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Let's Get Practical

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There is one characteristic of distance education that is both a strength and a weakness—it is the practical nature of the field. Distance educators are "can-do" people, and are used to solving immediate problems, such as getting a class online for next semester, or setting up a virtual school. Distance educators are good at developing effective plans and are even better at creating instructional approaches.

Our strength, then, is the ability and willingness to implement change, to make

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things happen, and to get the job done. Ok, then what is our weakness? Often, the sound logic behind our decisions is lacking, or skimpy at best. Distance educators like to figure things out, but are not very good at documenting why activities are effective. Practitioners in the field do not use theory and research to support decisions, even though there is science to support the practice of distance education. Often, this science is not applied. Some even "pooh-pooh" those who advocate a scientific approach to decision-making in the field.

In fact, the literature of distance education is comprehensive. There are theories available to practitioners in distance education; Moore's transactional distance theory and Simonson's equivalency theory are two readily applied examples. And, there is a growing body of research that builds a foundation for best practices. Finally, there are true scientists who are studying models and techniques that provide "touchstones" for decision makers. The literature of the field is robust.

Now we have one of the most comprehensive guides to the science of the field of distance education; the third edition of Michael Moore's *Handbook of Distance Education* has been released and it is outstanding. The first two editions of this "must have" handbook were good, but the third
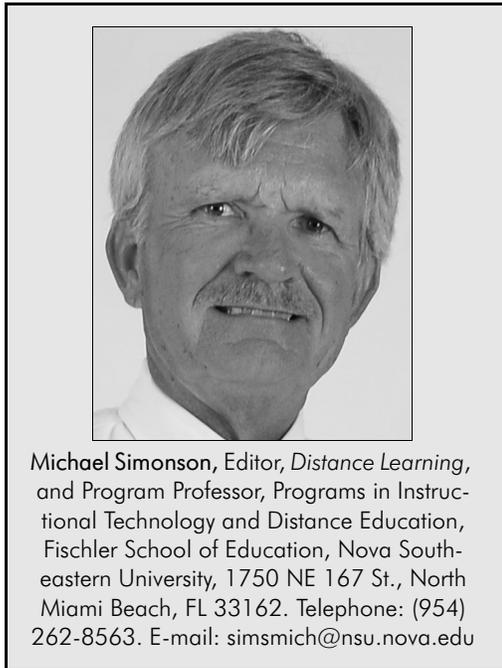
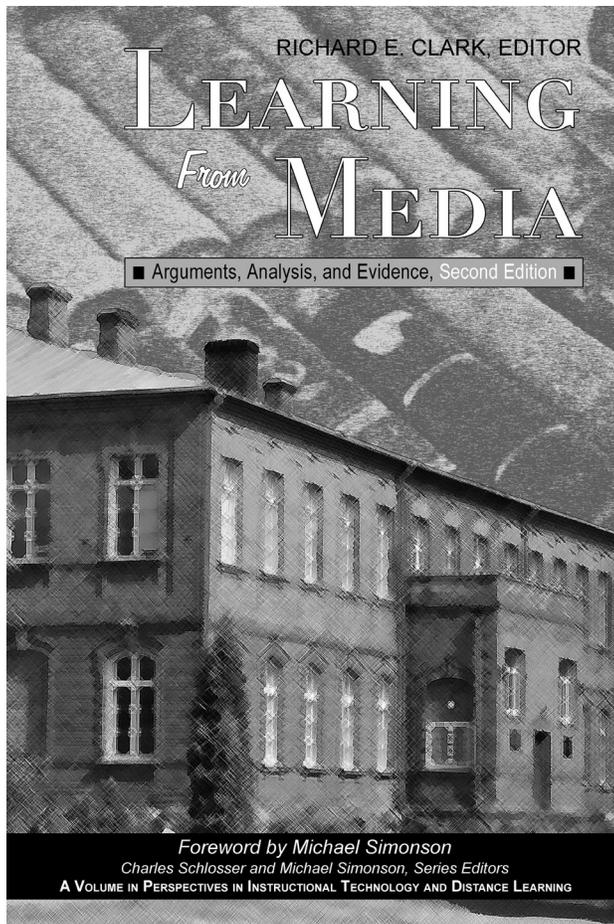edition shows the maturity of the field of distance education.

The third edition is a true handbook with guidance that can be directly applied to the practice of the field. What has improved are the underpinnings for the many recommendations and guidelines that are proposed in the 44 chapters of this 700+ page book. The science of distance education emerges from the pages of the new edition. It is now possible to find, in one place, best practices based not one someone's opinion, but on the rigorous study of the field, both in the laboratory and in the classroom. The *Handbook of Distance Education, 3rd edition* is must reading for any serious educator either involved in or considering the practice of distance learning, virtual schooling, online teaching, or e-learning.

And finally, as Hippocrates said almost 2,500 years ago, "There are in fact two things, science and opinion: the former begets knowledge, the latter ignorance."

REFERENCE

Moore, M. (Ed.). (2013). *Handbook of distance education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.