the flexibility?*

Research?

We believe that the new and emerging options of teaching and learning formats, allow for greater individualization and engagement and therefore, likely lead to greater learning.

Therefore, an interesting question or approach to program design and research regarding DE is not one of which format is better, but which formats for which purposes and for which learners, are of highest quality?

Additionally:

- How do students experience the blended or HyFlex course design?
- Does the HyFlex design meet more diverse learning styles?
- Do students prefer to create their own blend of learning activities?
- Which courses, programs, instructors, and students (content, learning goals, values, etc.) are good candidates for blended learning environments and the HyFlex design?