

International recognition for new distance education learning system

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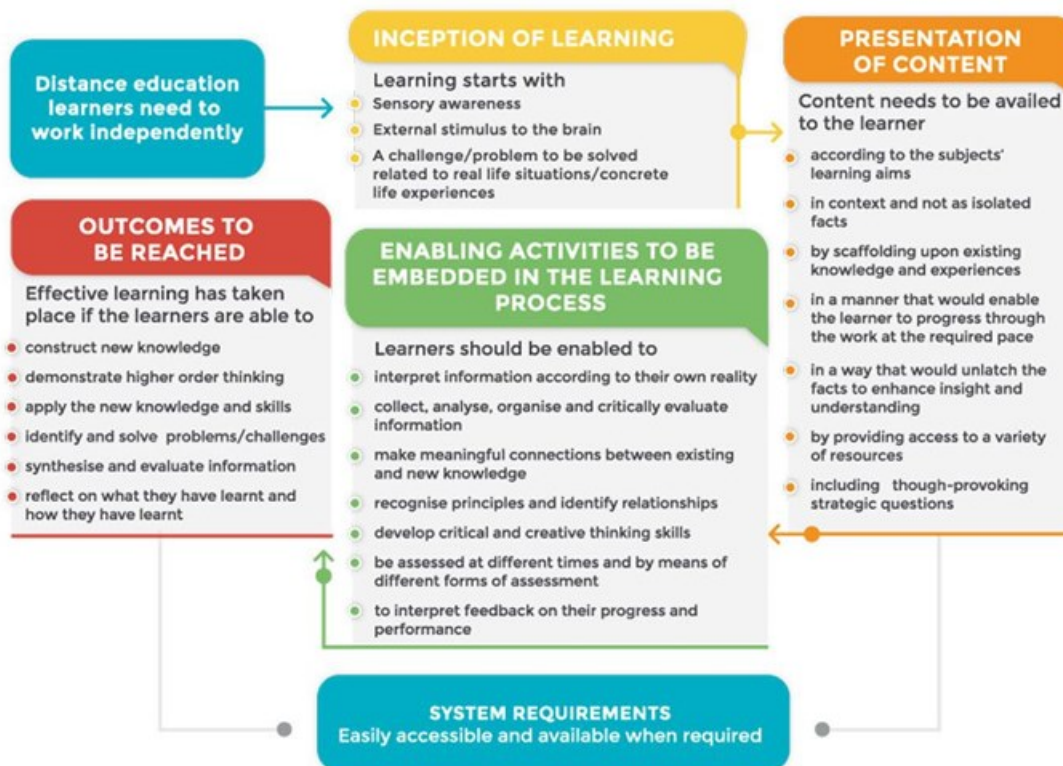
23 Feb 2018

Home education was legalised in South Africa in 1996 and has been increasing in popularity ever since. FutureLearn, a distance education provider for learners in the schooling phase, estimates that there are currently around 90,000 home-education learners in South Africa, of which more than 16,000 makes use of their products and services.

And, while there are many benefits, distance education is also characterised by a lack of interaction between the learner and the facilitator. This means that distance education providers need to develop effective technology-driven learning systems to optimise learner success. Two of FutureLearn's staff members, Prof. Rita Niemann (Executive Head: Academics) and Eloise Nolte (Executive Head: Innovation Consulting Group) joined forces to develop a comprehensive learning eco-system that would enhance learning, irrespective of the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Using FutureLearn as a case study, Niemann and Nolte conducted research to reflect on both the theoretical and practical concerns when designing a learning system. The theoretical concerns focused on the basic learning theories and curriculum requirements, while the practical concerns looked at the implications that these theoretical concerns hold for the development of a learning system.

Niemann and Nolte studied the various learning theories and conducted a synthesis between the core principles of learning and the requirements of the country's national curriculum (CAPS) to develop a learning taxonomy (as seen below).



The learning taxonomy challenges distance education providers (like FutureLearn) to figure out how these theoretical learning principles could be transferred into practice. Niemann and Nolte's research, however, provides a framework for building a system that would ensure that the principles of learning meet the technological demands.

Niemann and Nolte's paper will be presented at the International Conference on Business, Economics and Social Sciences

in Lombok, Bali, in April this year, as well as at the annual EduWeek in Midrand in June. Their paper has also been accepted to be published in the *International Journal of Economics Research* (Vol 15, 2018).

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