



**Som Naidu AUDIO INTERVIEW**  
**Editor of *Distance Education* and Expert Panel member**

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*As part of our launch week we interview Som Naidu, (Editor of **Distance Education** and Expert Panel member). Som discusses the development of the Distance Education journal, and gives his advice to adult learners looking to start a new course.*

**In the past 5 years what do you think has been the most significant change in the field of Distance Education?**

The most significant change in the field of Distance Education has been the growth of online learning and teaching and especially its association with Distance Education. You see, online education satisfies many of the key identifying features of Distance Education, and its *equation* with Distance Education has suddenly moved the concept of Distance Education from the periphery of formal educational systems to its centre. Furthermore, the use of synchronous, as well as asynchronous tools and mobile technologies has reformed distance education practices itself.

I agree, while much of this reform is confined to the developed educational contexts, because of access to technology there, the use of these technologies are expanding in the developing world as well. In the developing contexts, print and broadcast media such as radio and television remain the main forms of mediation between learners and teachers, but that will change as online learning technologies become accessible and affordable.

**What would be your top tips for creative Distance Education for a new lecturer/mentor in the field?**

The hallmarks of Distance Education are time, pace, and place independence. Distance Education should choose their technology carefully and wisely to support common educational processes such as communication, collaboration and cooperation, as well as discussion and debate, and tutoring and advisement, so as not to compromise the essential characteristics of Distance Education.

I would offer the same advice to distance educators when it comes to choosing and applying learning and teaching strategies in the field of Distance Education. There will be times when contiguous arrangements, such as face to face meetings, will require

learners and teachers to be together. There is nothing wrong with such learning and teaching arrangements to be integrated into an open and flexible learning and teaching environment.

### **How has the DE journal developed over the past few years with the changes in technology?**

The exponential growth in online learning and teaching and its equation with distance education - especially in North America and in the United States of America in particular – has suddenly given Distance Education a great deal of prominence. Researchers and developers working in the area of online learning are using “distance education” as keywords to search for publication outlets in the field. And when they do, the journal *Distance Education* comes up first, as it is not prefaced by any other sub-title, like many other comparable journals are. As such, *Distance Education* attracts a great deal of high quality research and development activity in the area of online learning.

Furthermore, the success of the journal, *Distance Education*, has also been due to its ability to respond to this changing focus of research and scholarship in the field, which it has done without undermining or compromising its fundamental focus, which is really to publish and promote research and scholarship in the field of Distance Education. The thing that has changed about contemporary Distance Education is its tools and technologies. Its foundation principles of flexibility, time, pace, place independence remain the same.

### **What one piece of advice would you give to an adult learner looking to start a new course via Distance Education?**

Foremost, be well organised, and remember to schedule your study. Do not underestimate the workload and time commitment that will be required. Because you are studying in the Distance Education mode, doesn't mean that you can study whenever you like, or however you might want. Surely you will have flexibility, but things will have to be completed and submitted by certain due dates - in most cases at least!

### **Going forward, how do you think technology will change the way teachers teach in their day to day life?**

Technology is influencing all aspects of our lives and livelihood. There is no doubt about that. There is no doubt that today's technology, as well as those of tomorrow, will influence the way we learn and teach and do our business in Distance Education. It would be silly not to not take full advantage of the powerful affordances of current, as well as forthcoming information and communications technologies, for any form of learning and teaching. But we must be vigilant about not leaving technology to do all the talking, as if it were. Yes, technology can enable us achieve many things, but not much if we haven't carefully designed their integration into the learning and teaching transactions. See, the end game is *effective, efficient and engaging learning and teaching*. We must remember to

use technology smartly to support that agenda and the sooner we understand that, the better off we are all going to be.

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