The World of Distance Learning

Virtual Summer School

In August and September 1994, the Open University of the United Kingdom organised a Virtual Summer School (VSS) for its undergraduate course D309 Cognitive Psychology. Using a computer and modem, students were able to participate from their own homes, to contribute to group discussions, run experiments, obtain one-to-one tuition, listen to lectures, ask questions, act as subjects in experiments, conduct literature searches, browse original journal publications, work in project teams, undertake statistical analyses, submit individual or joint work, and socialise. In brief, students were able to participate in a residential summer school without physical attendance.

With respect to the technology used, there were three main categories: communications and group work tools, support and infrastructure software/hardware, and academic project software. The last included a custom-built 'Word Presentation Program' which allowed students to create stimuli for presentation to others and automatically record reaction times and button presses; a HyperCard-based statistics package; MacProlog for writing artificial intelligence and cognitive simulation programmes; and ClarisWorks for preparing reports and presentations, reading articles and doing richer data analyses.

Students had a three-week warm-up period in order to become familiar with their new equipment, while formal academic activities took place over the period 27 August-9 September 1994. Results of formal evaluations are still to be published, but four areas present some challenges, namely, the need for greater bandwith, greatly improved computer/communcations interfaces, creating larger workgroups, and improving the ability of tutors to reach more students.

International Council for Distance Education (ICDE)

The second annual meeting of the ICDE Standing Conference of Open and Distance Learning Institutions (ICDE SCOP) took place in Saratoga Springs, USA, in October 1994. A number of major decisions were reached, among them that the ICDE General Secretariat establish working groups and task forces to implement the action agenda developed at the SCOP. For 1995 the following working groups and task forces have been identified:

1 Working group to analyse the changing learning paradigms and the convergence of distance education and traditional education; to share such analyses with SCOP member institutions; and based on such analysis, to develop appropriate programmes of research, development and capacity building for ICDE SCOP member institutions.

The working group is to aim at providing international leadership and guidance in the process of change the educational systems in the world are going through in this period of time.

The working group is to recommend to ICDE action agendas for achieving high international and national impact of its work, such as publications, senior policy seminars for governments, the education and business communities, as well as symposia and expert round tables in order more effectively to build capacity for change.

The membership of this working group will embrace representatives of ICDE SCOP member institutions, researchers, governments and corporations. The working group will report to the Chair of ICDE SCOP and to the annual meetings of ICDE SCOP.

2 Task Force to develop clear vision statements and criteria concerning the educational uses of technology, and to develop and maintain linkages with corporate vendors and service providers.

3 Task Forces on International Collaboration, whose purpose is to develop share vision statements and action agendas on the following critical issues:
   A. North/South and South/South Collaboration
   B. Sustainable Development
   C. International Copyright Policy
   D. Encourage and facilitate International Interinstitutional Partnerships
   E. Networking of presidents and chief executive officers of SCOP member institutions

4 Task Force to develop a programme of activities which will benefit school level and vocational education institutions using, or planning to use, among their delivery methods open and distance learning modalities, thereby broadening the membership base of ICDE. This task force should provide a forum for international cooperation among schools and school systems in flexible uses of combinations of traditional learning modalities and open and distance learning, and thus provide guidance and capacity building opportunities to the school sector. The work of this task force should be linked to, and take into consideration, the work of particularly Working Group 1 and Task Force 2. As part of its mandate, the working group should recommend to ICDE action agendas for the best possible international impact of its work, such as publications, senior policy seminars for governments, the education and business communities, as well as symposia and expert round tables in order more effectively to help build capacity for change in the school sector.

5 Task Force to develop quality guidelines and practices for open and distance learning internationally.

The above groups are to report to the chair of ICDE SCOP and a shorter meeting of ICDE SCOP in connection with the 17th ICDE World Conference on Open and Distance Learning, 26-30 June 1995 in Birmingham, United Kingdom and to the full meeting of ICDE SCOP in early 1996.

ANDREA: Information on Distance Education in Europe

ANDREA is an e-mail based information service on distance education in Europe: it began on 1 September 1994 and is freely open to everyone. ANDREA is an anacronym for 'A Network tor Distance Education Reporting on European Activities', and is established by NKI, one of Norway's largest distance teaching institutions, in association with EDEN (European Distance Education Network).

The aim of ANDREA is to distribute information and stimulate communication been distance educators in Europe. It will also publish short articles and summaries of research reports.

To subscribe to ANDREA, send a message to

    listserv@nki.no

with the following text

    subscribe andrea [your namel.

To send information to ANDREA, send as e-mail to

    andrea@nki .no

The TV Open Learning Project 1992-1993: Australia

The Open and Distance Learning Agency of Australia's *ODLAA Times* of November 1994 noted the publication of the final evaluation of the TV Open Learning Project. Commissioned by Department of Employment, Education and Training. The report – written by Bruce Keepes, Ken Sinclair, Samuel Ball, Kay Harman and Jennifer Kearns - is available from the Research

Division, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, NSW 2006. The report discusses the TV component which became the Open Learning Initiative (later Open Learning Agency of Australia).

Among other conclusions, the report affirms that TV Opening Learning did increase access to higher education; that the great majority of students found television a 'valuable help in learning'; and that just under half of all students were interested in being assessed.

New Publications in Open and Distance Learning

Kogan Page and the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University have combined to produce a series of practical books specifically designed to help all those charged with developing open learning resources and centres, or using open learning materials. The series includes:

Judith Calder: *Programme Evaluation and Quality. A Comprehensive Guide To Setting up an Evaluation System.*

Topics covered in detail include: evaluation- its nature and purpose, programme and curriculum development evaluation at course design, development and presentation stages, and organisational and resource implications. pp.162, ISBN O 7494 0847 2, 1994.

Robin Mason: *Using Communications Media in Open and Flexible Learning.*

Issues covered include: telecommunications media - what exactly are they? interaction, collaboration and social presence; implications for students, teachers and organisations; advantages and disadvantages of each medium; guidelines for education use; future trends. pp. 144, ISBN 0 7494 1149 X, 1994.

Terry Evans: *Understanding the Learners in Open and Distance Education.*

Issues covered include: Learners' social and educational backgrounds; why and how students make decisions to enrol in their courses; experiences and strategies, coping with the costs of study; learning in gendered worlds; and encounters with those in control. pp. 160, ISBN 0 7494 1235 6, 1994.

Derek Rowntree: *Preparing Materials for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning. An Action Guide for Teachers and Trainers.*

Topics covered in detail include profiling your learners, agreeing aims and objectives; deciding content and sequence; developing examples and activities; making materials-user friendly. pp.128, ISBN 0 7494 1159 7, 1993.

Alistair Morgan: *Improving Your Students' Learning: Reflections on the Experience of Study.*

Topics covered include: the student experience - from foundation course to graduation; how students come to be engaged in study; students' conceptions of learning; how students go about their studies; facilitating change and development; the organisational context of learning. pp.144, ISBN 0 7494 0712 3, 1993.

Phil Race: *The Open Learning Handbook. Promoting Quality in Designing and Delivering Flexible Learning.*

Topics covered include: learning cycles; when to adopt, or adapt, or start from scratch; piloting - the best way of guaranteeing quality; tone and style; choosing and using non-print media; feedback: scores and grades are not enough; and turning lecture notes into interactive handouts. pp.220, ISBN 0 7494 1109 0, 1994 (Second edition).

Open Praxis

Open Praxis is the bulletin of the International Council for Distance Education. Recent issues contain short but interesting articles by leading figures in the field of distance education. Volume 2, 1994 contains a series on technology and distance education. Edited on this occasion by Tony Bates (Executive Director, Strategic Planning, Research and Information Technology

at the Open Learning Agency, in British Columbia), the series includes:

Terry Anderson: Using the Internet for distance education delivery and professional development.

Rory McGreal: Tele-Education NB: Smart software sharing in a multi-point environment.

Xingfu Ding: Economic analysis of the Radio and Television Universities in China.

Tony Bates: Educational multi-media in a networked society.

Bates concludes that "In the end, the issue is not technology. We already have more technology than we know how to use. What new technological developments do, though, is provide us with a much wider range of choice of the kind of education and training we can create.

Open Praxis, Volume 1, 1995 focuses on conferences, and especially the forthcoming, ICDE Conference, 'One World, Many Voices', being held in Birmingham, England, 23-30 June, 1995.

Each volume of *Open Praxis* includes a section on Professional Development, the Volume 1, 1995 contribution being entitled 'Are we learning anything at conference?'