



Distance education and the right - or access - to education

REPORT

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THE BEGINNING :

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations, vide resolution 217 A (III), adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Based on this, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were designated as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction. This Declaration contains 30 Articles laying Principle issues for rights and freedom of human beings.

Taking a cue from the Declaration, the scientific council of the journal *Distances et savoirs* (www.cned/ds) and <http://ds.revuesonline.com>) undertook a project for 2008. *Distances et savoirs* (D&S) is a French journal on distance and e-learning, with an international

editorial board. It publishes four issues a year/volume. It is co-published by the French National Centre for Distance Education (Cned, www.cned.fr) and Hermès science publication/Lavoisier

(<http://www.hermes-science.com/fr/>).

Distances et savoirs is a peer-reviewed journal on distance education publishing articles from the French speaking world. It has been an observation that English speaking research and French speaking research (indeed, sometimes any other language but English) should not know more about each other. And, Thus, Ms Martine Vidal (Chargée de mission recherche, Rédactrice en chef *Distances et savoirs*, EDEN, executive committee, Cned - Direction générale) approached Asian Journal of Distance Education on 25 July 2006. She hoped that through exchanges between different cultures, but quite often similar concerns regarding distance education, can be a fruitful experience. This project for 2008 was perceived to be based upon collaboration between several peer-reviewed journals round the world.

This project was selected for 2008 because year 2008 is the 60th anniversary of the universal declaration

of human rights. It includes a “right to education” (article 26). All levels of education are concerned from primary to higher education and professional training. It was also thought of that we might also have a seminar or a workshop for the participating journals and authors, on the subject, in 2008. Not on the right to education itself of course, but on the research produced and published on the theme Distance and e-learning and the right to education.

THEME :

The general theme as envisaged to be taken under this project was:

Distance and e-learning and the right to education.

This rationale behind this theme was:

- It covered many aspects, social, pedagogical, legal, economic, political, technical ... and it certainly transcends languages and regions, and yet, has to be researched in very different cultural backgrounds.

- The 2008 anniversary is undoubtedly an interesting opportunity, but the reference to the Declaration of 1948 needs not be exclusive, and can also be linked to many other declarations bearing on the same subject, closer to the regions of some readers and researchers.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

The following six International Journals collaborated

Asian Journal of Distance Education :

<http://www.asianjde.org/>

Distances et savoirs, www.cned.fr/ds,

<http://ds.revuesonline.com>

EURODL : <http://www.euodl.org/>

Journal of Asynchronous Learning

Network : <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/>

IRRODL : <http://www.irrodl.org/>

Open Praxis :

<http://www.openpraxis.com/>

(*American Journal of Distance Education* was also invited to collaborate, but due to pre-occupations of Professor Michael Moore, they could not).

It was decided that the papers would be published (and presumably submitted) in either French, Spanish or English ; all “places”, online or paper, would have to publish texts in the three languages, from several geographical areas :

→ and not : the French speaking countries publishing French literature, English speaking countries publishing English literature, or Spanish speaking countries publishing Spanish literature.

This necessitated for some working principles for that multi lingual, multi sites publishing endeavour, like the following :

- Organise an international scientific committee (ISC), according to the response to the present proposition ;
 - o The ISC would decide on the different participants as regards existing journals or online sites ;
 - o Backed by administrative advice, the ISC would decide on the publishing conditions and copyright issues ;

- the ISC would finalise the theme upon which a relevant call for contributions would be based ;
- the ISC would decide on an international reading committee; coherent with the theme decided upon.
- Organise the call for papers, the reading and selection processes, according to criteria agreed upon, including interaction between the experts of the reading committee, the authors and the ISC.
- Organise the publication of all the selected and finalised papers in the various “places”, paper based or online.

To carry out the various activities smoothly a Scientific Committee was constituted having following Editors:

Terry Anderson, Barbara Spronk (IRRODL)

John Bourne, Janet Moore (JALN)
Svein Haaland, Ana Perona, Reidar Roll (Open Praxis)

Paul Kawachi, Sanjaya Mishra, Ramesh C Sharma (AsianJDE)

Alan Tait (EURODL)

Martine Vidal, Christian Depover, Monique Grandbastien, Pierre Moeglin, Jacques Wallet (D&S)

In order to provide a wider coverage to the theme, it was decided to concentrate on geographical areas for launching the call for contributions, not necessarily all of them in all the issues :

- an European area
- an African area

- a Northern American area
- a Southern American area
- an Asian area

CRUCIAL ISSUES

After deliberations (all done over the emails) some of the issues emerged:

1 - Publishing concerns

- what about the copyright issue ?
- what about the fact that some journals are Open Access ones, and not all of them ,
- would journals publish their “own” articles ,

2 – Linguistic issue

- should the articles be translated or not
- should they be grouped according to languages,
- or should there be various languages together, and to what proportion ?

3 – Contents issue, articles

- should they be comparative articles ?
- should they deliberately show cultural differences ?
- should they be on a regional basis ?
- what about the quality and the level of the articles ?

And what about the theme ?

Comments from the members of the Scientific Committee

The call for the Project 2008 received some interesting comments from the members of the Scientific Committee:

- « *All interesting indeed. Lots to think about -- the language problem is an interesting one* »

- « *We could amalgamate articles that have cultural implications into a single issue rather than spread them out.* »

- « *In terms of cultural aspects -- I would like to find out what is different in different cultures in online learning. How do Japanese online course differ from others, for example.(...) There are doubtless lots cultural differences based on the way education has been in a country (e.g. China....) »*
- “*J’étais à Adis Abeba il y a peu dans le 1er colloque "e-learning africa " et un "espace" de comparaison entre les expériences anglophones et francophones paraissait un véritable besoin. »*
- « *I think it is a great proposal. We need to develop a more global perspective on research in this area. »*
- “*In principle we support the project and would like to be involved. As you suggest there is too much “linguist regionalism” in DE research.”*
- “*I am thinking that the theme would transcend languages and regions and that differentiating on regions (as opposed to language) would add a great deal of complexity”*
- « *I definitely share your concern at the compartmentalization of research in linguistic boxes, where I think the English speakers are most disadvantages since in my experience a larger proportion of educated French, Spanish, Russians etc cope with the English literature, where-as the Anglophones rarely make the same effort ... but that may be an exaggeration? . »*

GOING AHEAD

We had in mind a model where the selected and finalised articles, in

various languages and from various backgrounds, would be published together on one dedicated website, under the seal of all participating journals, and in open access. Each of the participating journals could also publish some of the same articles, either in their original formats or translated in the most convenient language for their usual readership, according to their usual practice – open or subscription access - so as to integrate them in a current issue, or so as to compose thematic or sub-thematic issues. Of course with due references and reciprocal links to the whole “group” and specific call under which the articles would have been produced. This also meant that the copyrights would have had to be cleared for each and all journals.

By September 2006, AsianJDE and others were geared up and running to work towards the Call for Special Issue 2008 which was prepared both in French and in English. Martine, who initiated this Project 2008, coordinated all the activities like meeting other colleagues in October, at the EDEN conference in Barcelona in 2006.

Asian Journal of Distance Education suggested some theme for consideration by the Scientific Committee:

- * Differently abled and the right to education (RTE)
- * Role of library services at distance education institutions towards right to education
- * Distance Education Institutional policies towards right to education
- * Attitudes, beliefs etc of distance education functionaries towards right to education
- * Right to Information vs. Right to Education

- * Millennium Development Goals: What can be done and achieved for right to education
- * Digital communities and cultures: issues concerning Right to Education
- * How and whether religions promote right to education
- * Sustainable development vis-à-vis Right to Education
- * Best practices for RTE
- * Paradox of screening best learners and talking of RTE?

To the themes and ideas suggested by AsianJDE, John Bourne, who was attending a conference at that time in September 2006, indicated that he would try to obtain the feedback from the participants of the conference as well.

He further observed, *“Ramesh adds many things to the list which might all potentially fall under banner of "right to education"... I'm wondering how the phrase "right to education" will be understood in the US? – maybe some additional titles like Ramesh has will help tune the minds of people reading? Does differently abled mean "handicapped", "learning disadvantaged" or ?? I'm not sure I hear a lot a "right to education" for public institutions here - certainly private institutions are in the business of making money (or trying to break even)...”*

Another comment from Martine Vidal on the theme suggested by AsianJDE (* Differently abled and the right to education (RTE):) was

Just one comment showing the problems of languages : when I do

expertise for the European commission programmes, the official expression is people with "special needs". It means handicapped as well as women, displaced persons, etc. This is eurotalk, but it is world talk? It places people with very different needs side by side, and is not satisfactory (I can say this, s a woman!). Obviously I need to add some examples to make sure everyone understands.

By the end of September 2006, the theme of "distance education and the right to education" was finally Okayed. It was felt that although it is a very motivating one, but also a very difficult one, involving many aspects, with many ways of approaching it. Slowly the things were getting finalized so it was planned to Publish the and the description of the theme on Journals website, with the usual practical information as to how to submit the summaries call - by mid-october 2006. By having the same thing at around the same time, more or less, was beneficial in the sense that the idea of the 6 journals working together on that theme becomes concrete, and visible, and it to give it the strength the theme deserves. It was further decided by D&S that they will develop the website, with an independent web address, for publishing the articles resulting from all 6 journals activity. It was also examined of what funding from interested institutions D&S can find for such things as translating the articles (on the web site they should be in their original languages, but perhaps not in the journals themselves, and the added value of translation has a cost ...), and other possibilities such as a seminar, ... John Bourne offered to use the Elluminate site of the Sloan Consortium for discussions.

Terry Anderson, Editor, International Review of Research on Open and Distance Learning, invited Dr Barbara Spronk to be a Guest Editor for this issue and also suggested two small edits (while creating the IRRODL version) to the English version of sample Call for the Special Issue:

1. Articles will have to conform to usual scholarly requirements: research questions, methodology, references, contextualisation, results and implications. {He preferred word scholarly instead of scientific (some in the humanities get upset with the hegemony of “scientific” terminology). And also substituted “research questions” for hypothesis, as it makes the criteria open for qualitative research.

2. IRRODL is launching this call for papers in collaboration with five other scholarly journals with international influence and readership in Europe, North America, Asia , etc.

Distances et saviors had published the call on its website by the first week of October 2006
<http://www.cned.fr/ds/appel2008/index.htm>.

JALN put its call at http://www.sloan-c.org/test/call_for_papers.asp

AsianJDE published its call at the <http://www.asianjde.org/specialissue2008.htm>

Timeline for the Project2008

The following Schedule for the Project was finalised :

- October 2006 : call for papers
- January 31st, 2007 : deadline for submitting summaries of propositions for articles (500 to 1000 maximum words);

- April 1st, 2007 : Notification to authors of selected abstracts;
- December 1st, 2007 : deadline for submitting the first version of full text;
- January 1st, 2008 : Final versions of texts;
- Spring 2008 : All selected texts published on common website of participating journals.

Ana Perona, from Open Praxis, asked whether there was already some graphic design for the common website, whether we would use logos, etc.. It was clarified that the common website will not open before the end of 2006, and thus till then we all will use our own ways to disseminate the call. On the basis of Ana’s suggestion, Distances et Saviors considered adding the logos of each journal at <http://www.cned.fr/ds/appel2008/index.htm> and asked all the participating Journals to submit their logo.

During the course of this project, in November 2006, Martine Vidal, while participating in some conferences (like Unesco Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=26596&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), had the opportunity of meeting some of Editors or some authors of contributing journals like Alan Tait at the EDEN Research Workshop in Casteldefells (near Barcelona), John Bourne and Claudine Schweber at the Sloan-C conference in Orlando, to meet several potential authors (and just last week at the EADTU conference in Tallinn). She reported: Some themes begin to appear in the suggestions, in the propositions (at a very early stage) :

- case studies, where distance education is seen to spring up or considered as a solution in emergency situations (war, pandemics, etc.), or specific professional contexts (soldiers in foreign posts),
- research into laws passed, and their effect when linked to distance education (in France, the "Droit Individuel à la Formation"), into the cases of children of migrant populations, of people with special needs (handicapped, in hospital for a long term, etc.)
- methods, providing better access to education, such as blended learning,
- public-private cooperation for distance education

LEGAL ASPECTS

D&S's legal department prepared a draft for a convention between the 6 journals, mostly to protect the intellectual rights property of the authors, and to protect articles from being used unduly by other parties than the 6 journals. Also, some of us are "paying journals", others are not, and since the access to the website will be open and free, this has to be legally stated. A convention was prepared to be signed by all of us for the publication of the papers resulting from our common call for papers on the website www.distanceandaccesstoeducation.edu.

It is in English and in French too, since French is the language it was developed in. Professor Terry, Editor, IRRODL, had some major concerns regarding signing the proposed convention. IRRODL had changed its copyright policy and practice such that individual authors retain copyright ownership of their work and grant right of first publication to IRRODL and agree to license their work under a

Creative Commons license. His other concern was about republishing articles. AsianJDE suggested some measures to address these genuine concerns like asking each author for copyright transfer to re-publish in the joint website and in any other participating Journal. Another possibility could be to explore that IRRODL republish the Abstract only of all / any other Papers from the Joint website. The idea of publishing the abstracts of the other articles in the pool was well received.

Signing of the Contracts was over by November 2007.

NAMING THE COMMON WEBSITE

During May 2007 when a suitable name was being thought of, AsianJDE suggested www.righttoeducation.org. Although this suggestion was well received, D&S expressed its concerns that there are many sites on that question, and ours is on distance education and the right to education, therefore we are wondering whether "distance education" should be visible somehow. The web designer thought of "article26", because in the declaration of human rights it is the article that mentions right to education.

AsianJDE suggested more names like www.distanceeducationforall.org Which could be shortened like www.distance_education_for_all.org or www.d_e_for_all.org

The website was to be hosted by Cned, but wholly independent of access and look. It was preferred to buy a name, for a period of 3 years, and it has to be relevant and easy to remember. The following was kept in mind when trying to find a name for the website:

- it will host a series of research and practice references about distance education (ODL, e-learning, flexible learning, etc. at school, higher education, lifelong learning levels) and access to education, right to education.
- There will be mentions and links to several references concerning the declarations (universal of 1948, and others).
- the site is multi cultural

The website was thought to be rather simple :

- context of call for papers, and call itself of course
- links to all 6 journals, and to contacts at the journals
- all finalised articles - we will have to think of key words for their organisation
- links to references and resources (like the declaration of human rights and article 26, and all the relevant resources you can think of, regarding your journal, the theme, etc.)
- a page for news (announcing the Research Workshop for example) but the idea is not to maintain news on a very active basis (no time on my, or on Cned's side for this)
- perhaps some kind of forum or moderated possibility for visitors to comment (again, no time for moderation here, but perhaps, as the time for EDEN Research Workshop comes closer we can organise something more interactive in view of discussions in Paris).

As mentioned at the beginning, the articles were to be in their original languages, and it would be practical if they were all in the same format, using a very simple model, so that exchanging articles between journals is easy.

The website was designed in such a way (where all the articles will be published), so that these articles can be searched easily by visitors. The website was exclusively in English, although, as mentioned all along, articles can be in any language.

The search could be done by:

- journals;
 - languages : English, French, Spanish
 - keywords : restricted to titles, abstracts and articles' own keywords. : which means that all articles should have titles, abstracts and keywords in English as well as in native language.
- So as to keep the original journal's format, the best thing could be for each article to in a pdf downloadable format, provided by the journal itself.

On the homepage it was decided to publish the legal informations (in French : "informations légales"). We needed to make them as inclusive as possible, for all the journals, although we had different systems going on.

- All the authors and journals have agreed that the articles published on this website remain the property of the authors and journals.
- They are open to being downloaded for scientific research and personal uses.
- They cannot be published in any other journal than those mentioned here.

The possibility for all journals to present news (RSS, + other) was also explored.

By the end of July 2007, it was informed by D&S that they have secured domain names for the website where articles will be posted.

- www.distanceandaccesstoeducation.edu

(plus a number of other extensions :
.net.info)

- www.distanceandaccesstolearning.edu
(idem)

Both will lead to the same website.
There is also a French version,
distanceetdroitededucation.edu, which
will also point to the same site.

Blog

The Asian Journal of Distance
Education (during June 2007)
suggested to author and moderate a
blog for the express purpose of
posting up our Abstracts and provide
a forum for commentary to support
and promote the development of the
respective full papers. We invited the
Other Collaborating Journals to
comment or set up their own blogs in
similar fashion. We believed this open
access technique would have been a
stimulating scaffold for the Project.

Managing final texts received

When the final texts from all the six
contributing Journals were being
received at D&S, it was decided that:

- The texts should look like they
usually do individually for six
contributing journal, with an abstract
and keywords (each journal keeps its
visual identity).

- They should be in pdf format, but the
title, authors, abstract and keywords
should also be available separately in
word format : they will be searchable
on the website.

- On each full text, pdf format, should
be mentioned the name of the original
journal they belong to, with all the
legal details you feel necessary to
mention, so that can always be traced
to the proper journal.

- The journals must have cleared the
question of copyrights.

- Authors should also be made aware
that there will be the possibility for
visitors to the website to post a
comment, but that this comment will
not be visible from outside, and that it
will be forwarded to them.

Response to AsianJDE

Dr. Victor Wang was the first one to
respond to the call by our Journal (17
November 2006) followed by Dr.
Kiran L. Dangwal, Institute of
Advanced Studies in Education,
University of Lucknow, India. Ana
Perona informed that for Open Praxis
by the end of November 2006 they had
received three papers up to now, all of
them in Spanish from Latin America
and Spain. JALN got one abstract
submitted. In January 2007, AsianJDE
got three abstracts more: one from
Dominic Wong from Malaysia, second
from Prof. Monica Mittal, JIM
Lucknow, India. Third, Mark A. Tyler,
Catherine H. Arden, and P. A.
Danaher from the Faculty of
Education and Centre for Research in
Transformative Pedagogies,
University of Southern Queensland,
Australia also submitted their abstract
entitled, “Teacher Educators: Distance
Education and the Right to Education
in an Australian University” to
AsianJDE. By the end of March 2007,
AsianJDE received a proposal from
Dimitris Zondiros, “Online and
distance education as a product and a
producer of globalization - How does
it, and how might it, impact on
educational access, inequality and
exclusion?”

AsianJDE received 14 proposals all in
all. Nearly 10 of them were
straightaway “good” proposals, some
more showed very interesting
possibilities, and the authors were
asked to try and reorganise their
intended paper.

In the end the papers were more or less classified according to the categories below (Martine Plan).

Of course these are not definite; the full papers will tell more!

I	Law	Distance education: an approach founded upon rights
II	Institutional (and social)	From “right to education” to “right to success” Illiteracy, distance education and role of Local authority in digital access.
III	Specific social context	Distance education in prison Nomadic and non sedentary population, and school education Distance education and the immigration and linguistic context, a case study
IV	Higher education	Access to higher education via distance education : extending the right to education Distance education, law, and access to education in the digital age.
V	Training and quality	Quality of teachers and tutors, training via distance education
VI	Specific geopolitical contexts	Several case studies (some with North-South implications)
VII	New uses of ICT	Blog, Internet generation ...
VIII	Standards	Multilingual, multicultural access to education and standards in distance education

Concluding stage of the Project2008

By the end of January 2007 we were getting close to the end of the first stage in our project. As usual the propositions or requests for more time were arriving. It had been thought we would get around 10 relevant ones each, which would mean about 60 papers from all parts of the world - which would not be bad considering the difficulty of the subject.

Parallely, members at D&S were planning a seminar with Unesco in Paris, jointly with the Research Workshop of EDEN, probably in October 2008. Therefore it is thought

that the papers resulting from the first call should be ready and published as full papers before the seminar, and could be used as references for discussions during the Workshop. In addition, the papers resulting from both the call of the 6 journals and from the Workshop/seminar could, in the end, be part of the same set of references on the question of distance education and the right - or access - to education.

Finally, in the February 2008, all the articles are available on the common space
<http://www.distanceandaccesstoeducation.org/index.aspx>

Readers of the Papers are encouraged to send in their comments for further discussion.

Happy Reading!!

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