Thoughtful Use of Technology for Online Learning

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Universities throughout the world have embraced online learning technologies to enhance teaching. Administrators and faculty at the Karakoram International University have a strong desire to use online learning technology to enhance teaching in Gilgit-Baltistan. Like all technology, online learning technology can be used competently or incompetently. Online learning technology can be used in ways that can open or close the mind, in ways that enhance or impede critical and creative thinking. The paper draws on John Dewey's work on pedagogies for enabling students to think reflectively, which begins with perplexity, is aided by creative suggestions and suspended belief, and relies on a combination of deduction and inference. The paper argues for the thoughtful use of online learning instructional technologies.

Much of the paper will draw upon my experience with designing and offering with Pakistani faculty a bi-campus, bi-national course wherein students at Wellesley College and Fatima Jinnah Women University investigated together the political dimensions of human development policies and practices. (I hope to offer a similar course with the Karakoram International University Ghizer.) Video-conferencing allowed students in Pakistan and the United States to engage with one another and with notable practitioners, mostly women, in the fields of community development, human rights, basic education, and women's empowerment. We used a free over-the-internet service and video-conferencing facilities that the Higher Education Commission has made available at every public university in Pakistan.

The paper maintains that online learning technologies can enhance reflective thought if it permits live interaction but is likely to stifle reflective thought if it involves merely viewing pre-recorded material. The paper cautions that the cardinal mistakes of teachers considering the use of online learning technologies are the assumptions that online learning technology is time-saving and that online learning technology gives students access to areas of knowledge that their teachers do not yet possess. The paper argues that thoughtful teachers can use online learning technology to enhance learning but only if teachers are focused on improving students' skillfulness in thinking reflectively and only if teachers recognize that technology is merely a tool which, like all tools, can be used well or poorly.