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The American Journal of Distance Education and
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EDITORIAL

This issue has three parts. The first announces DEOS-L, our new online discussion forum. The second reviews the two books "Distance Education: The Foundation of Effective Practice" and "Research in Distance Education 1". Both reviews are scheduled to appear in the American Journal of Distance Education later. The third part of this issue presents information on how backissues of DEOSNEWS can be retrieved.

PART I. DEOS-L

We have now decided to open DEOS-L, an international discussion forum for distance education. Initially, the intention is to facilitate discussion of some of the issues presented in DEOSNEWS. We hope to promote communication among distance educators, and to disseminate information and requests about distance education around the world. However, no firm objectives will be presented today, we just hope that DEOS-L will evolve to a useful forum for our subscribers.

DEOS-L will be open for everyone who wants to subscribe, and all subscribers may post information to the list. However, to enhance the quality of DEOS-L, we have decided to review the notes posted. Notes that do not comply to the following three rules, will be rejected:

1. Each note should contain valuable information, even if it is read independently of other messages.
2. Each note should be relevant to distance education.
3. Each note should be of interest to an international audience.

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PART II. BOOK REVIEWS

Distance Education: The Foundations of Effective Practice. John. R. Verd-
uin, Jr. and Thomas A. Clark. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991, 279 Pp.,
\$31.95).

Review written by Kyle Peck
Pennsylvania State University

[Both Kyle Peck (P16@PSUVM.PSU.EDU) and Thomas A. Clark
(GR3862@SIUCVMB.BITNET) have agreed to answer comments and questions via e-
mail.]

Few readers of this journal would argue with the authors' initial point: despite its indisputable potential, distance education has had little impact in the United States. There certainly are success stories, but when accomplishments in the U.S. are compared with the potential contributions, there is a disappointing discrepancy. This discrepancy, the authors propose, exists primarily because postsecondary educators lack awareness of what distance education is, what it can do for them and their adult students, and how to overcome the resistance and obstacles they will face once they decide to employ distance education. This book is designed to provide adult educators with the information, insights, and ammunition they will need to first embrace the distance education and then to predict and overcome the inevitable barriers. The book is intended to serve postsecondary educators as well as educators and trainers in military, business, and industrial settings.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One introduces distance education, Part Two reviews current research on distance education, and

Part Three deals with issues during the implementation of distance education. The book ends with a twenty-seven page "Resource" providing abstracts of individual studies arranged into four sections comparing the achievement of students in conventional settings with television, computer-based, videodisc, and correspondence study.

Part One discusses the demographics of the adult learner population, the types of learning experiences in which adults engage, and their motives for seeking additional education. Distance education is differentiated from distance learning and is formally defined as having four elements:

1. The separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of the instructional process
2. The influence of an educational organization, including the provision of student evaluation
3. The use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and to carry course content
4. The provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor, or educational agency and learner. (p. 11)

This reviewer was pleased to see attention paid to redefining the role of the distance educator. While it is tempting to use distance education techniques and technologies to simply broadcast traditional teaching practices, the authors describe the distance educator's "mission" as providing "a learning environment that allows individual adults to interact with appropriate objects, people, and events in order to acquire relevant new behaviors..." (p. 24) This reorientation, if not overlooked by readers of this book, can help distance educators create powerful alternatives to today's traditional teacher-centered environments in which a significant fraction of the information supposedly "taught" misses its mark. The authors also encourage readers to employ strategies that allow learners to set their own pace, reminding us that adult learners learn at different rates and have professional and private lives with associated schedules that will make it difficult to move a "class" through a course in unison. These two important points were made almost in passing. Had these points been made in a section devoted to a discussion of an exemplary (although perhaps by necessity hypothetical) distance education course, or a section devoted to what a distance educator should consider doing differently, they would have more impact and more readers might have benefitted from the wisdom these authors have acquired through significant experiences.

In Part Two, the authors describe six models of distance education and describe examples of each type. Next, the media commonly used to carry instruction to distant learners are described and advantages and disadvantages of each are discussed. Media covered in this discussion include: audio cassettes, telephone; radio; broadcast, cable, microwave, satellite, compressed, and recorded video; computer-assisted instruction; computer--managed instruction; interactive videodisc; and print. The discussions related to computers were a bit simplistic and may have reflected little

experience with more recent instructional software. To say, for example, "CAI... may not be appropriate for higher levels of learning since it does not facilitate teacher-learner communication or promote learner autonomy" discounts the power of modern learner-centered explorations. "The Geometric Supposer," (Sunburst) "Diagnosing Reading Abilities," (Intellimation) and "Oregon Trail" (MECC), for example, all cause students to operate both autonomously and at the highest cognitive levels. Such products can be powerful additions to distance education courses.

Part Two ends with a strong chapter on assessing the quality and effectiveness of distance education programs. A research-based discussion of cognitive skills and mastery learning moves into a series of media comparison studies (with appropriate disclaimers discussing the controversial nature of such comparisons). A brief discussion of the psychomotor domain is followed by an important discussion of the affective domain, often ignored but critical to distance educators.

Parts One and Two helped educators new to the field of distance education understand the options available. In Part Three the authors are concerned with developing a theory to explain the phenomenon of distance education both subjectively and objectively and which provides a framework by which distance education can be related to adult and conventional education." (p. 123) They draw heavily on the work of Michael Moore, and provide a service by summarizing the thinking of Moore and others. They merge a number of important concepts into an interesting and perhaps more comprehensive model. In this model, the relationships among six major factors are identified. Factors proposed to interact in the distance education process are: assessment of entering behaviors; specification of behavioral objectives; specification of the learning unit and procedures; presentation of learning units and tasks; performance of tasks by students; and assessment of student performance. While the model resembles others and stops well short of a "theory," it does provide ample food for thought and also provides a degree of guidance for practitioners engaging in the design and development of distance education courses.

The book makes an important contribution by gathering what the authors claim is the most comprehensive summary of research studies comparing distance and conventional adult education published to date. These comparisons help the book meet the authors' goal, by providing the information required by tentative, would-be distance educators. The challenge now, is for proponents of distance education to use this information wisely, and to find ways to get this book into the hands of distance education's fence sitters."

Research in Distance Education 1.
Edited by Terry Evans (Deakin University, 1990)

Review written by David Murphy
Hong Kong Polytechnic

This book, edited by Terry Evans of Deakin University's Institute of Distance Education, comprises the revised papers from the first Research in Distance Education seminar, held at Deakin in November, 1989.

I had been reading *Qualitative Approaches to Evaluation in Education: The Silent Scientific Revolution* (Fetterman, 1989) when I received draft copies of a few of the papers from the seminar. What particularly caught my eye was the coincidental title of Morgan's timely contribution, "What Ever Happened to the Silent Revolution? Research, Theory and Practice in Distance Education". He has read Fetterman's book, too, and has used it for some telling observations on the state of research in distance education. His conclusion is that the revolution has, for a number of well-argued reasons, largely bypassed the field of distance education, but that some "important initiatives are in progress". This book seems to be one of those initiatives, or is at least instrumental in reporting the initiatives.

Those who purchase the book looking for some introductory material or a global assessment of research in distance education will be disappointed, for that is definitely not what this volume is all about. Further, those researchers with positivist inclinations will search in vain for reassuring pages of graphs, tables, and traditional statistical analysis. Rather, *Research in Distance Education 1* challenges the assumptions of traditional research and pushes the boundaries of research in distance education: the contributions are largely qualitative, coming from the illuminative or critical end of the paradigm spectrum, with brief forays into the feminist and postmodern approaches.

Wisely, Evans has chosen as the opener (after his own introductory comments) Morgan's chapter which fittingly sets the scene for what is to come. The book is divided into three parts, "Issues" (seven chapters), "Teaching and Learning" (six chapters), and "Ideas in progress" (two chapters).

Each contributor in the first part raises significant and sometimes disturbing challenges to our thinking, both about distance education in general and research in particular. Nation, like Morgan, questions the assumptions made by certain researchers. In particular, he aims some of his critique at the work of Dan Coldeway, who, Nation believes, typifies the traditional positivist researcher, upholder of quantitative "scientific" research and dismissive of qualitative approaches. His suspicions about Coldeway's objectives, he admits, "would require more evidence in the context of a dialogue with him." Being aware of the ability of each to articulate his ideas with conviction, eloquence, and good humor, I would dearly love to be present should the two of them have the opportunity to debate their views.

Margaret Grace manages to explain the mysteries of hermeneutics in her chapter, as well as shows us how this method, with its ancient tradition, can be applied to distance education research. Her concerns with feminism and with understanding students' perspectives have led her into fruitful research, which she forthrightly defends against potential positivist objections concerning the subjectivity of the hermeneutic method.

In his role as contributor rather than editor, Terry Evans continues his exploration of the ways in which theories from other disciplines can contribute to research in distance education. In particular, he has for some time used the work of the distinguished sociologist, Anthony Giddens, as a stimulus for his research activity. The emphasis in the chapter is on theoretical aspects, though a brief description of a project at the end does help the reader to make sense of ideas that can be difficult to follow (especially for non-sociologists like myself!).

Richard Guy uses his experience as a distance educator in the third world to present a critical view of distance education, in terms of both a research approach and critical comment. He exposes the cultural differences and tensions that must be recognized if progress is to be made and appeals for recognition of certain metaphors (such as community, relationships, and support) which can facilitate development of distance education in the developing world.

Bigum's contribution was one of the first I turned to, because of the reference in the title to Chaos Theory, with which I've been trying to come to grips in recent times. The chapter, "Chaos and educational computing: Deconstructing distance education," is more about chaos and deconstruction than computing, but I found that acceptable, as it helped to clarify my thinking about postmodern science, and gave me some new references to follow up on. It is also one of the chapters that forces us to look at both research and distance education through different sets of conceptual lenses, as is that of Campion, who takes a macro look at distance education, particularly in Australia, and challenges its apparent Fordist foundations (yes, Fordism refers to the general industrial model of mass production).

The second part of the book starts with Altrichter's evaluative investigation of an innovative distance education course. A good proportion of his chapter is devoted to a discussion of action research, for which Deakin University has become something of a stimulus and center in recent years. His observations and reflections are based on some insightful interviews he had with students and tutors. Interviews also play a significant role in Nunan's chapter, a case study of the development of a research methods course. His description, "an attempt to tell the story," is a faithful recounting of a protracted and complicated process, and left me with the feeling that I had come to an accurate understanding of the difficulties and complexities that were faced and overcome by the course team.

Holt, Petzall, and Viljoen recount the progress they've made in a longitudinal study of MBA students. It is heartening to read of the researchers' concerns for the students' point of view, with particular attention being paid to organizational and family support. Another section that caught my eye was the students' expressions of what constitutes "quality" in distance education. As distance educators, I'm sure we all have our own ideas about quality, but do we ever approach the issue from a student perspective? MBA students also played a large part in a research project, reported by Thompson, which focused on student experiences of teletutorials. As well as providing a good assessment of the literature in this area, the chapter provides some interesting findings on the interaction and independence issue and, like others, stresses the need for appreciation for the students' point of view.

A background and interest in mathematics prompted me to look at the chapters by Mousley and Rice, and Ellerton and Clements early in my reading of *Research in Distance Education 1*. The evaluation of a course, *Mathematics Curricula*, is the basis for Mousley and Rice's contribution, which provides an honest and forthright appraisal of the successes and failures of innovative practices in distance education, particularly those relating to professional development.

If you believe that mathematics is a culture-free discipline, then Ellerton and Clements may change your mind. Their powerful and thought-provoking chapter is based on a study they undertook for the Commonwealth Secretariat in London to investigate the distance teaching of mathematics. Their conclusion is worth quoting, especially if you are about to offer your mathematics materials from Melbourne to students in Madagascar (or even Manchester):

. . . mathematics curricula cannot properly be constructed by armchair theorists remote from the action. That is the main lesson of history, yet moves to translate distance mathematics materials developed in one cultural context to other contexts, virtually intact, and moves towards national curriculum and assessment in mathematics, suggests we have failed to understand our histories (p.218).

To start the third part of the book, Angela Castro introduces the "technology developer", and cunningly applies the metaphor of "Tinker, tailor, soldier, spy . . ." to reveal different facets of the developer's role. She uses her experience, coupled with observations from the literature, to take a sober and sobering look at technology development and its evaluation in distance education. The final chapter, from McNamara, is also one of sober reflection, this time about the question "Whom is distance education really for?" Although primarily written for an Australian readership, the question, and the issues about learners which it leads to,

deserves widespread consideration.

I enjoy reading this type of book. It allows me to pick and choose, to delve into subjects and areas of debate that interest me. Further, while skimming other contributions of lesser appeal, I make serendipitous discoveries that might otherwise have eluded me. Others may find it too much of a "mixed bag", a collection of disparate ideas and arguments presented at different levels, at various stages of development, and to varying degrees of sophistication. Incidentally, I'm not sure if it was deliberate, but there are no personal details given of the contributing authors; for me, it would have been helpful to know something of the background to each chapter. By the way, if you're interested, there's to be another RIDE (Research in Distance Education) conference later this year. I'd like to be there, especially if Nation and Coldeway can make it!

Reference

Fetterman, D.M. (ed.). 1989. *Qualitative Approaches to Evaluation in Education: The Silent Scientific Revolution*. New York: Praeger.

PART III. RETRIEVAL OF DEOSNEWS BACKISSUES

The following are the titles of the first articles posted in DEOSNEWS:

- #1 The American Center for Study of Distance Education
- #2 GO MEEC! A Goal Oriented Method for Establishment of an Electronic College
- #3 Audio-Conferencing in Graduate Education: A Case Study
- #4 Abstracts from the American Journal of Distance Education 1987
- #5 The ICDL Database for Distance Education
- #6 Bibliography on Computer Mediated Communication in Distance Education
- #7 Computer-Assisted Language Learning at a Distance: An International Survey
- #8 Abstracts from the American Journal of Distance Education 1988
- #9 China's Network of Radio and Television Universities
- #10 Computer-Mediated Communication and Distance Education Around the world
- #11 New Accessions List 1991, No. 2.
- #12 Abstracts from the American Journal of Distance Education 1989
- #13 Interview with Reidar Roll, Secretary General of the International Council for Distance Education
- #14 Innovative Computer Conferencing Courses
- #15 Features of Distance Education in Finland
- #16 Abstracts from the American Journal of Distance Education 1990

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