



## Editorial

### Celebrating Open and Distance Education in Asia

Paul KAWACHI, Ramesh C SHARMA, & Sanjaya MISHRA  
[Editor@AsianJDE.org](mailto:Editor@AsianJDE.org)

This year we are celebrating several important events. Beyond these though, we are celebrating also remarkable advances throughout Asia in open and distance education. These advances are crystallized in leading journals and books ; including a special issue of the International Journal of Lifelong Education on the *Theories, Policy and Practice of Lifelong Education in East Asia* by guest editor Weiyuan Zhang republished as a book by Routledge, and a book *Distance and Blended Learning in Asia* by Colin Latchem and Insung Jung published by Routledge. These clearly demonstrate the coming of age of ODE in Asia. In IJLE, there were papers from leading authors in East Asia analyzing the conditions in China – mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, in Japan, and in South Korea. These give a close look into the different conditions in each region. In one paper, the super-aged society was described in a town with one-quarter of the 50,000 persons over the age of 65 years. How well they are providing services for lifelong learning to the aged is not fully clear yet : they describe for example 500 lectures given over the past 15 years attended by an average of only 500 persons – clearly only a fraction of the 12,500 super-aged. The details given by the authors throughout this issue are remarkably impressive. Similarly too the book by Colin Latchem and Insung Jung provide unprecedented details on ODE across Asia.

This book covers e-learning readiness, open schools, higher learning, and learning for the old-aged. Perhaps the only criticism here is that they do not include any words on early childhood education. This is an important omission, since a solid early childhood education is recognized as the basis on which lifelong learning is built, according to Kawachi (2008a), Leong (2010) and Tuijnman (2002).

The events we are celebrating personally are the seventh anniversary of publication of the Asian Journal of Distance Education, and the recovery of the Journal following the chaos caused by the financial crisis in the United States.

Throughout the past seven years we have striven to provide editorial and publishing services to scholars from all regions of Asia, and being aware that many authors are not rich, we have kept this Journal free of charge. This has had two impacts – one, that up-and-coming authors have had access to publishing regardless of their personal income equally with authors from the most developed regions in Asia and the rest of the world, and two that scholars and researchers can access this Journal free of charge. Other journals in the West cost more than \$50 per issue for only three or four articles. In contrast, we have maintained seven or more high quality Articles in each issue all at zero cost to the authors, libraries and researchers. We are all now working hard to produce the hard-copy



## IGNOU 2009 Silver Medal Award

print editions too at zero cost, but this has been difficult. That the Journal continues to attract high quality Papers is clearly evident and demonstrated by the award by Indira Gandhi National Open University of the Silver Medal to Raja Rao for his Paper on *The Social Basis of Distance Education : Strategies for Inclusive Growth*, (see above photographs). We congratulate Raja Rao, and join him in thanking IGNOU for this award.

Most of 2009 was marred by the financial crisis that caused our regular server to be bought up by an unscrupulous dealer. We lost control of all uploading services and our password too, but struggled on to escape and restore ourselves on a new server. We must thank all our authors who have been so patient with this crisis. We lost all our email as well as domain control. While we are physically exhausted, now we are busy re-building. We had two issues planned for the year. In the turmoil, we could only manage one towards the end of the year having eventually freed ourselves.

This means that many authors and their excellent papers have been unavoidably carried over into 2010. We apologize to them, and thank all our authors and readers for their continued patronage.

In the current issue, we have seven full papers as usual. We have a key paper by Nabi Bux Jumani and Shahinshah Babar Khan, from Pakistan. They report that we need to use all available avenues to listen to the distance students – in seminars and workshops as well as in tutorials. We then have a paper by Patheni Sivaswaroop and P.N.S. Madhuri in India on HIV / AIDS. They exhort everyone to increase awareness to prevent infection, and report a low awareness level in distance learners. While conventional universities can use posters and face-to-face guidance, we need to find more effective ways to raise awareness in distance students. Next is a paper by Xiaoxia Cui on the characteristics of students in an online course in China describing how these characteristics were changed by the course. She reports that the

interactive online classes can benefit especially language learners. This was especially the case for the beginning younger students at university in China who were studying English online. Following this is a paper from Iran by Parviz Ajideh and Esmail Valizadeh-Haghi. Unfortunately we could not attend the annual conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities this year in Tehran hosted by Payame Noor University. This was most regrettable given the size and importance of Iran. Then we have an interesting paper by Thi Hong Gam Luong and Pam Wright from Australia but on Vietnamese students. We are made more aware that sociocultural differences among our student affect how they learn – and this whether face-to-face or at a distance. They found that the lower level of self-confidence often stereotyping Asian students can be overcome through use of virtual learning environments, supporting the educative development of such platforms such as Second Life. The next paper is by Kalpana Gupte on learner support, which reminds us that this aspect remains so important not only to reduce attrition and dropout rates but also to enhance the learning experience of those that persist. They also recommend that we should use all available avenues to give support and gain feedback from the students at a distance including tutorial/ assignments, audiovisual conferencing, as well as interactive radio. Radio is generally ignored these days in the most developed regions : we could investigate further the use of interactive radio. We should consider that interactive radio as well as campus television should be developed for two purposes – one that these develop the critical thinking skills with collaboration among the active participants, and two that these develop ownership of the learning. Both these factors are greatly needed (Kawachi, 2008b). Finally in this issue, we have a paper by Serazul Islam and Najnin Jahan on tutors and students in Bangladesh. They bring up the issue of tutor salaries. There are some current feelings that salaries, which had previously been recognized as an extrinsic motivation, are actually intrinsic for teachers and act as a

satisfier – in other words higher salaries increase their self-esteem and peer standing and act as a significant intrinsic motivation. We need to re-visit motivations to learn and to teach as soon as possible. Overall, we continue to attract and are able to publish high quality papers from across Asia : in this issue alone covering students in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, China, Iran and Vietnam. They continue to make an impressive contribution to the world literature on open and distance education.

Also this year marks the seventh anniversary of the French journal *Distances et savoirs* <http://ds.revuesonline.com/> . We join them in having a seventh anniversary, and send our congratulations to them. Martine Vidal of that Journal invited us to join them on stage at CNED, in Poitiers, France, on 11<sup>th</sup> December, to discuss academic journals and publishing. We arranged for superb teleconferencing and could participate fully, thanks to the skills and good efforts of their technicians in Poitiers. The Asian Journal of Distance Education was outstanding as one that has always offered free access, and this point was discussed quite heatedly between the editors of other journals and the audience there. We expressly made clear our commitment to this issue of cost, through our powerpoint text to the teleconference ;

“We propose the way forward for all academic journals is to form consortia with ten or twenty universities each so that readers and writers can have free access and so that lifelong learning can be nurtured through such free access. We especially want free access for the poor - in Asia : researchers and students cannot afford US\$ 50 / one issue containing 3 or 4 articles. Libraries throughout Asia also cannot afford such high costs.”

We also celebrate and welcome Nabi Bux Jumani as Assistant Editor of the Journal. We know that there are many scholars and researchers in Pakistan, and trust that we can reach more as authors and readers in the coming years.

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Paul KAWACHI, EdD, MA ODE  
[Kawachi@AsianJDE.org](mailto:Kawachi@AsianJDE.org)

Ramesh C SHARMA, PhD  
[Sharma@AsianJDE.org](mailto:Sharma@AsianJDE.org)

Sanjaya MISHRA, PhD  
[SMishra@AsianJDE.org](mailto:SMishra@AsianJDE.org)