

Book Reviews

LOUISE MORAN and IAN MUGRIDGE (editors), 1993: *Collaboration in distance education – international case studies*. Routledge, London and New York, 178pp, NZ\$169.95.

This book is published at a time when the case for inter-institutional collaboration is very strong. In many western countries governments are now encouraging more young people to enrol in tertiary educational institutions while requiring universities and polytechnics to manage with decreased funding relative to this growth. These changes are taking place at a time when information and communication technologies are converging and distance education is taking on a new significance for both educational administrators and policy makers. *Collaboration in Distance Education* is one of the first publications in the new Routledge series in distance education and provides educators, managers and policy makers with a variety of material to consider in the implementation of formal interinstitutional arrangements. The appearance of a well-researched text on inter-institutional collaboration is very welcome and should find a ready market in both developed and developing countries. This volume of case studies of collaboration in distance education is largely based on institutions in Australia, Canada, Malaysia and the United States, and, from a practitioner's point of view, is long overdue. However, the complexity of developing collaborative arrangements between educational institutions in the variety of contexts described in this book, underlines the fact that it is not something to be undertaken without considerable planning.

Moran and Mugridge note that collaboration in distance education was the subject of discussion as long ago as 1979 at the tenth anniversary conference of the British Open University. Collaboration among educational institutions

can be defined as an 'active working partnership supported by some kind of institutional agreement' based on formal agreement between two or more organisations. (M. W. Neil [ed], 1989: *Education of adults at a distance*. Kogan page, London). This is a practice that is becoming increasingly important in distance education as information and communication technologies converge. According to the editors' introduction, inter-institutional collaboration is based on four conditions: first, the desire to make 'better or more extensive or new use of resources that are available within one or more communities; and the opportunity to improve 'the quality of learning materials [to increase] educational opportunities for a wider student population, and [to ensure] ...the relevance of studies to student needs'; third, the need to respond to political pressures of various kinds; and the perceived need to guide or initiate changes of various kinds in particular societies.

Of particular interest to tertiary educational institutions considering collaborative projects is the chapter by Jocelyn Calvert, Terry Evans and Bruce King on the construction of a Master of Distance Education degree between Deakin University in Geelong and the University of South Australia in Adelaide. The authors take the reader through what was obviously a difficult and time-consuming process that required considerable goodwill on the part of both universities. The importance of goodwill and mutual trust cannot be underestimated in the development of successful collaborative ventures such as this; in fact the absence of mutual trust and goodwill is likely to doom any such undertaking from the start. The question may arise in the minds of some readers, however, whether this sort of educational programme could be made even stronger by the inclusion of other contributing universities? Perhaps the complexities outlined here should preclude such thoughts.

Chapters on the 'rise and fall' of the University of Mid-America by Donald R McNeil and the Northern Ontario project, Contact North, by Marion Croft provide the reader with insights into the difficulties of developing teaching arrangements among multiple tertiary educational institutions, each of which was established to be autonomous. The chapter on Contact North outlines a particularly complex collaborative arrangement involving Laurentian, Lakehead, Nipissing and Algoma Universities and Cambrian, Confederation, Canadore and Sault Colleges in four widely separated locations; namely Sudbury, Thunder Bay, North Bay and Sault Ste Marie. In addition to these institutions these are also participating colleges in Timmins and in Hearst. The need to provide educational opportunities for people in the northern ninety percent of Ontario which is inhabited by only ten percent of that province's population, underlines the importance of this sort of interinstitutional collaboration but, at the same time, the difficulty in doing so. While collaboration between two educational institutions requires careful planning and considerable goodwill on both sides; collaboration among a variety of different types of institutions located over a wide area increases the complexity.

Many tertiary educational institutions today in both developed and developing countries are either involved in or considering initiating collaborative arrangements with other colleges or universities. Collaboration in Distance Education is likely to be of considerable interest to educational administrators preparing to develop collaborative teaching and learning, as well as to teachers and learners themselves. Collaboration between educational institutions has not been the subject of much attention in the research literature until now, but this is likely to change as universities, polytechnics and community colleges consider their futures. It is particularly significant that collaboration between institutions is considered in the context of distance education, although this volume deserves a wider audience than the one suggested in its title. As more universities and polytechnics consider collaborative

arrangements in future, the case studies outlined in this volume should find a place in the literature of Educational Administration and, in so far as they relate to the provision of increased educational opportunities, in the Sociology of Education. I would like to have seen more in this collection on the application of new interactive technologies to facilitate the collaborative process, as I am sure that educational administrators will, in many cases, consider this to be the means by which future collaborative arrangements will be developed.

Moran and Mugridge have brought together a very valuable collection of case studies that effectively pioneers a new topic of great significance. The concept of collaboration among universities, polytechnics and community colleges challenges notions of institutional autonomy and even the future of national educational systems. Collaboration among educational institutions can take an almost infinite number of forms and it is impossible to capture all of these in a single volume. Nevertheless, I would like to have read more about international collaboration as, in the late twentieth century, inter-institutional arrangements increasingly extend well beyond regional and national frontiers. Moran and Mugridge have, however, effectively summarised the main trends in collaboration in distance education: the accommodation of institutional cultures, the building of relationships built on trust and the perception of mutual benefits while drawing attention to the importance of the role of governments in the development of such arrangements. As the editors point out in their final chapter, the challenge for today's distance education institutions is to build on existing expertise and experience, so that they can lead the rest of higher education into a new era.

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DESMOND KEEGAN (editor), 1993: *Theoretical principles of distance education*. Routledge, London and New York, 272pp., NZ\$179.95

It has always been difficult to theorise about distance education and with recent developments in communications technology and the adoption of distance education by institutions that until recently were teaching only in traditional face-to-face mode, this is an area of education that is changing rapidly. A book on the theoretical principles of distance education, in this case a collection of international essays edited by Desmond Keegan, the general editor of the new Routledge series in distance education, will undoubtedly become an important collection likely to be referred to often by future writers of books, journal articles and conference papers. A particularly useful feature of this collection is its breadth, ranging from the philosophical to the technological. As distance educators come from such a wide variety of intellectual and professional backgrounds, the breadth of the theoretical perspectives presented here is a valuable aspect of the publication.

Keegan notes in his introduction, that a theory of distance education is something which can eventually be reduced to a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph, and which can provide the touchstone against which decisions about distance education can be taken with confidence. It subsumes all practical research and provides the underpinnings for decision making'. An attractive feature of this book is the way in which the variety of theories of distance education have been organised by the editor, making it likely that this collection will become required reading for many future students. *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* is organised in five parts: didactic, academic, analytic, philosophical and technological, each of which is intended to provide the reader with an introduction to the 'underpinnings' of an aspect of the theory of distance education. Each of these five theoretical areas which underpin distance education contains three essays, most of which are drawn from a variety of international sources, which collectively provide a very comprehensive overview of this rapidly changing field of

education. The first three essays on the didactic underpinnings of distance education, by Otto Peters, Michael Moore and Randy Garrison, cover basic concepts of teaching, learning, interaction, feedback and communication. These introductory chapters are followed by several chapters on the 'academic underpinnings', particularly the development of distance education courses. Chere Gibson's chapter

'Towards a broader conceptualization of distance education', provides an introduction to ecological systems theory, while Louise Suave's contribution 'What's behind the development of a course on the concept of distance education?' is a succinct introduction to the distance education as well as to the principles of developing a course to be taught in this mode. These two contributions approach distance education in different ways and illustrate the range of approaches that can be taken by practitioners.

It is particularly appropriate that *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* has been published at a time when distance education is challenging national educational boundaries, assisted by the convergence of information and communication technologies. As distance education increasingly becomes part of the organisation of institutions that have not in the past provided courses at a distance, this book is likely to have an important educative role in explaining the foundations of distance education to educational administrators and policy makers. The organisation of these theoretical chapters allows the reader to work selectively through them. I will be suggesting that my students begin with the chapter by the editor, Desmond Keegan, on the 'Reintegration of the teaching acts', even though it appears as chapter seven in this collection. In this chapter Keegan outlines the role of the teacher, student and content in distance education and provides a useful framework for their analysis.

As many of the readers of *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* likely to be graduate students, studying distance education from a variety of professional backgrounds the scope of this collection will likely provide them with

material that will link distance education with their past and future career orientations. Papers by Tony Bates on *'Theory and Practice in the use of technology in distance education'*, and by Gary Boyd on *'A theory of distance education for the cyberspace era'*, are likely to be of interest to virtually all students of distance education today, as well as to institutions that are considering developing distance education within their traditional face-to-face teaching frameworks.

The range of theories of distance education outlined by the authors of the fifteen chapters in this collection is very impressive. Michael Moore's theory of transactional distance sets out a useful framework for structuring the instructional process in distance education and contains some insights into the selection and the application of communications media. I found the section of this chapter on the place of the teleconference in distance education particularly useful. This is an aspect of distance education that even the neophyte will likely have experienced before reading this book and Moore's chapter is appropriately located early in this collection to provide an introduction to and interesting explanation of an increasingly popular distance education practice.

The chapter by Otto Peters on distance education in a post industrial society is particularly relevant to the direction of national education systems at the present time. Peters, a prominent German educationalist and a leading theoretician of distance education, concludes his essay with three macro perspectives. His outline of the Lebenswelt perspective, the ecology perspective and the concept of 'instructional design', provides a way of contextualising distance education as well as for understanding past, present and future directions of the education of students at a distance.

I have been looking for a collection of theoretical essays like this for several years to provide my masters students, in distance education with a comprehensive overview of the field. Although distance education has changed considerably over the last decade, many of the essays in this collection will be current for years to come. As Keegan points out in his introduction, 'there is nothing as practical as a good theory'. *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* is a valuable contribution to educational scholarship and, in spite of its price, deserves a place in the library of all distance educators.

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