



Editorial

Formulating a Theory for Modern Distance Education

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This second issue of the year comes as usual just after the Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities that was hosted this year by President Pham Minh Viet, and Hanoi Open University <http://aaou2010.hou.edu.vn/>. We continue to work hard to support this association. Also at this time, on the sidelines of the Conference, we hold our Board Meeting of the Asian Society of Open and Distance Education – held on Monday 25th October. We received various items for the agenda by email, and if anyone has any additional items please forward them to us for consideration.

At this Meeting, we were very pleased to announce the appointment of Steve Foerster to the Editorial Advisory Board position of English Language Adviser. We have been offering free English language support to our Authors and - as might be expected in such a region as Asia of wide diversity – we have been very busy in this respect. This has been doubly time consuming because many files have been lost from our old server, and we are re-setting a lot of past Papers. We welcome Steve to the Board, and would ask prospective Authors to work with him for preparing their manuscripts for publication.

We were also very pleased to appoint Carmencita Castolo to Fellow of the Society. We know that Chie continues her kind support of the Journal over the years since our founding. She is currently Director

of the School of Distance Education, at the Open University of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

We covered many other points in the Meeting. We were brought up-to-date on the progress of re-building our website, and on our accreditation and citation index status. We thank our three Assistant Editors Jack Fei Yang, Irshad Hussain and Nabi Bux Jumani for their great efforts in the past year. They have contributed greatly, and we are fortunate to have them on board.

In this Issue, we have powerful Articles that suggest new theoretical understanding of open distance education. The first Paper in this issue reports the history of Siemen's (2005) connectivism as a theory of education using web-based networking among students, by SHRIRAM & WARNER. It is well known that theories are not replaced simply by the formulation of new concepts. We still see behaviorism, cognitivism, and Piaget's and Vygotsky's constructivism inside our ODE. Now we are also seeing Glasersfeld's radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1995), and in the past ten years Papert's constructionism (Harel & Papert, 1991 ; Kawachi, 2009) and Gergen's social constructionism (2001). Other theories are also being developed : a grounded theory study has found in China that there are two categories of characteristic practices that are being identified with two new theories - one named empathy (covering the collaborative

interactivities) and the other named as responsiveness (to take account of the sharing and cooperative interactions). Thus our practices of modern distance education are being explained by five new theories beyond constructivism :- constructionism, social constructionism, connectivism, empathy, and responsiveness.

In the next Paper FARAJOLLAHI et al give an interesting account of a host of interactivities involved in modern distance education. They present evidence in practice of the effectiveness of eight specified interactivities, bringing the total number now to ten distinct interactions. While this does not make the original identification of Student-Teacher, Student-Content, and Student-Student interactivity out-of-date, it does mean that we have advanced a long way now from those early suggestions.

Then Kumiko AOKI outlines some of the structural and infrastructural challenges facing ODE in Japan which likely apply to many countries and regions across Asia. Many conventional universities engage students at a distance. AOKI describes the characteristics of the e-learning utilized by 41 responding universities across Japan. Most of them are developing technically after having added student services through web-based technologies. We know that there are natural iterations of value-added services followed by technical rationality. These were indeed first predicted by Otto Peters in 1983 and later identified by Paul Kawachi (2002). We have seen in the last few years great efforts to improve and develop student support services in Japan at the Open University of Japan, and naturally there needs now some technical re-organisation sooner or later to accommodate the recent new value-added services more efficiently. Details can be found in a forthcoming book (Kawachi, 2011). These cycles were first predicted by Otto Peters (1983 p110) about thirty years ago just after the initial establishment of the leading institution – the UK Open University, and the IGNOU in India. At that time Peters predicted that, after the initial zweckrationalität of the mass production of distance education materials and delivery as

seen in the early years of both the UKOU and IGNOU, there would be a movement to wertrationalität, seen in the early-1990s, of value-added services such as tutor support, media choice and learner-to-learner interactivities.

In the next Paper by Parveen MUNSHI & Tarique BHATTI, the authors compared conventional with distance mode in a very accurate study and discovered exactly which aspects showed significant difference and why. We are seeing more and more these days that the no-significant-difference arguments are not to be over-generalised. The ability to produce teachers through distance education was found to be lacking in three key areas :- subject knowledge and subject application, teaching strategies and techniques, and classroom management. These are serious deficiencies that need to be further studied.

Following on from our previous issue which looked briefly at non-academic counselling, here Avani TRIVEDI & Kalpana GUPTE give us a clear and comprehensive inventory of counselling in ODE. The role of the academic tutor may be viewed narrowly as classroom based (even though a virtual classroom), yet we must never forget that many of our ODE students - especially as we reach more marginalized sectors of the population - are in need of non-academic counselling. It falls to the tutor on the frontlines of institutional contact with each student to recognize and refer students in need to appropriate resources.

Then we have Cindy HIEW, Fauziah Haji Abdul AZIZ, & Rozhan Mohammed IDRUS show us how they used science experiments in distance education to rural secondary schools. Through stimulating science courseware, they succeeded in promoting interest in science careers and potentially lifelong learning. That this was achieved in the pure sciences - as opposed to an easier subject - is remarkable.

Our final Paper is by Pallop PIRIYASURAWONG, & Prachyanun NILSOOK. Even urban teachers in the most advanced technological regions are in need of personal knowledge management. Here they show us how knowledge management

awareness and skills can be distributed through a web-based course. This kind of course should we hope become an OpenCourseWare or open access course as soon as possible, with of course sufficiently clear tagging so that it can be found by all of us who need more help with our daily technological overload.

As is becoming more regular in the past few years, we include too a Special Report on the AAOU Conference. The Asian Association of Open Universities remains the umbrella organization for much of ODE in Asia. The AAOU has improved its value-added quality - much as described in the earlier Paper by Kumiko AOKI - and now needs to rationalize its infrastructure. The new President of the AAOU, Tat Meng WONG, has indicated that now is a good time to revise the Constitution of the AAOU, in other words to engage in some technical rationalization.

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