



Editorial

The Right to Education

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The Asian Journal of Distance Education published a Call for Papers in early 2007 for a Special Issue to commemorate this year as the 60th Anniversary of the Right to Education, framed in Article 26, of United Nations resolution 217A(iii) called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR. Article 26 is ;

- Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

This Special Issue is published in collaboration with five other leading international journals, and coordinated by

Martine Vidal, Vice-President of the European Distance and e-Learning Network EDEN <http://www.eden-online.org>.

The six participating Journals are ; -

- Asian Journal of Distance Education <http://www.AsianJDE.org>
- Distance et savoirs <http://ds.revuesonline.com>
- European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning <http://www.eurodl.org>.
- International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning <http://www.irrodl.org>
- Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln>
- Open Praxis <http://openpraxis.com>

The planned Second Stage of this global project is to convene an EDEN Research Workshop on or about the 20-22 October 2008. Meanwhile, the six participating Journals have contributed their Papers to an online website set up expressly for the purpose of commemorating this 60th Anniversary of the UDHR.

The shared website is set up through Martine Vidal and entitled 'Distances & access to education'. It is at <http://www.distanceandaccesstoeducation.org/index.aspx> , and there is a mirror URL to the same site at <http://www.distanceetdroitededucation.org/> . The Papers are uploaded there, and the site

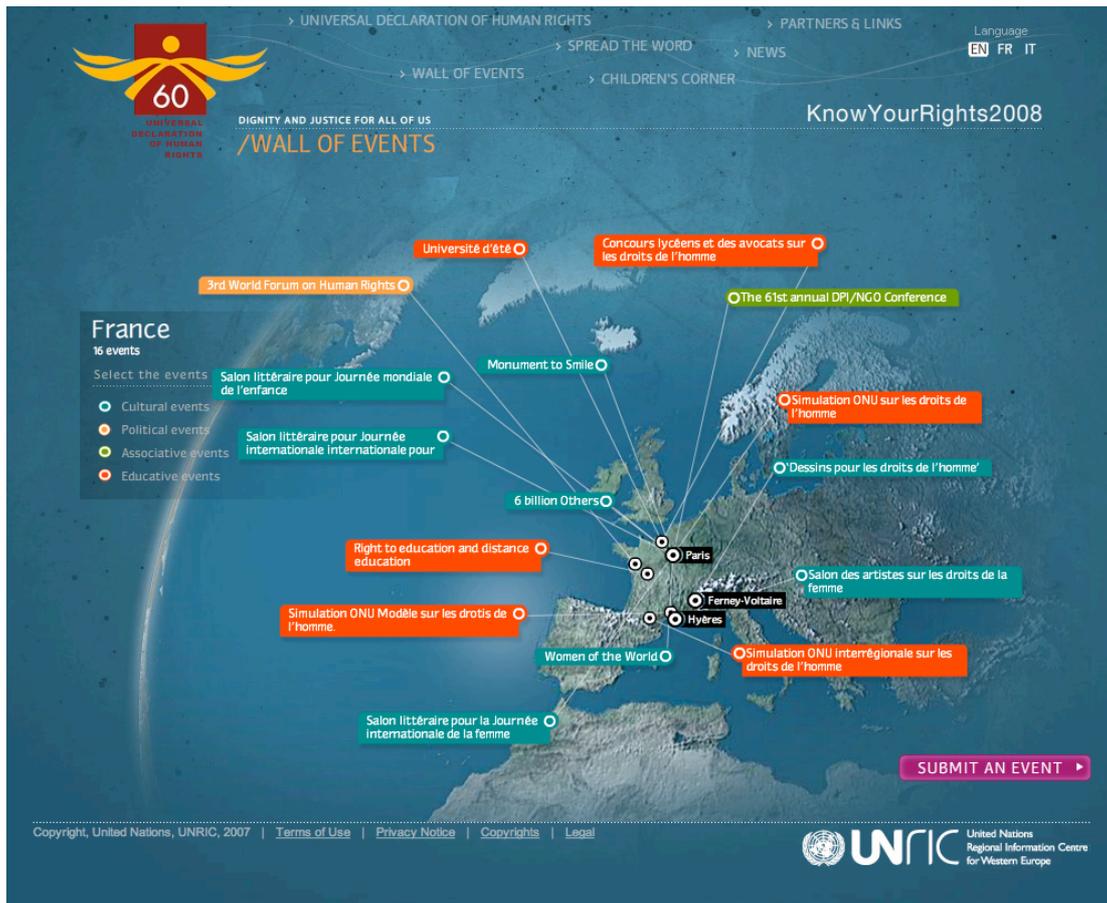


FIGURE 1 : Screen-image of the the United Nations RIC Homepage

has been active since the beginning of February 2008. The Project was selected and approved by UNESCO Paris for inclusion in its recognized events to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the UDHR, (FIGURE 1), in the centre of the screen taken from the homepage <http://www.knowyourrights2008.org/index.php?nav=campaign&key=2007102412162404> of the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe.

The Asian Journal of Distance Education received much interest for this Special issue, and seven or eight Papers may be suitable – six are published here in this Issue 6(1) and two or three may be in the next Issue 6(2). The six accepted are of exceptional quality. We have a policy of relevance to Asia, and two of these six are from outside Asia but of considerable interest to us. One covers many regions in southern Africa (or Sub-Saharan Africa),

and the other covers the arab countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. These are relevant for many reasons, and are briefly described here.

In our first paper, Dominic Wong describes the current situation of open and distance learning and of working adult students in Malaysia. Dominic reviews their status and focuses on their actual situation, to examine how well their socioeconomic status has been changed by their studying experience. Dominic’s paper is enriched by the fact he uses individual case studies to make his points. Large cohort-based studies may be useful for policy makers, but case studies are best to engage the reader in a conversational style. The current paradigm for learning and framing what we mean by knowledge is the social constructionist view (not the social constructivist) in which meaning attaches to the interactions, rather than residing in books or in people. In this

view, knowledge derives from the conversation and transactions in context. So Dominic's approach using case studies is ideally suited to our learning vicariously by listening to his dialogues with different students. His conclusions are put in real terms of improved salaries, job placements, increased responsibilities, increased confidence and increased professional skills.

In the next paper, Paul Kawachi looks at distance courses in Asia to find that key core components of acquiring critical thinking skills may need more time and attention. Social capital can consist of many short-ranged strong connections among a small group, or a far-reaching looser network. The far-reaching connections are better for vertical mobility and critical thinking skills. These days many employers and even the students themselves tend to want more job-related skills and dialogue, at the expense of structure and theoretical problem-solving skills. Paul uses the four-stage Transactional Distance Model in order to explain that the added structure of the core stages of learning are essential for better quality assurance and for building better far-reaching social capital. All this is presented within the framework of the Right to Education. In order not to under-serve our students, ODL in Asia should not compromise on the often-difficult but important critical thinking skills stages that are needed for worker mobility and social development.

The next paper presents how distance education in China has achieved more equal opportunities, by Xiaoying Feng, Weiyuan Zhang & Li Chen, through linking together urban schools with rural schools. In many Asian countries, opportunities tend to accumulate in the central city, and it is refreshing to read how these resources can effectively be used to help school students far away from the centre. They report not only overcoming the technological barriers which in such a wide country are not inconsiderable, but also the human resources issue that involves a lack in the number of qualified teachers in rural areas. They succeeded through designing and then implementing scaffolding strategies for the

students and teachers to use. This is an important paper since scaffolds are generally defined and interpreted as fading scaffolds, i.e. they are gradually removed from the learning forum. Here we can see that continuous scaffolds are effective for increasing access to education, and their study also offers the clear potential for scalability, and transmissibility to other regions, within China or to other parts of Asia or the world.

Sriram Arulchelvan & D. Viswanathan report in their paper how radio and television in India are still the most important media for extending the right to education to everyone. Television was several years ago thought to have brought false promises as a medium to revolutionize education access, but here we can see clear evidence of the benefits, also from radio, for reaching poor and remote students. Their paper covers all three media of radio, television and the internet, and they show how courses developed using all three are now exported to other countries. Their paper is important for its baseline reviews of the efficacies of each media, which should help other researchers as well as policy makers. Even elite universities in the world's developed countries might consider for example the Indian model of campus-based radio, campus-based or inter-campus television to increase opportunities for interactions in education.

Then Dele Braimoh & Jonathon Osiki give us a deep insight into how worker migration and mobility can be enhanced by distance education. Such mobility greatly increases the social capital in the community, and can be used as a measure of how a university contributes to society and the world.

Our sixth paper is by Jack Fei Yang and discusses the latest findings on learning styles. We all know how important these are, and how important it is for teachers to teach according to student preferences. Several papers in other journals have recently revisited this issue, and Jacky's paper should be of interest to everyone. This study presents a new perspective through correlating the learning styles with the students' perceived quality of learning.

Enhancing student satisfaction is important to prevent dropout and to promote lifelong learning, throughout society. He reports on the different learning styles and perceptions of the women in graduate master's courses, and the point here is that access could potentially be increased if teaching were more suited to their different styles.

In the final paper in this issue, Siran Mukerji & Nader Jammel present the progress made in building universities - some with international collaboration - in the Arabian Gulf region. They provide a clear analysis to extend the Right to Education with data showing more women are entering university. Among the challenges they highlight are building human capital, and quality assurance including relevance to the work-place.

We are planning the 7th Meeting of the Asian Society of Distance Education (ASODE) in T'ainan City, at Hsing Kuo University, for mid-June, and the 8th Meeting in Tianjin for mid-October. ASODE Members and others interested are asked to keep in contact with us for the exact venue and time. In each case, the meeting will likely be on one afternoon or evening when participants are not so busy with other meetings. Last year, the Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities was held in Kuala Lumpur, at the Open University of Malaysia <http://aaou.oum.edu.my/aaou>, and at that time we delayed the second issue to include a Conference Report for readers.

This year the conference will be hosted by Tianjin RTVU in Tianjin, on the coast near Beijing, on the 14-16 October 2008 <http://aaou.tjrtvu.edu.cn>, and so we propose

that v6.2 be published just after this. You can best contact with them through email aaou2008@tjrtvu.edu.cn. We are pleased to include useful information to our readers about this Conference here. The theme for this year's conference is 'New Development, New Trends and New Missions of Open and Distance Education in Asia and the World.' Keynote speakers (in alphabetic order) are expected to include Sir John Daniel (COL), Pannekoek Frits (ICDE), Daokai Ge (CCRTVU), Hiromitsu Ishi (OUJ), Peter Jarvis (Int J Lifelong Education), Atwi Suparman (AAOU), and Fun-Den Wang (CORE). Registration opens on Tuesday, and keynote speeches will take place on Wednesday. Thursday morning is expected to be very busy with the parallel sessions. On Friday, there are some optional cultural trips. Details are on their website <http://aaou.tjrtvu.edu.cn/en/zym.html>.

The second issue 6(2) this year will contain further Papers we have received for the Special Issue on the Right to Education. Such is the geographic situation of Asia that several Papers were delayed – for instance from remote regions of South Asia. These delays due to massive flooding, other disasters and even the breakages in undersea cables perhaps affect this Asian Journal more so than other journals, although we are pleased to be busy trying to reach the unreached and unreachable. Please feel free to contact us if you need further information, or help with English writing. We remain keenly observant that many researchers across Asia may wish to get assistance in the appropriate use of English language and may want to receive freely expert help.

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