



Editorial

New Trends in Applying Distance Education

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We are interested in this issue to present some recent trends in how distance education is being applied to quite novel situations. When we first set out with Journal more than seven years ago, distance education was used to deliver text-based courses with some web-based discussion or chat rooms. Email and the internet facilitated interaction but really only for text-based exchanges. Some file sharing was possible and people could post attachments to each other. Distance education has moved on remarkably from such text-based interactivity. In this issue we see virtual reality used for online shopping, the web used for speaking practice and improvement, as well as ubiquitous distance education using mobile telephones. Papers on using mobile telephones have been published in the past few years. But those have been reports from usually small-scale individual studies, and have generally been pilot or research studies. In this issue we see mobile telephones come into the mainstream as a standard communication media for distance education. Distance education is also making advances into fields such as law which have traditionally been fairly closed to outsiders.

Researchers and practitioners in distance education these days need not only to read on what has been done and achieved by others, but need to read papers in order to forecast future developments. Readers need

to gather papers from various sources in order to formulate their own vision of the future, so as to be informed about those trends developing and happening now that are most likely to influence and impact on distance education in the future.

In this respect, we are very pleased to note a new international journal just starting up to report on new trends in distance education. The International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications ISSN 1309-6249 started in a few months ago at <http://www.ijonte.org>, with Zeki Kaya and Ugur Demiray as joint Editors. Readers are encouraged to follow Papers there to keep abreast of global trends in all modes of education. Nowadays we are seeing more experts in distance education. At first ODE tutors were borrowed or transferred from conventional education and new little about the mechanics of distance education. Now ten years on, experts have grown up solely inside distance education. We need to keep an eye therefore on trends in conventional education to see and follow how they are developing. The journal IJONTE provides a balanced view on trends and developments in distance education, blended, and conventional education, and is to be welcomed.

This journal follows the same open access model of this Asian Journal of Distance Education. This open access model is free to all users, and so provides access and equity to both the rich and poor.

Why are some journals priced at more than one thousand US dollars for three issues per year? We firmly believe in free access and universal equity. And we therefore support this new journal.

When we first introduced the Asian Journal of Distance Education, we received some criticism asking why we needed to destroy trees and produce print-based issues in this internet age, and all that at a financial cost to readers. We reflected a lot on this and re-started over as a web-based journal with an option to produce print if there was a market. However, we note that how people learn has changed since the internet has arrived. Prior to the 1990's, the leading theories for how people learn were the theories of cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Each of these is dualist in nature – that knowledge is conceived to be either in the world (and books) or is constructed in the mind. With web-based distributed learning, we see a unitary theory developed known as constructionism. In constructionism, print is irrelevant and learning is wholly and only constructed within the mind. This theory is useful to understand the effectiveness or not of producing books and print-based materials. We will look in more detail at this theory and other supporting theories in the following issue later this year.

Meanwhile we would like to call for Papers on a special theme to be published in 2011 or 2012. This theme will relate to open and distance secondary-school education. The third millennium goal to provide universal primary education looks increasingly likely to be achieved by 2015 on time in most of the world. This is a considerable and commendable achievement. Not to detract from this success, we do note however that these tsunami waves of primary school children globally are getting older year by year, and very soon are going to need and want secondary schools. Who will build the thousands of schools needed and who will teach them? In this respect, open and distance higher education must prepare now to help these children. At first glance, it looks like ODE experts in higher education will be called upon to train vast numbers of

secondary-school teachers in various new methodologies for open and distance education. These teachers may be new to teaching or they may be coming from conventional education. Either way, there will need to be global new efforts to provide teacher training at a distance. We should like to invite Papers that address these concerns, particularly those with a focus on Asia and the developing world.

Having covered these points, let's briefly look at the Papers in this issue. We open with a Paper on learning French in Thailand. This is noteworthy because English-language teaching has generally been the language associated with different teaching and learning methods, and with distance education until now. French on the other hand is taught usually through an immersion method, as if one were in France. In this Paper, Soudaya Orprayoon presents preliminary pilot results from new online materials for teaching French. In the following Paper, Maria Cusipag and Yen-Yen Chen report from Taiwan on the use of mobile telephones in a course on English. They recorded and performed discourse analysis to discover the communication strategies used. This is interesting because when using email which is asynchronous there is a high risk to miscommunication and 'flaming'. In synchronous media, there is also high risk and different risks to miscommunication. They compared first-year students with final fourth-year students to discover more mature and more efficient purposeful strategies used by the senior students. These findings suggest that there are some student-student skills to be learnt (and therefore taught) for using mobile telephones in distance education. The next Paper comes not from Asia, but Arabia but since it deals with vocabulary learning, it should be of general interest to us all in Asia. The author Abeer reminds us that we cannot rely only on the technology, and that teacher and administration support are essential for achieving successful learning using technologies. Veena Rao in the next Paper illustrates how distance education can be used directly to increase capacity building in the important garment industry of India. The Paper focuses on one course in

fashion design, and gives an overview of other courses for continuing education in this industry sector. The next Paper is by Ying-Hsiu Chen & Wen-Cheng Wang, and is also from Taiwan and extends our concept of text-based distance education to virtual reality. While we have heard about virtual worlds and some education being provided, there are few reports of using this media for direct education. Then there is a paper on providing law courses at a distance in Bangladesh that helps to narrow the gender differences there. Then we have an interesting case study by Ram Chandra, V.P. Rupam, & Pooja Thakur on how some courses are being evaluated for quality assurance at IGNOU. They highlight the need for tutors to be more aware of issues affecting the integrity of grading. Lastly in this issue we have a paper from Africa by Olugbenga David Ojo. This is on non-academic counseling to students. So many Papers deal with courses and the academic learning part, that we tutors sometimes need

reminding of the non-academic aspect that tutors also face in their contact with students, and need to develop observation skills to identify cases of need and how or when to refer these to specialized counselling support services.

Overall we have eight full Papers in this Issue. We are increasingly busy, not only in uploading past files and materials after our old US-based server almost destroyed our website, but also in managing incoming Papers and the review processes. We are encouraged by the strong support we are receiving this year. And especially in the support we are receiving from outside Asia. We hope that more researchers start to look seriously at open and distance education practiced in Asia. The ODE here has quite different characteristics from the Anglo-American way, and we think everyone can learn a lot through reading of practices from far away, and reflecting perhaps on which aspects might be adapted and transmissible to new contexts.

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