

## Chapter 6

# Students' Support in an ODeL Context: Students in ODeL

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Open distance and e-learning (ODeL) gives students who occupy multiple roles and are affected by the barriers of distance, cost, and time an opportunity to pursue their studies; these students are called distance students. For them to be successful as distance students, knowledge of technology is important as teaching and learning is conducted online and students are expected to interact actively online. There is no value if you have knowledge of technology as a distance student but do not interact online. The student must actively interact with peers, lecturers, study materials, and the university; failure to do so will affect learning and teaching negatively. Most students do not interact online. ODeL institutions prescribe technological tools for the students to interact online, but they lack academic, administrative, and technical support, which is a concern. ODeL institutions must commit themselves to always supporting distance students – academically, cognitively, administratively, institutionally, and affectively.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Nursing is one of the socio-humanitarian disciplines. The specifics of teaching and learning concerning nursing are therefore of critical importance. Furthermore, it is essential to reflect on the experience. Carol Rodgers (2002) points out the importance of reflection and then states that the pioneer of reflective thinking, John Dewey says that people do not learn from experience, but rather from reflecting on their experience.

The author has gained experience in an ODeL environment, being a lecturer at an ODeL institution. What has become clear to the author is the challenges that students encounter when learning in an ODeL context. These students are registered with the Department of Health Studies in the College of Human Sciences at an ODeL institution. This ODeL institution is one of the largest higher education universities in South Africa. The author assumes that academic and non-academic student support at ODeL higher education institutions can be improved by responding to the challenges referred to and by resolving them. This chapter put forward strategies to assist higher education institutions operating in virtual and ODeL environments, in improving student support and enhancing the success of online teaching and learning in an ODeL context. These strategies may also help guide technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges that are offering technical courses when they intend introducing ODeL to their students. The focus of technical courses are more on the cognitive and psychomotor/practical aspects of teaching and learning. These colleges fall under higher education institutions. The author endeavours to see the introduction of technical courses in an ODeL context. Simulation of practical aspects can be demonstrated by using technology.

## **BACKGROUND**

Recent years have seen a concerted effort by higher education institutions to offer courses and qualifications using distance education as well as an increasing emphasis on offering these courses for online distance learning using the internet. The use of online systems requires students to log on to a website on a regular basis and download relevant documents (study material). The reason for students opting for distant learning programmes are varied (Falloon 2011). Generally, the structure of open distance and e-learning (ODeL) provides students with great flexibility. It provides control over time, place and pace of education. However, changing to learning at a distance has brought with it particular challenges.

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