



INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR OPEN AND
DISTANCE EDUCATION

THROUGH THE MIRROR OF ICDE: From Correspondence to Distance to Online

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Introduction

Correspondence Education, External Studies, Distance Education and Open and Distance Learning are just some of the names which have been applied to non-traditional forms of teaching and learning in which the students and tutors have little or no face-to-face contact, a separation in space and often also in time. This is not an attempt to catalogue developments over the years or even to try to trace patterns in what has become a stream of revolutionary innovation. It is merely eclectic vignettes from the organization's first 50 years chosen by an individual who, for the past 36 years, has had a close association with ICCE/ICDE in a variety of capacities.

The Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter saw innovation as a fundamental driving force in industry structure. He saw a "perennial gale of creative destruction" through which dominant industry structures contained the seeds of their own destruction by providing incentives for changes and new approaches. He was, of course, commenting on competition in industry. But his theory has relevance to the development of non-traditional education over the last century in which an industrial approach to learning and teaching, reliant on and building from an ever increasing range of communication options, has destroyed the monopoly position of traditional face-to-face education. The world of education into which I stepped as a primary school student in the second half of the 1940s in the UK and which still adhered to some educational practices which had existed in Europe for some 2,500 years, has gone through and continues to go through a revolution such that education above secondary level now offers as a norm a range of options which were unimaginable at the time when I completed my formal tertiary education in the mid-1960s.

The early years

The International Council for Correspondence Education - ICCE as it then was - arose from a meeting of a group of individuals who attended a national conference, on what was then referred to as supervised correspondence study, in New York in August 1936. At that meeting a certain Mr J.W. Gibson, the Director of High School Correspondence Instruction in Victoria, British Columbia, raised the question of an international conference on correspondence education. Two years later those preliminary considerations were to reach their goal in the 1st ICCE Conference which took place in Victoria, British Columbia, in August 1938.

Historical roots

The notion of distance education in some shape or form has a long history. It is reported that when Dionysius the Tyrant of Syracuse asked the philosopher Plato to describe for him the constitution of Athens, Plato sent him the works of Aristophanes, the greatest comic dramatist of his day. The story may or may not be apocryphal. But it offers us an example of how some 2,500 years ago it was deemed possible to learn about and understand the Athenians by reading a series of plays by someone who took, as his subject matter, life in ancient Athens and through his wit, parody and satire recreated it on a stage.

The concept of “learning at a distance” from texts was not alien in those times and half a millennium later played a significant part in the early history of Christianity through the Apostle, Paul, whose epistles (letters containing instruction, interpretation and guidance) to the growing diaspora of Christians, are central to the morality, worship and culture of the varied traditions of Christianity today. The notion of teaching through a sacred work often supported by local religious leaders is a significant element in many religions. But it was only with the invention of printing in the mid-fifteenth century that texts could become widely available.

Even then geographical separation was an ever present barrier. In the early years of the first millennium a courier bearing a message from the Emperor to the Roman Governor in London took the same time as it took a British courier to carry a message in the 18th and early 19th centuries from London to the British embassy in Rome. And if it took 7-10 days for a letter to make such a journey, a consignment of goods (such as books) might take many times longer. And so the creation of distance education on a wide geographical scale had to await the arrival of railways and motorized vehicles. Of course there still remained isolation. And in the 1960s the Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey, could speak of the isolation of Australia from the Europe from which most of its immigrant population had travelled as “The Tyranny of Distance” although the influx of telecommunications was already beginning to change this.

The significance of literacy

In a world of instant electronic communication it is easy to forget that an underlying requirement for its users is the ability to read and write. Yet literacy, even in developed countries, is quite a recent phenomenon. Even if we were to take the ability of an individual to sign their name as an indication of basic literacy, marriage registers in the UK in the 1750s would suggest that only half the population had achieved this skill. And 100 years later that figure had not yet reached 60%.

However, the new industrial society which appeared in the second half of the 19th century in the UK carried with it a requirement for literacy. In the UK the powerful voices of industrialists that mass education - and thus an educated workforce - was absolutely essential if the country was to maintain the lead it had won in manufacturing, began to carry increasing weight in Parliament. It overcame the long-held views that the ability to read and write would be the catalyst for sedition amongst working class people and therefore must be avoided. The 1870 Education Act in the UK demonstrated a commitment to educational provision on a national scale. But it did not contain a requirement for education for all children. Finally in 1880 a further Education Act made school attendance compulsory between the ages of five and ten. However, some 10 years later attendance within this age group was still falling short at 82 per cent. Truancy was a major problem due to the fact that parents could not afford to give up income earned by their children. Further legislation in 1893 extended the age of compulsory attendance to 11, and in 1899 to 12.

I have offered this briefest of summaries of education and literacy in what was at the time arguably the most advanced industrial society in the world in order to reinforce the brevity of the time span in which mass distance education has appeared. To put it another way, the dates of birth of my grandmother and grandfather precede the date when primary

education became compulsory in the UK although both were to benefit to some extent from the new law before they reached the age of 10. Yet their grandson spent the vast majority of his working life as a member of staff of the UK Open University, an organization which rapidly dwarfed all other Higher Education institutions in the UK, producing at one stage by distance education methods one in twelve of the county's university graduates.

By the beginning of the twentieth century compulsory primary schooling was being widely introduced. Adult education began to appear in a formal way as did the beginnings of correspondence education which allowed students to study at times when they were not constrained by their employment. The scene was set for the expansion of correspondence education for adults and the development of this in primary and secondary education where the student population was very widespread.

The 1st ICCE International Conference in 1938

And so it is not too surprising to find that primary and secondary education figured highly along with tertiary provision through established colleges and universities in ICCE's early history. Nor is it surprising that it was those countries where geographical distance posed problems to traditional education which provided the majority of the participants. The 1st ICCE International Conference attracted 87 delegates, of whom 57 were Canadians (40 from British Columbia and 17 from other provinces), 27 Americans (8 from Lincoln, Nebraska, 19 from other states) and 3 from overseas (Scotland, Australia and New Zealand).

The Foreword to the Report of that Conference summarises the background against which the Conference was set:

During the past twenty years or more systems of correspondence instruction have sprung up in several widely separated countries, quite independently, and in response to a very real need. That world-wide response has involved the education of children in the elementary school grades as well as those in secondary schools and universities. It has, moreover, found an important place in which to function, quite outside of schools, in the form of home study courses for adults engaged in industry and in the most diversified occupations.

There is a certain historic ring in phrases such as "elementary school" and "home study courses" but this quotation serves as a reminder of the early emphasis of correspondence education on both initial schooling and adult education. I have no knowledge of any comprehensive analysis of correspondence education in the two decades prior to this Conference. However, I have come across early examples in Australia 1914, Canada 1919 and New Zealand 1922.

Looking back on the last 75 years we can see a continuing ideal:

Now we are gathered here today to enlarge our ideas and to take stock. We are deciding on new steps, perhaps upon a new direction, and in all of this, ladies and gentlemen, we are motivated by what we consider to be a very practical ideal; that ideal is equality of

educational opportunity and this is an ideal which I believe is accepted in all parts of the world that have been more recently settled.

By equality of educational opportunity we mean extending education of equal quality to everyone, no matter how humble his birth, no matter where he may live, and no matter what his reasonable aspirations may be. We think that it is a very practical ideal - an ideal to which we can all subscribe, and I trust that everything we do in this conference will be evaluated in terms of it.

These words are taken from the opening address at ICCE's 1st International Conference by Dr K.O Brady, Professor of School Administration at the University of Nebraska. And he it was who, in the Business Session at the end of the Conference, offered to host the 2nd ICCE Conference at his own institution. Knute O. Broady was to become perhaps the most prominent figure in the early years of ICCE and his memory was to be celebrated in a specific lecture at later Conferences.

The 1st International Conference ended with two resolutions. The first dealt with the appointment of an Executive Committee "to hold office until the Second International Conference on Correspondence is held". The second determined "That the Second International Conference on Correspondence Education be held in two years' time (1940) at some point situated centrally in the United States". Lincoln, Nebraska had been suggested. In addition this resolution went on to state "Furthermore, in order not to overlook the interests of delegates from the Antipodes and the outstanding work now in progress there in the field of Correspondence Instruction, it is also recommended that the Third International Conference on Correspondence Education be held in one of the Lands of the Southern Cross (Australia, New Zealand) in 1942 at a Conference city to be decided upon at the next (Second) International Conference."

The 1st International Conference had been structured firmly on a solid foundation of practical sessions covering

- The Organisation, Promotion and Accreditation of Correspondence Instruction
- The Preparation of Correspondence Courses
- The Work of the Correspondence Instructor – Teaching Evaluating and Recording of Results

The 2nd and 3rd ICCE Conferences in 1948 and 1950

The success of the Conference can be seen in the desire to develop a series at which the growing experience of this form of teaching could be shared. However, the unprecedented international situation between 1939 and 1946 was to put on hold the hopes expressed in Vancouver in August 1938. And it was not until 1948 that the 2nd International Conference could take place.

In October 1948 the 2nd Conference met in Lincoln, Nebraska, USA with an attendance of 116 delegates of whom this time 99 were Americans, 12 Canadians and 5 from other parts of the world (2 from Norway and 1 each from the Philippine Islands, Australia and New Zealand). In April 1950 the 3rd Conference was held in Christchurch, New Zealand, as part of

Canterbury's Centennial year celebrations and the man who was President at the time of that Conference, Dr A.G. Butcher, Headmaster of the New Zealand Correspondence School, was in fact the only individual to have actually attended all three Conferences in person.

There were 79 delegates at the Conference together with 11 others who sent contributions. It was possible to attend this Conference at a distance! Of these 90 delegates, 63 were New Zealanders, 17 Australians, 7 Americans, 2 Canadians and 1 Swede. A particularly interesting aspect is that when it appeared from early expressions of interest that no Canadians and only 1 American might actually attend the New Zealand Conference in person, a decision was taken to invite other leading North American members of the preceding Conferences to participate by submitting papers for presentation for reading or for audio presentation. In the latter cases, recordings were sent which enabled these addresses to be heard in the original voices of the contributors. Nowadays, of course, with modern communications technology, this would be a trivial matter to arrange. In 1950, it required the use of rather more state of the art technology and represented the first usage, as far as I am aware, of anything other than a verbal medium at an ICCE World Conference.

The programme for the 3rd Conference in Wellington was certainly packed with presentations. A visit was arranged on Sunday, 23rd April to the New Zealand Correspondence School and also to Te Waipounamu Maori Girls College. But this appears to have been the only break in a Conference which began on Tuesday, 18th April at 09-00hrs and concluded only in the late afternoon of Thursday, 27th April, a programme that had sessions every morning, afternoon and evening! Obviously our predecessors were imbued with a considerable work ethic.

Dr Butcher's address to the conference contains some interesting statements:

There is practically no subject of study that cannot be effectually taught by correspondence, supplemented by certain associated services developed in our own and in other countries in recent years both by State services and by private enterprise.

In the field of academic studies, for example, the problem of pronunciation arises in connection with the teaching of a living foreign language, for example, French. This problem has been met in three ways which reinforce one another.

The first is the employment of phonetic script in the initial assignments. This is done by printing in parallel columns a passage of French, in orthodox characters in one column and in phonetic script in its parallel. A thorough knowledge of the use of phonetic script is a pre-requisite to the successful employment of this aid to the correct pronunciation of French, but that is not a matter of any appreciable difficulty.

The second 'aid' is provided by the circulation and use of a 'library' of French gramophone discs in which the same text that has been recorded in the parallel columns referred to above is recorded in perfect French for reproduction in the home of the pupils on a gramophone instrument. Pupils learn thus how to pronounce the language, and can practice the prescribed passages before a mirror to ensure the correct use of the lips, tongue etc., according to the drawings and photographs issued in the assignments.

The third 'aid' is the delivery by the Correspondence School teachers of special lessons in oral French over the air by means of broadcasting, supplemented by the issue of specialty prepared Listeners' Sheets

And so we can see that in New Zealand at this time there existed a basic multi-media system with the use of recordings and open circuit broadcasting. Here was a whole package which had been very carefully constructed to meet the needs of those who were learning at a distance.

Dr Butcher continues:

Turning now to the teaching of Science subjects, we are met with the problem of practical laboratory work. To meet this need the Correspondence School maintains a supply of assorted sets of scientific equipment - balances, lenses, graduated cylinders, test tubes burn, etc., and materials. These sets are sufficient to enable students to establish small home laboratories, so as to meet the requirements of various science courses - general science, physics (electricity and magnetism), chemistry, home science, biology, agriculture, botany and so on, for at least the first two years of/those courses. In the third and fourth years, for the work in which more elaborate and expensive apparatus is required, Correspondence School students are assembled in small groups at post-primary schools established in the urban centres of their districts. Here, with the co-operation of the principals and the senior science teachers, Correspondence School students are enabled to carry out a more extensive programme of experimental work with all the resources and facilities of a fully equipped science laboratory. The adequacy and success of such a system are sealed by the acceptance of Correspondence School graduates by the University for entrance in science subjects on the same terms as, and on equal footing with, the graduates of the regular post-primary schools. Moreover; as in the case of students of French, follow up enquiries show that in these subjects also Correspondence School graduates more than hold their own in open competition with those of the regular schools.

When I joined the UK Open University as it began its first year of teaching, the same practices involving "Home Experimental Kits" were in operation, albeit now in tertiary education. The volumes of students studying with the Open University of course provided logistical problems of a different order of magnitude but its kits were based on already time-honoured and successful practices. The same is equally true of its residential school programme. We see also from the final sentence of the quotation that the students who were studying by this method achieved the same or even higher standards than those who were going through the equivalent traditional forms of education for the same subject areas.

A paper at the 3rd Conference from Dr K.S. Cunningham, Director, Australian Council for Educational Research, contains some interesting comments on what he saw as the beginnings of distance education - and again he is alluding to primary and secondary education.

It was apparently left to the Australian States to demonstrate on an organised scale that, if a literate supervisor is available, it is possible to educate children who never attended

school or who have no personal tutor The organisation of such schemes is perhaps the only major contribution to educational method which Australia has made. Conditions were favourable to its evolution. Never before in history has there been such large tracts of country with an extremely scattered population of people who in the main were literate and naturally desired their children to become so.

The first demonstration (of the correspondence method) was given in Victoria in 1914 when several teachers in training agreed to send lessons back by post to the children of a parent who had written to the Education Department pleading that something be done to provide an education for his boys. Soon afterwards, a similar situation arose in New South Wales and one of the inspectors handled the situation himself in both states. It was very quickly found that so many cases could be dealt with in this way that special staff had to be appointed. The correspondence schools were now fairly launched. Instruction by full time teachers began in New South Wales and in Victoria in 1916. Six years later all six states had set up similar provisions.

It is not for me to comment on the veracity of this claim by an Australian that it was his country which, so to speak, invented correspondence education. Claimants for this honour might, as I have mentioned, stretch back more than two millennia. What can certainly be said is that there were huge developments in correspondence education in Australia in the first half of this century. By 1946, almost 22,000 pupils were enrolled in the primary correspondence schools which served the six states in Australia. For secondary education the numbers were much smaller, a total of approximately 3,400. But a massive growth in correspondence education in the area of technical and vocational education occurred as the Second World War ended and papers at the 1948 World Conference reported that over 100,000 people had taken such courses in Australia in the years immediately following the war, a large number of them as pre-discharge or post-discharge activities for men and women from the armed services,

The first six ICCE Conferences which spanned the first 24 years of ICCE's existence were relatively small affairs with attendances ranging from 73 at the 4th Conference in 1953 in Pennsylvania to 118 at the 2nd Conference in 1948 in Nebraska. And those attending these Conferences, not surprisingly, came for the most part from the United States and Canada. This period of ICCE's history saw it concerned very much with North American correspondence methods for school children and college students and engaged almost entirely, as far as one can determine from the papers presented, with the medium of print. But it is worth remembering that in those early days the interests of both the public and private sectors were represented at the Conferences.

The first ICCE World Conferences - 1965 and 1969

It was not until 1965 that the World Conference came to Europe, to Stockholm, Sweden. Interest in distance education in Europe had been increasing rapidly to the extent that some 114 delegates from 27 countries were present and the role of distance education in post war Europe, and indeed in general for expanding the opportunities for a much wider range of people, began to be understood by governmental world organisations.

And so it was not surprising that the 8th World Conference was held in Paris in May 1969 and was particularly significant in that it marked the admission by UNESCO of the ICCE to a mutual information relationship which meant that ICCE became a Category C nongovernmental organisation. This move had arisen from resolutions at the Stockholm Conference four years before and was announced formally on the opening day of the Paris Conference. Interestingly, Dr Knute O. Broady was Honorary President still at this time, the President being René Erdos, Head of the School of External Studies, Department of Technical Education, New South Wales.

Amongst others who made contributions at the Stockholm Conference and came to hold positions of considerable esteem as scholars in the field of distance education were Börje Holmberg, Otto Peters and Charles A. Wedemeyer. The UK Open University, which had only just received its University Charter, was represented for the first time at this World Conference by two delegates. It would be two years before it was to begin its teaching programme.

The Proceedings of the Paris Conference are fascinating in a number of respects and I highlight just a few of these. The Conference Papers were presented in English or French and simultaneous translation was provided, courtesy of UNESCO. The actual Proceedings contained the presentations in the original language. This was not a precedent which was followed in subsequent Conferences, although the 15th World Conference in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1990 had separate English and Spanish tracks and separate Conference Books in these languages. Another notable aspect of the Paris Conference was the decision to start a Newsletter, the grandparent of Open Praxis as we will see later. In fact the closing Business Session of the Conference suggested a Journal as well as a Newsletter although priority was placed on the Newsletter. The Conference duly passed its decision to the incoming Executive Committee, not the least of the difficult tasks which the Conference gave its new Executive before catching their trains and planes home!

Finally, and from the Paris Conference, it is worth noting a few prophetic comments from Otto Peters' presentation. Referring to the title of his paper *New Perspectives in Correspondence Study in Europe* he began by saying:

I really think now that I should rephrase it and call it -- using a term I found in one of Brian Jackson's articles - New Perspectives in European Distance Teaching, including also teaching by TV and Radio. Reflecting in this way does not mean that I want to depreciate teaching by correspondence. On the contrary, I believe that this particular method of distance teaching has not yet been exploited to the fullest extent. But to neglect the services of newer media and to stick to correspondence instruction alone, would be to indulge in the relative joy and comfort of a ride in a horse and carriage and to ignore the fine jet planes which have brought most of the delegates to this wonderful and gracious city.

Maybe the fact that one can think about whether the term 'correspondence education' should be changed is already indicative of a new perspective.

Within this comment lay the seeds of a great deal of heated debate which, as we shall see, came to fruition in the change of the Council's name at the Vancouver Conference some 13 years later.

And within the same presentation Otto Peters offered the first comments on the UK Open University at a World Conference:

Just in order to demonstrate how attractive the idea of academic correspondence study has become in Europe, let me finally refer to the Open University in England. This new and unconventional academic institution is to provide opportunities at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. Here correspondence courses will be closely integrated with radio and television tuition and short residential courses. The report of the Planning Committee, issued four months ago, stresses that "broadcasting can be used as a component part of a fully integrated teaching system" and that the Open University "can make the best authorities and best expositors universally available" and thereby "serve as an incomparably rapid means for the diffusion of the latest knowledge and ideas". The first Vice-Chancellor, Professor Walter Perry, took up his appointment in January 1969 and the development of an entirely new organisational set-up is under way. The first courses will start in January 1971.

Back in the USA: The 9th ICCE World Conference returned in 1972

The 9th ICCE World Conference returned in 1972 to the USA, this time to Warrenton, Virginia, close to The Skyline Drive which gives access to the Blue Ridge Mountains, perhaps the seat of history in the USA. The opening address by the Honourable Mrs Gloria L. Scott, Chief of the Social Planning Section in the United Nations Headquarters, urged the delegates to consider the vital role which correspondence education could play "in combating conditions of under development". William Fowler, Executive Director of the National Home Study Council, offered some interesting statistics. According to the study conducted by the National Home Study Council over 5 million people in the USA were studying every year through correspondence courses offered by over 1,000 providers. Correspondence study was now widely seen as a practical, convenient and economical way of learning.

The potential within correspondence education for allowing developing countries to leapfrog the generations, providing learning to many through a tiny core of teachers, was to become an important theme which drove many governments and funding bodies at this time. But this applied also to developed countries, as ICCE Vice President Ripley S. Sims reported:

It is now plainly evident that an educational system heretofore structured to serve a relatively small proportion of the population is not suitable in every respect for the influx of many thousands of new learners such as occurred in the 50s and 60s. New learners bring new ideas, new demands, and even new patterns of behavior to the formal education systems. They are unaccustomed to the behavior patterns of bygone

generations. They have their own way of thinking and living. The deep concerns and needs for adjustments occasioned by the arrival of these thousands of new learners in the 50s and 60s all but drove some inflexible and unyielding educational institutions to be a part of the problem instead of performing the expected role of helping to resolve the strains on society.

While research into distance education had been mentioned at previous ICCE World Conferences, it had been practical research rather than theoretical research. In Virginia the focus was placed on the need for theoretical research also. Was distance education merely a part of traditional education or a separate phenomenon in itself? The notion of the 'autonomous learner' which involved responsibility for one's own learning emerged in Michael Moore's contribution and was to be developed in the literature of distance education in the rest of the decade. Of historic interest also was the contribution of Walter Perry, the UK Open University's Vice-Chancellor, who could now report on a successful start to the institution and point out that:

There were two basic concepts behind the Open University. The first was to offer higher education to anyone who wanted it. The second was to harness technology (including the technology of mass communication) to the service of education.

Walter Perry's address brought to ICCE members the concept of very large scale distance education systems where student records were maintained by a computer as were mailing, fees, assessments and payments to tutors. All Mathematics students had access to a computer terminal at a Study Centre, a concept entirely novel to Conference participants in 1972.

Notable too at this Conference was a report on the first seven issues of the ICCE Newsletter. The decision of the Paris Conference had reached fruition under the editorship of Mary Louise McPartlin and the Conference resolved to continue this activity. A further important landmark for ICCE was the elevation from UNESCO Category C status to Category B status and the notion of a change in name, first mooted at the previous Conference in Otto Peters' presentation, was an item for discussion - as it was to be for another decade.

The 10th ICCE Conference - 1975, UK

1975 saw the 10th ICCE Conference and the first to be held in the UK. The Conference had in fact been planned for Tokyo but, late in the day, had to be transferred to Brighton. Because of this, the Conference was smaller than usual, although it did attract participants from 32 countries and for the first time the papers to the Conference were published separately from the Proceedings as a high class publication under the title of *The System of Distance Education* and edited by Erling Ljoså. Knute O. Broady to whom, more than anyone else, the embryonic ICCE had owed its survival from its very first meeting, had died on 22 November 1974 and, in his memory, the Broady Lecture was established, the first of which was given by his friend, Dr F.H. Harrington of the Ford Foundation.

By this time various technologies had become the focus for much discussion and a sub-section of the publication was dedicated to modes of teaching in distance education with specific concentration on the telephone, radio and television. The relationship between

the media and the message was debated. It was suggested that perhaps distance study had been regarded and examined almost exclusively from the point of view of the “teachers”. The emphasis had to change to the perspective of the students.

The 11th ICCE World Conference – first time in a developing country 1978, India

The 11th ICCE World Conference in 1978 was the first time that the Conference had taken place in a developing country and certainly a symbol of the importance which had been recognised for distance education in accelerating the process of education in developing countries. As part of its growing link with UNESCO Ripley Sims had produced an ICCE inquiry into the correspondence educating processes in 1977 and a great deal of reference was made to this comprehensive work. The second of the Broady Lectures was given by ICCE's former President, Börje Holmberg, who quoted a number of statements from Sims' Report in trying to determine the limits of what might be universal in correspondence study. The New Delhi Conference attracted 157 delegates from 39 countries and the emphasis within the Conference can be judged from some of the remarks made by the Vice President of India who inaugurated the Conference:

The basic relationship between education and democracy, and the vital role of education in the transformation of society through social change and economic development have been receiving increasing recognition everywhere. It is through education that the quality of the individual human life can be refined and raised. The ultimate beneficiaries of any improvement in the individual are the society and the nation.

Education planners have had, in recent years, to meet the challenge posed by the needs of a vast and growing population, newly conscious of their right to education. The result of the new awakening is evident in the pressure on existing educational institutions at all levels which has been rapidly building up over the years. The educational set-up which served the needs of a limited number, mostly from the elite classes all these years, obviously cannot meet the needs of the millions now seeking education and enlightenment. Education planners have now to formulate new strategies and unorthodox means to make education reach the people, transforming the universities into institutions for mass enlightenment.

The record of the 11th World Conference is contained in two volumes, the first embracing the Advance Papers and the second the Proceedings with some Additional Papers. This Conference took a rather different format to the more formal presentations of previous Conferences. In addition to the traditional formal lectures, there were a variety of smaller sessions involving panels of individuals and thus allowing real participation to a much greater number of Conference participants. The Proceedings have a great deal of interesting background to the Conference itself, not least a substantial number of photographs, one of which caused me to reflect for more than a moment on the passage of time. This was in fact my first ICCE Conference and I found myself presenting a paper entitled Academic Support and Guidance for Individuals in a Distance Learning System. I would not wish to suggest that the content of the paper was particularly significant but, by some quirk of history, the rapporteur for that session was a certain Dr John S. Daniel, at that time Vice-President of Athabasca University, later to become Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University and

ultimately to lead the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver. Neither of us, I suspect, imagined that we were both to go on to become Presidents of ICDE in the next decade; even less that we would even later become respectively Programme Chair and Host for the 17th World Conference in Birmingham UK in 1995.

But perhaps one of the most significant features of this Conference was its growing importance on the world stage. ICCE was faced with no less than five offers for hosting the 12th Conference and, in its choice Vancouver, took some major steps in a particular direction.

1982 – the birth of the International Council for Distance Education

The 12th World Conference in Vancouver was also the occasion of the rebirth of ICCE in 1982 as the International Council for Distance Education. The organisation was revisiting its birthplace in returning to British Columbia and the interest in distance education was demonstrated by the explosive growth in Conference participants, some 450 participants.

The term “Correspondence Education” was beginning to be challenged in the early 1970s and those who attended the 9th World Conference at Warrenton Virginia in 1972 were asked to consider “a broader and more appropriate title”. Radio and television were beginning to take their place in the non-traditional field, not least through the impact of the UK Open University which had begun teaching in 1971 and in whose offerings radio and television were an integral part. The Executive Committee appointed in Virginia in 1972 was asked to offer examples of more appropriate names to the next World Conference in Brighton in 1975. But at the Brighton meeting it was reported that the majority of members from a sample of 40 who had been consulted preferred to retain the existing name.

However, membership of ICCE was increasing and so it was decided to send a questionnaire to all members asking for opinions. This elicited only 14 responses but the 11th World Conference in New Delhi in 1978 heard that now only two of these favoured retaining the existing name. This, it was noted, left a significant silent majority but no clear decision was reached. How long this desultory debate would have continued is a matter only for conjecture but the decision was brought to a head in the following year through a Conference on the Education of Adults at a Distance (CEAD) in Birmingham, UK in November 1979. At this Conference, a proposal was considered to establish another more broadly based international organization for distance education. There were a number of ICCE members who were present at that meeting and they were able to resist this proposal. But a need for urgent change was registered and a proposal to change the name to the International Council for Distance Education was carried at the 12th World Conference in Vancouver 1982. By that time the term “Distance Education” had gained wider acceptance, not least in Europe, and was recognized by a range of international organizations including UNESCO.

In Vancouver the membership decided upon the new name by a large majority, on the grounds that it would better reflect the growing diversity of methods for learning outside the classroom and emphasise the Council’s role as the world wide association in distance education. The Vancouver Conference also broke new ground in that the Programme Committee had decided to publish selected papers as a Conference Book. *Learning at a*

Distance; a World Perspective was published by ICDE and Athabasca University in April 1982 and mailed to all pre-registered delegates. The book consisted of 118 papers from 25 countries and included editorial introduction to the major sections. In editing this publication John Daniel, Martha Stroud and John Thompson set a standard which others had to follow in subsequent Conferences.

The programme also took on the format which had begun in New Delhi. Formal presentations were interspersed with panels and discussion groups in 55 plenary and parallel sessions. At the New Delhi Conference, Janet Jenkins had taken over the editorship of the ICCE *Newsletter* from its third editor Erling Ljoså (the second editor was Habeeb Ghatala from Wisconsin, USA). The *Newsletter* was flourishing and some thirteen issues had appeared between the Conferences, with the Newsletter changing its name formally to *The ICCE Newsletter on Distance Learning* at the beginning of 1981.

In his address to the closing luncheon, the new President, John Daniel, committed ICDE to an extensive programme of activities, leading up to the 1985 Melbourne Conference. ICDE would begin to project itself on an international basis and be far more proactive. The *Newsletter* would take a substantial leap forward and become the *Bulletin* of ICDE and, having been appointed as a Vice President at that Conference, I found myself designated as the editor of this new development.

The 13th World Conference – 1985, Australia

The explosive growth in interest in distance education was further exemplified in the 13th World Conference in Melbourne in 1985, which was attended by almost 700 participants from 50 countries. The Conference was in fact a joint event of ICDE and ASPESA (the Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association) which had been for some time the most dynamic regional distance education association and which began at that meeting an association with ICDE which was to lead to the development of other regional organisations beneath an ICDE umbrella. One of the highlights of this Conference was the Broady Lecture given by Geoffrey Bolton, Professor of History and Dean of the School of Social Enquiry at Murdoch University in Western Australia. *The Tyranny of Distance*, the title of Geoffrey Blainey's finest book, is a concept which has passed into Australian folklore. Geoffrey Bolton traced the history of distance education, noting the use of radio broadcasting in Canada and Australia from the 1930s onwards and in Latin America from the 1940s. But he saw the opportunities for the explosive growth in distance education arising from the social and democratic aspects:

During the middle and later 1960s youth in the Western World after a period of benign apathy became unusually politicized, partly but by no means entirely as a result of the Vietnam war. Harassed university administrators who during the sit-ins and protests of the heady years between 1967 and 1972 may have begun to question the conventional wisdom that the best students were necessarily educated on campus and aged between 18 and 22. Simultaneously the increasingly militant feminist movement reminded its hearers that women, although theoretically given the same access as men to higher education, were in fact often discouraged by a range of more or less covert social pressures. They should be given opportunities in adult life to make good these deficiencies. The stage was set for a major rethinking of the role of off-campus education.

The Conference was notable for the number of presentations on technology but within its organisation lay a salutary reminder of the potential difficulties of such technology. The Conference Papers were not published in print but rather provided in microfiche. This proved to be almost certainly the least successful innovation in the history of ICDE Conferences and I would have to confess that my first act on returning to the UK was to print out all the microfiche onto A4 paper.

The time between the Vancouver and Melbourne Conferences had demonstrated that ICDE's change of name was more than semantic. In its early years ICDE members for the most part had been those involved in government secondary level correspondence schools and proprietary colleges together with private sector colleges offering a wide variety of vocational and recreational study. The 1970s had seen the arrival of major higher level institutions employing a whole range of technologies and these members brought to the organisation a distinctive professionalism as well as the managerial and organisational capabilities more traditionally seen in industry. ICDE's *Bulletin* had been published three times a year at regular intervals and, as well as articles contributed by members, had contained a letter from the President and details of activities taking place in distance education throughout the world. Thoughts had also begun about the creation of a Permanent Secretariat and John Daniel had explored various avenues in Canada, although without success. A Permanent Secretariat came high on the list of desirable objectives for the new President, Kevin Smith, and his Executive Committee as Oslo was designated as host for the 14th World Conference in 1988 and emphasis was also placed on the continuation of the *Bulletin* which served as the main channel of communication to members.

A permanent secretariat – 1988, Norway

The 14th ICDE World Conference in Oslo in 1988 celebrated the Golden Anniversary Year of the organisation with some notable achievements. Perhaps the most significant of these was the creation of a Permanent Secretariat in Oslo. This had become a reality over the intervening years in large measure through the commitment and generosity of the Norwegian Association for Distance Education (NADE) and the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education which had provided baseline funding and still continues with its support today. ICDE now had the more sophisticated and professional organisational structure which could take it forward. The Opening Ceremony in Oslo was graced by the presence of the King of Norway and the Prime Minister of Norway gave the Broady Lecture. As Programme Chair for the Oslo Conference and joint editor of the Conference Book, I would not have the temerity to comment on the Conference itself. But Norwegian managerial excellence went so far as to provide us with splendid weather. As the new President of ICDE, with a presidency which now would span the next two Conferences in Caracas and Thailand my attention was focused on the creation and maintenance of the infant Permanent Secretariat since the early years would be so crucial.

From 1990 until 2001

The Conference in Caracas in 1990 represented a gigantic undertaking once the decision had been undertaken to develop a Spanish and an English speaking stream. All credit to the success of that adventure should go to the Conference Manager, Armando Villarroel, and Programme Chair, Marian Croft. Distance education had been long established in Latin

America but for the most part up to that point had stayed outside the mainstream development in the rest of the world. The Caracas Conference served to cement relationships and to establish a formal link between the regional organisation in Latin America and ICDE itself.

The 16th World Conference in Thailand which followed in 1992, graciously hosted by Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, re-established ICDE involvement in the rapidly growing distance education scene in Asia. The four years of my Presidency had seen a particular concentration on the needs of developing countries and the two Conferences served to establish the credentials of distance education and its parity with more traditional forms of higher education in those parts of the world.

Thailand for me marked not only the end of four years as President but also the end of ten years as editor of the *Bulletin*. The 30 editions of the *Bulletin* which came out over that decade provide in themselves a valuable commentary on the development of ICDE as well as the development of distance education in an international perspective. *Open Praxis* (edited by Ros Morpeth) took on the mantle of the old ICDE *Bulletin* and provided it with an essential new image.

June 1995 saw the 17th World Conference in Birmingham, UK and hosted by the UK Open University. As the outgoing President I had remained on the Executive Committee and taken on the responsibility of Programme Chair as well as Editor of the Conference Book. It was a challenging experience to take on such responsibilities but also a humbling one, particularly with regard to the Conference Book. It had been some seven years since I had undertaken that task for the Oslo Conference and, as I looked through the papers which had been submitted, I realised that I had failed fully to keep pace with the worldwide advances which had been made in open and distance learning and which meant that it was now such a large part of the educational offering in so many countries throughout the world.

There had been suggestions in the 1970s that distance education and traditional education were and had to be studied as different entities. I had found this difficult to accept. I had myself suggested that there was in reality a continuum between a face-to-face dialogue between one student and one teacher at one end of the spectrum (theoretically “pure” traditional education) and the total separation in time and space (theoretically “pure” distance education) at the other end. The papers being submitted were clearly demonstrating this - an almost infinite variety of activities along this continuum, a mixing and matching of new and old. The review of the Conference Book (Jakupec and Nicholl *Open Praxis* 1995. 2) notes this and other aspects:

From our reading of the collection we felt it as witness to the general blurring of boundaries between distance, conventional, open and flexible learning; boundaries that are themselves becoming more open and flexible, As a separate issue the papers seemed also to be illustrative of a broadening uptake of purely distance education practices and methods, created by newcomers to the practice in areas (pharmacy, human resource development, dentistry and primary health care and nursing) which had previously used more traditional methods.

Reading from a different perspective it seemed that the papers indicate a deepening divide across the world landscape of open and distance education. The previous divide between and within developing and developed nations seemed more than just

economically based; one of the technology and ideology. A technological divide lying between the countries which have access to new communication and those which do not seemed increasingly marked

More than 1000 people attended the Conference in Birmingham either for the week or as day delegates. They came from more than 80 countries to participate in the theme *One World, Many Voices*. Between them they represented an unparalleled knowledge base of what was happening in distance education throughout the world. Two Conference Books, running in total to over a thousand pages together with a separate index, allowed participants to make informed choices from the huge range of topics which was available. It was a splendid opportunity for me to look back on the 13 years of the new ICDE in which, as a member of the Executive Committee and in a host of other guises I had been privileged to play a part. This was the time to retire, leaving the organisation in good hands.

ICDE returned again to the USA for its 18th World Conference at the Pennsylvania State University in 1997. My retirement had proved to be short-lived. In mid-1986 I had again taken over as Editor of ICDE's publication and almost the entire volume of *Open Praxis* (1997.1) was taken up with the developments in distance education in North America. The Conference for most of us was a taste of the future, opening our eyes to the need for examining the possibilities of new technologies in a country which clearly led the world in this and where it was beginning to play not just an important but actually an essential part in a student's learning experience. For a couple of years I had been revolving in my head what these new technologies might mean for Student Services (of which I was Director) in the UK Open University. Returning home and stimulated by the knowledge that we had to make wholesale changes, I at once set up a team to investigate what services would be like in this new world and to implement these.

Although that completes the "50 years" of the title of this series of vignettes I feel I must go on to embrace the next two Conferences, the 19th in Vienna 1999 and the 20th in Düsseldorf 2001. Both were organised impeccably by the FernUniversität in Hagen through the good offices of its Rector, Helmut Hoyer.

In laying out the theme of the Vienna Conference *The New Educational Frontier: Teaching and Learning in a Networked World* (*Open Praxis* 1998.2) Helmut Hoyer offered a forthright challenge:

A new educational frontier has been opened for teaching and training: universities, schools, companies, institutions and the workforce have to face the future in a networking and networked world. It is important for all institutions, associations and individuals in the field of teaching and training to stay on the cutting-edge of this fast-moving environment.

The Conference was to demonstrate the meaning of partnerships between the education sector, business and industry. Education was no longer a separate activity. It was no longer defined as an activity for one's early years. It was a life-long activity, inextricably linked to work and all aspects of life for the modern citizen.

This was followed two years later with the theme *-.The Future of Learning- Learning for the Future: Shaping the Transition*. 85 countries from all five continents were represented and over 1,200 people attended in Düsseldorf. All the plenary sessions had simultaneous

translation into French, Spanish and German. Whereas many of the previous Conferences had included either papers or presentations from most of those attending, almost half of those attending the 20th World Conference did not make such direct contributions. This was a Conference where people attended in order to gain experience from those who were already almost wholly engaged in shaping the future. I had been asked to organize a stream of the Conference on "Support and Services". It was an opportunity for those who were already actively engaged in applying new technologies in this area to demonstrate how they were interpreting the future.

The project which I had initiated in the Open University in the autumn of 1997, following my return from the Penn State Conference, had been mapped out and much of it was by that time operational. We were beginning to operate two parallel systems, the traditional one of paper, post and telephone and the new vision of web based information, "intelligent/interactive" forms and digital contact. "Transition" was always at the forefront of any move forward into the new future. The time when all our students had internet access was still quite a way in the future. But for those who did have such access, we were now beginning to offer a new highly responsive service which we had the opportunity of show-casing in Düsseldorf.

In some rare moments in the Conference when I was not being assailed with questions on how and why we were developing in particular ways in Student Services in the UKOU, I visited other streams. There too I found that the presenters were being inundated by similar questions on the aspects of "transition" they were covering and by equally enthusiastic Conference participants. With the benefit of hindsight I can now look back at this 2001 ICDE Conference, organized by the FernUniversität, as the one which more than any other fulfilled its theme – *Shaping the Transition*. This theme, its timeliness and the organisation of the Conference so as to drive forward the theme, all combined to make a truly memorable occasion for me, for those of my OU colleagues who took part in our presentation and I know also for many participants whom we met in Düsseldorf and who continued to keep in touch long after the Conference had ended.

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