Book Reviews

Distance Education in Essence: an overview of theory and practice in the early twenty-first century
Börje Holmberg, 2001
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Distance Education in Transition: new trends and challenges
Otto Peters, 2002
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The two books reviewed here, by Börje Holmberg and Otto Peters, are the fourth and fifth volumes of a series produced under the general editorship of Dr Ulrich Bernath and his colleagues at the University of Oldenburg that is fast becoming a useful addition to the literature of distance education. If I have a general criticism of the series, it is the lack of an index to any of the books in it that I have seen. Both of the books reviewed here have been authored by well-known distance educators with a wealth of professional expertise behind them, yet they could not be more different, and the purpose of this review essay is not merely to review the books, but to place them within the context of their respective authors' *oeuvres*.

Börje Holmberg's general position can best be described as that of a liberal humanist. Grounded on his view that deep learning is an individual activity, the ultimate test in any teaching–learning system is whether or not the elements of a system foster individual learning on the part of the student. It is this test that leads Holmberg to the view that distance education is in many ways superior to face-to-face teaching because, by its very nature, it fosters autonomous personal learning by the individual student. It is also this test that determines Holmberg's view of the various media employed by distance educators, leading to his emphasis on print at the expense of face-to-face and other media. Given his emphasis on individual learning, Holmberg favours approaches that allow students to determine their own rate of progress, despite the evidence that unpaced systems have higher drop-out rates. At the same time, however, he argues vehemently for some form of two-way communication to be built into the structure of the teaching–learning system. In his earlier works he focused on written and telephone-based two-way communication (as well as acknowledging the role of face-to-face contact in this regard, although he regarded the latter as less appropriate for reasons outlined above). The key to success was to motivate students. Motivation is likely to encouraged where students

are 'engaged in decision-making [about their courses and their progress]', use 'lucid, problem-oriented, conversation-like' learning materials, and engage in 'friendly, non-contiguous interaction' with other students, their tutors, and other staff, and operate within a framework of 'liberal organisational-administrative structures and processes' (Holmberg, 1995, p. 175). He also suggested more dubiously that a form of two-way communication could be simulated through the use of a conversational style in the writing of materials coupled with the likelihood that students would themselves interrogate the materials as they studied them, thus provoking an internal conversation with themselves. As expounded here, there is much in common between his ideas and those of Peters (i.e. the stress on self-learning and on social intercourse), although Peters has discussed Holmberg's theory of guided didactic conversation, arguing that 'it is questionable whether the conversational model is generally suited for the presentation of scientific content in the context of university teaching', and that accordingly 'some of the recommendations of supporters of this model can only be followed with reservations, if at all' (Peters, 1998, p. 22).

Holmberg's present book is in many ways a re-presentation and updating of the second (1995) edition of his *Theory and Practice of Distance Education* (p. 6). Holmberg frequently refers the reader to his earlier book for a fuller explanation of his ideas (pp. 11, 19, 62, 70, 74, 80, 85, 86). This gives the new book the distinct and rather unsatisfactory flavour of a précis and leaves one asking why, if this is the case, we were not given a revised and updated edition of the much fuller statement of his views contained in the 1995 book.

Chapter 1 rehearses the field (definitions, lists of providers, the duality of single versus dual-mode provision): there is little new here, although there is a recognition that the field has changed with the arrival of online providers. In Chapter 2 Holmberg argues that there is something paradoxical about the fact that distance education can both reach a mass audience *and* individualise its response to the individual student. It would have been interesting to have seen this point explored some more, especially in relation to the use of ICTs. In this chapter Holmberg draws on Ross's 1976 model of educational innovation to look at distance education as an innovative form of educational that allows students to manage their own learning (Ross, 2001, p. 21). A great deal has been written about innovation, not least work that links innovation in education to distance education (for an historical account of innovation within five distance teaching universities, see Guri-Rosenblit, 1999; and more generally within the current field of distance education, Latchem & Hanna, 2001) and the discussion here might have benefited from being somewhat less superficial.

Chapter 4 takes a quick run through the theory of distance education—Peters' (1973) industrialisation model, Moore's (1993) theory of interaction, Keegan's (1993) theory of the reintegration of the teaching acts, and Holmberg's own theory of empathy. Holmberg then discusses the extent to which such theories have an explanatory power and notes that 'few distance education theories generating testable hypotheses have been presented and even fewer have *de facto* been tested' (p. 37). Most of the rest of Chapter 4 outlines Holmberg's own theory of empathy

and his defence of its status *qua* theory (pp. 45–46). This draws heavily on his previously published material but is clearly central to the Holmbergian position.

In this chapter Holmberg also acknowledged the presence of 'so-called progressive thinking presented by distance educators'—what one might call the social theories of distance education presented by Evans and Nation (1993), Harris (1987), Carr and Kemmis (1983) and Sumner (2000)—all of whom he magisterially dismisses—in my view wrongly (though he does return to Sumner briefly in Chapter 8 on 'Distance education and society'). (As we shall see, the location of a 'theory' of distance education within a 'theory' of society is central to Peters' modernist/post-modernist conceptions of society and distance education. Holmberg incidentally does not allude to the extent to which Peters' own approach is grounded in social theory.)

Chapter 5 is a quick rundown on the methodology of distance education: teaching (the support of student learning) is dependent upon media of some kind; there are two constituent elements to a distance education system, the primarily one-way presentation of subject matter, and the two-way/multi-way interaction between participants (tutors and students). The chapter covers some of the learning theories that have influenced distance educators including constructivism, where Holmberg takes a swipe at the extreme relativism of some post-modernist views of knowledge formation without engaging with them (p. 48). The remainder of this chapter discusses media choice in relation to the presentation of subject matter and the provision of opportunities for interaction.

Chapter 6 deals with organisational issues. The brief reference to the duality of single- and dual-mode systems here hardly does justice to the impact that distance education methods have had on the traditional university and college campus, nor to the concept of convergence, as the wealth of material in, for example, Latchem and Hanna (2001) attests. Chapter 7 discusses expectations and outcomes before concluding with a lengthier discussion of the relation between student independence (independent learning) and distance education that somehow seems misplaced here, and might have more appropriately been contained in Chapter 4. The brief three-page Chapter 8 ('Distance education and society') looks at the rationale for distance education in terms of target audiences and also at questions of power and control over content, where Holmberg argues that it is the promotion of students' independence that is the chief bulwark against anti-pluralistic tendencies in distance education (p. 83). This may be true, but it is far too easy to subvert this through content selection and covert or overt controls on the content of academic dialogue. This is something that surveillance of e-mail and other electronic forms of communication makes much easier.

Chapter 9 deals briefly with research into distance education, of which there is so much 'of an acceptable standard that the field can well be described as a discipline in its own right' (p. 85)—a position Holmberg has long held and one that I argued against some years ago (Rumble, 1988). (By contrast, Peters refers to the emergence of distance education in the 1970s and 1980s as 'a subject, which was now dealt with by educational researchers …', a formulation with which I have no problems; p. 16.) Finally, Chapter 10 draws out Holmberg's main points.

I have left Chapter 3 until last. Most distance educators would probably say that

the major change of the last 10–15 years is the widespread adoption of the computer with its range of applications into distance education study and, of course, Holmberg does not ignore the changes in technology. He rightly warns against 'technology euphoria' (p. 22) before acknowledging that for some scholars have seen the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as leading to a 'paradigm shift' in distance education (p. 23). However, it is clear that this is not his view. He begins with the widely acknowledged differences between North American approaches (the preferred mode remains face-to-face teaching but we use technology because it facilitates access) and those more widely found in Europe (yes, of course technology can facilitate access but what is really interesting about it is its pedagogic capabilities). Holmberg rightly takes a swipe at those systems that fail to support the learners (p. 29), which he locates 'particularly' in North America. It is in this chapter he points to one of the main philosophical differences between his position and that of Peters: whereas Peters sees virtual learning spaces as providing something radically new, Holmberg sees them, with two exceptions, as merely a development that provides ways to improve both the presentation of subject matter and interaction between students and tutors. The two exceptions that Holmberg sees, where something radically new is provided, is the ability to undertake simulations, and the ability to search the web; otherwise they merely improve on 'the two constant constituent elements of distance education'—materials presentation and participant interaction (p. 32).

There is, then, a great deal in Holmberg's book that will be familiar ground to those who have read his earlier works: what one gets is a quick account of ideas that in the main he has expressed at greater length elsewhere, and a sometimes tantalising and too off-the-cuff dismissal of some of the newer thinking in the field that begins to look like subjective opinion rather than an argued and objective case.

Some of the problems I have with the book are encapsulated in the bibliography. A feature of Holmberg's past books has been their extensive bibliography, providing evidence of the extraordinary scope of his reading in the subject (his 1981 book had no less that 54 pages of small-type bibliography). While I sympathise with the argument that, in contrast to the situation that appertained as late as the 1980s, it is now impossible for scholars to keep up with everything that is written on distance education (p. 10), there are some surprising omissions from his bibliography, with the real weakness being the citation of studies on e-education. For example, work that I might have expected to have been referenced in any contemporary book on distance education would include that of Tony Bates (2000*), Betty Collis (1996*), Stuart Cunningham *et al.* (1997, 2000), Marc Eisenstadt and Tom Vincent (1998*), Glen Farrell (2001*), Diana Laurillard (1993*, 2001), Steve Ryan *et al.* (2000*), Gilly Salmon (2000*), and John Tiffin and Lalita Rajasingham (1995*). None of them are referenced by Holmberg. (For comparison, those marked with an asterisk are referenced by Peters.) There is also not one single reference in Holmberg's bibliography to the rich material on distance education now available on the web (for example, David Noble's polemical papers on the dangers of electronic degree mills; Noble, 1997, 1998a,b, 1999) which, given Holmberg's comments on the quality of some American distance education, one might have expected to have seen

mentioned; there are no references to articles in some of the online journals in our field—for example, *The Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *The Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *TechKnowLogia*. In comparison to Peters' book, Holmberg's references generally come from an earlier literature on distance education. Of the 192 works he references, 17.7% were published between 1970 and 1979; 29.9% from the period 1980–1989; and 47.9% from the period 1990–2002. Peters references 221 works; here the corresponding figures are 5.9%, 10.4%, and 78.2%. Part of the difference between the two books might be explained by the fact that Holmberg credits virtual education with far less 'transformative' power in respect of the fundamental nature of distance education than does Peters, but this is unlikely to convince those who see e-education taking distance educators into a new pedagogic paradigm.

It is, then, something of a relief to turn to Peters' book. Peters' original fame rested upon his development of an analysis of distance education as the most industrialised form of education (contrary to some peoples' claims, Peters has said very clearly that he did not develop a theory of distance education as an industrialised form of education; Peters, 1989, p. 5). First articulated 35 years ago, Peters (1967, 1983) claimed that distance education shared a range of characteristics with modern industrial production processes. This separated distance education from traditional face-to-face teaching in classrooms or in groups—a form of education which, by extension of his analogy, he later characterised as 'pre-industrial—that is, structurally similar to the work of a craftsman' (Peters, 1993, p. 38). Peters went on to suggest that the differences between distance education and face-to-face education were so great that 'Anyone professionally involved in education must presume the existence of two forms of instruction which are strictly separable: traditional face-to-face teaching based on interpersonal communication and industrialised teaching based which is based on a technologically-produced interaction' (Peters, 1973, p. 303, translated in Keegan, 1986, pp. 106–107). As he was to explain later (Peters, 1989, p. 7), 'Developing industrialised instruction means losing … the feeling of belonging and, possibly, the warmth of human relations … The process of alienation begins' … In distance education you simply cannot have the 'sharing of experience in exploring a common world' … Distance students cannot enjoy 'the contagion of a shared enterprise. The interaction is indirect, emotion-free, and depersonalised'. Those who argued that there was in fact no difference between face-to-face education and distance education were mistaken: 'distance study is *sui generis* as it is the most industrialised form of teaching and learning' (p. 7)—though were traditional modes of education to be reformed so that students learnt more independently, and relied to a greater extent on resource-based learning, 'the huge gulf' between the two modes might disappear (p. 7). This Peters expected to happen: 'I envisage that industrialised forms of imparting knowledge will, by and large, also permeate and finally substitute for face-to-face instruction on all levels' (Peters, in Keegan, 1994, p. 16). Writing in 1994, Peters concluded pessimistically that this will likely 'contribute to the disintegration of society as it isolates people from one another, reduces the forms of shared learning, and keeps learners away from personal interactions and critical intercourse' (p. 16). (Later Peters was to see

one positive advantage arising from this form of distance education—the tendency of students to have to rely on themselves and become autonomous learners: this has fitted distance education students far better than traditional students for the demands of the post-industrial world.)

While Peters' ideas had been formulated in the light of an analysis of the workings of correspondence schools, the development of distance teaching universities in the late 1960s and 1970s seemed to prove his point. These so-called 'open universities' demonstrated markedly bureaucratic (cf. Weber), Taylorist, and Fordist characteristics.

Although Peters' analysis has been critiqued (see Peters, 1989, for his response to criticism), the real challenge to his views came, paradoxically, from Peters himself as he responded to the advent of the new electronic media. Peters' new position was signalled in the chapter he wrote for Desmond Keegan's *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* in which he asked whether or not the principles of industrialisation were in the process of fading out in the face of *post*-industrial developments (Peters, 1993, p. 40). Here Peters looked at the emerging characteristics of knowledge-producing and personal-services industries and the structural implications of these trends to suggest that these industries would be more democratic. Although he still held that distance education was basically an industrialised form of education (p. 45), he identified four elements of even the earliest forms of distance education that corresponded to post-industrialised forms of teaching: home-based learning, the self-reliance demanded of the learner, the extent to which social interactions among students are promoted in distance education, and the strong affinity distance education has to the new electronic media (p. 45). If, Peters suggested, the post-industrial tendencies referred to in distance education were to become stronger, then perhaps distance education would shift from being an industrialised form of teaching and learning, to one based on new post-industrial forms of education (p. 47). At the time of writing this was in his opinion unlikely to be the case in the big distance teaching institutions, which are 'so bureaucratised and structurally inflexible that this will probably never happen' (p. 47). (This is not, I think, a view Peters would hold today, given the changes he sees taking place in some of these institutions.) However, more generally, Peters believed that the demands of those used to a post-industrial services economy will force changes on distance education that in essence increase student's autonomy and self-direction, and decrease reliance pre-packaged materials, such that distance education institutions that cling on to industrialised forms of distance education will lose students to those that, in a 'Copernician' revolution (p. 57), develop structures that meet the demands of a post-industrial society (pp. 47–53).

The shift in Peters' thinking, signalled in his 1993 chapter, was followed by an important book, *Learning and Teaching in Distance Education*, first published in German in 1997 and then revised in an English translation published in 1998, in which Peters analysed the different forms of teaching and learning found in various distance education systems, and the prospects opened up by the development of electronic media, to look forward to 'the university of the future … the flexible and variable university *par excellence*' (Peters, 1998, p. 246). I shall not go into the

content of this book because he returns to these issues in his latest book, reviewed here. However, I do think that his 1998 book still has a lot to say to us, and I recommend that people read it alongside the present work.

In the book reviewed here, Peters starts (Chapter 1) by sketching briefly the history and current state of distance education (in Chapter 3 he identifies seven models of distance education) before rapidly launching into his main theme: 'A pedagogical revolution is currently taking place in distance education: the increasing use of digitalised learning environments and the net … education will also now take place in a hitherto unknown territory: virtual learning space. This demands the design of new formats of learning and teaching and causes powerful and far-reaching structural changes in the learning–teaching process' (p. 20). These changes (Chapter 2) are greatly increasing the importance of distance education, the more so given that there is no possibility that 'our traditional system of education … [can] … cope with the tasks ahead of us' (p. 28). In responding to these demands, we are indeed lucky that the new ICTs have become available. However, these technological developments have to be applied in a wholly new context, the post-modern world that has replaced the modern world (p. 29). This will challenge traditional distance education, and its main impact will be to require a shift in our curricula, the implications of which Peters spells out on p. 30, and which he summarises as involving three shifts:

- from discovery and determinism to creativity and indeterminism,
- from systematic construction to pluralism and eclecticism,
- from linearity of thinking to multilayers of interpretation (pp. 30–31).

Peters argues that the development of a digitalised learning environment will facilitate the shift away from expository teaching, thus enabling teachers to respond to the new post-modern environment. In particular, instead of having the traditional situation in which teachers design courses and specify content and structure, it is the students who can now get hold of information on the net who will 'have to develop their abilities of self-instruction and of becoming autonomous learners' (p. 32); instead of having social interactions confined to the class, they will take place in the virtual environment of the web, e-mail, the bulletin board, and teleconferencing, all of which will become 'the core of a new pedagogy' (p. 33); and instead of learning goals and objectives being pre-set, objectives will emerge as students study—a change that means that learning will be less systematic and linear, more coincidental and intuitive (p. 33).

In Chapter 4 Peters looks at the *potential* impact the existence of computer networks will have on teaching and learning, the range of very different pedagogical processes that they open up, the extent to which they contribute to the individualisation of learning, and the impact that they will have on the role of teachers and on institutional structures. His approach is to look at what experts think *may happen*, while usefully warning that such prognoses tend to overestimate the rate of change and underestimate the power of inhibitory factors (p. 55). The main conclusion here is the growing importance of online learning, although very few of the experts polled

believed that online learning would by 2010 have a greater 'market share' than traditional forms of education.

Chapter 5 assesses some of the new possibilities opened up by online learning. It examines two approaches to learning, the traditional approach emphasising expository learning—what Peters calls 'regulated learning'—in which students tend to be passive recipients, and the more 'progressive' (and in Peters' opinion more important) approach—'self-directed autonomous learning'—that requires students to be active, taking responsibility for their own learning. Digital learning environments have raised new possibilities that will affect both 'regulated' and 'self-directed autonomous' learning. In effect, Peters says, a new 'learning space' has been opened up that is very different to the concrete, physical learning space of the classroom.

Chapter 6 explores the characteristics of this new 'virtual space'—its 'boundlessness, uncertainty, inconceivability and "emptiness"' (p. 77), in which everything is ephemeral—'nothing has "its place", but everything has "its time"'—its short-term presence as a trace of light on the screen' (p. 78). Peters goes on in the remainder of this chapter to examine the spatial metaphors that have evolved to help us make sense of this virtual space—the desktop, the virtual classroom, the virtual laboratory, the information *highway*—and (in Chapter 7) to examine in more detail the kinds of learning spaces that are opening up: 'They provide', says Peters, 'new space for instructional design' (p. 86). One cannot but contrast Peters' enthusiastic exploration of the language and the concepts and the pedagogic meaning of virtual space with Holmberg's comment: 'There is also much talk of "virtual" universities, "virtual" seminars etc. This is a neologism of doubtful value as "virtual" in non-technical English means "not really exact or true"' (see Holmberg, p. 28).

Chapter 7 continues by exploring the implications of the computer for the learning space in respect of 10 functions performed by computers: the presentation, storage, and retrieval of information; communication and collaboration; browsing; multimedia; hypertext and hypermedia; simulation; and virtual reality. Ten new learning spaces are opened up—instructional spaces, documentation spaces, information spaces, communication spaces, collaboration spaces, exploration spaces, multimedia spaces, hypertext spaces, simulation spaces, and the spaces of virtual reality (p. 90). These spaces, says Peters, 'confront us with the necessity of educational innovation' (p. 91). 'They change conventional teaching and learning and adapt it to the requirements and circumstances of the post-industrial knowledge society' (p. 100). The detail of the chapter sketches out some of the reasons for this, and some of the implications for students and teachers.

Peters is not blind to some of the drawbacks of virtual space. We cannot, he says, 'feel at home' in a virtual space; we will not be able to link the memory of acquiring knowledge to specific places, times and persons; we lose the whole field of non-verbal communication; we can get 'lost in hyperspace'; we no longer experience 'the original and the authentic' (pp. 103–104). Such losses are serious (which is why in the end he advocates the retention of some face-to-face contact)—but there are compensations—a whole new digital world is opening up and 'people in the coming information era will differ from those of the industrial era in the same way that the latter differed from those in the agricultural era' (p. 104). The comment illustrates

the way in which Peters' views on distance education have *always* been located in a wider appreciation of the social and psychological context within which distance educators work. Again the contrast with Holmberg is significant, witness Holmberg's dismissal of 'so-called progressive thinking presented by distance educators'— what one might call the social theories of distance education—to which I have already referred.

As Peters says, the changes that we have experienced have all happened very quickly. Educators who were socialised and trained at traditional institutions get into difficulty when they try to conduct online seminars because the strategies and skills of face-to-face teaching do not work in virtual spaces. One of the dramatic differences is that virtual learning spaces lend themselves to autonomous and self-regulated learning. In Chapter 8 Peters draws on his experience moderating virtual seminars on the Master of Distance education course offered by the University of Maryland University College and the Carl von Ossietsky University of Oldenburg. Online students are 'by necessity' (p. 108) much more active in planning and controlling their own study. The goal is to help them develop the skills to do this. Since the course he was teaching was a beginners' course in the programme, Peters had to design a strategy to encourage the students make good use of the potential benefits of online learning. This included helping them to observe and evaluate their own learning. In Chapter 9 Peters discusses the issues, the sense of 'sameness' and of 'difference' between 'virtual' and 'real' seminars, the perceived advantages and disadvantages relative to 'real' seminars, the importance of commitment and of a sense of autonomy on the part of the students. In his exploration of the nature of virtual seminars, he draws on students' comments, and on feedback from an evaluation of their views carried out on the initiative of one of the students. He discusses issues such as the structure of online discussions (less spontaneous, more disjointed); 'inactive' students who do not log on, or if they do, only lurk (he dismisses the idea that lurking is a problem—autonomous students have the right to do this); and the presentation of student biographies (a 'critical pedagogical element of any virtual seminar'; p. 120).

Chapter 9 looks at the development, organisation and typical pedagogical structures of virtual universities, with a view to demonstrating their 'unusual pedagogical flexibility' (p. 131). Rapid societal change requires flexibility—and the tasks of teaching and learning are no different. In everyday higher education flexibility has four special means: increased accessibility; increased student choice and control over their learning processes; increased student responsibility for their learning; and providing students with more support (p. 131). Peters holds that a real virtual university, defined as 'a purposefully structured accumulation and combination of a large number of net-based learning approaches' (p. 132), does not yet exist (p. 133). However, we can describe the ways in which the net is used in higher education to impart knowledge and skills; we can show what students do, pragmatically (that is, the kinds of activities they engage in); what teachers do, pragmatically; and what steps are being taken by institutions of higher education, alone or in collaboration; and we can begin to develop theoretical interpretations of what is happening. Here there is first a new emphasis placed on autonomous, self-directed, self-learning.

Trying to realise this is not something that is new: what is new is that for the first time developing, applying and practising autonomous learning can be done relatively easily through digitalised learning environments. Second, the concept of autonomous learning has been greatly strengthened by 'a change of paradigms in the field of learning theory'—the shift from epistemological realism to the view that we construct our own reality, something that is enabled to happen much more easily in a virtual learning environment that in a traditional classroom or lecture hall. (Here again, the difference between Peters and Holmberg could not be greater: Holmberg (2001), hardly discusses constructivism at all; cf. Holmberg, p. 48.) Third, Peters addresses the concept of the virtual society. Within this context, Peters avers that the net enables learning, teaching, and institutional behaviours, to be much more flexible.

Peters next outlines some of the emerging institutional patterns within higher education (he identifies four types), before asking where all this is leading us. Pedagogically, should we be digitalising practically all the relevant teaching, support and administrative functions of the university? In answer, he points to the way in which these new organisational forms have increased flexibility, but in general the full potential for change has yet to be achieved. This is particularly true of changes in pedagogy. In the final part of this chapter, then, Peters looks at the various pedagogic models that are emerging, of which he identifies six:

- The replication model—which essentially imitates conventional teaching and learning, so that only the medium is changed. Peters dismisses this model because in this model important and badly needed innovations in flexibility will not be made.
- The composite model in which traditional universities that begin to use digital technologies find students and staff beginning to exploit the real pedagogic possibilities of the medium.
- The '10-virtual spaces' model, where the technological functions of the digitalised learning environment (identified in Chapter 7) are exploited pedagogically. This model provides a flexibility that 'cannot be surpassed as it is highly individualised and allows each student to design his or her own curriculum' (p. 153).
- The virtual distance education model that combines net-based learning with some of the approaches commonly used in distance education.
- The 'learning by research' model, which consciously exploits the flexibility of the virtual university to encourage autonomous self-learning, with the ultimate model being the independent scholar doing research. This model is 'by far the most flexible one because it is radically individualised' (p. 153).
- A 'hybrid model'—the 'Virtual University of the Future': this will have to be a hybrid model, at least for some time to come, because of the cost of developing interactive multimedia courses. This model also provides 'extraordinary flexibility' (p. 153).

Time (and cost) will determine which of these models becomes the most popular one. Currently there is a long way to go—but the central idea driving the establishment of virtual universities 'must be to innovate learning and teaching in the university in order to adapt them to the requirements of the post-industrial,

post-modern knowledge society' (p. 154). Any one of the last five of Peters' models may, he says, 'become instrumental in innovating and modernising learning in higher education': 'The most important requirement of this innovation is to make both learning and teaching and the university itself as an institution more flexible' (p. 154).

Peters' final chapter argues the case for change in universities. As currently structured they are failing to meet the demands that post-modern society is placing on them: a new structure for university education is required. Peters believes that the priority of reaching those people who have been prevented from studying in the past, or who cannot engage in their own continuing education remains: these have been consistent objectives in distance education since its inception, and Peters carries them through into the future. But an additional priority is to transform the university so that it supports self-learning (something distance students already have to do), online learning (which will provide for curricular autonomy), and social intercourse. Crucially, for Peters, this last must involve personal interactions, face-to-face: those who believe that one can 'learn together apart' or teach 'face-to-face at a distance' deceive themselves (p. 164): there will be a need for traditional forms of academic teaching, but these too must foster independence on the part of the students. (Again, there is a contrast with Holmberg who has always seen the provision of face-to-face teaching within a distance teaching environment as essentially a backwards move—and of course, he is right to hold that it does reduce some of the flexibility of distance education.)

To provide these three ingredients, Peters argues that the university will have to be 'reorganised, restructured and rebuilt' (p. 164) around extensive communications systems; it will need new kinds of staff; it must have a new, highly flexible curricular structure; and it will need a professional student support system as a counterweight to the emphasis on self-learning and online learning. It will in fact look 'completely different' from the traditional university (p. 165). Achieving this will require vision and strategy: Peters provides us with the vision—all we need to do is realise it.

As I have tried to make clear, although there are differences between the positions adopted by Holmberg and Peters, much of the quintessential essence of Holmberg's position is actually subsumed within Peters' approach (i.e. the stress on self-learning and on social intercourse, although one should note Peters' critique of Holmberg's core theory of guided pedagogic conversation, in Peters, 1998, pp. 21–23). However, Holmberg's work is essentially narrow in its focus, compared with breadth and depth of Peters' work. Holmberg chose to title his book *Distance Education in Essence: an overview of theory and practice in the early twenty-first century*; Peters has called his new book *Distance Education in Transition: new trends and challenges*. There is still some value to be extracted from Holmberg's work, but this is not the book to use: if one wants to do this one should, in my view, return to the second edition of Holmberg's *Theory and Practice of Distance Education* (1995). Fundamentally, though, the problem that I have with these two books is that they cannot both reflect the real state of distance education in 2001/02. Peters poses the challenge: that distance education has changed, and is changing, so fundamentally in the face of the new electronic media that we need to rethink the way we think about teaching and

learning. Holmberg seems to be saying that the new media are not nearly as 'transformative' as Peters, for example, suggests. Personally I do not think that there is a contest here: I strongly recommend people to read Peters—not just Peters (2002), but Peters (1998) as well. These two works, along with a handful of others such as Laurillard (2001), and Latchem and Hanna (2001), are mapping the future—and the future is 'where it is at'.

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Flexible Learning in a Digital World
Betty Collis and Jef Moonen, 2001
Kogan Page
232 pp., £19.99
ISBN 0 7494 3371 X

Flexible Learning in a Digital World, by Betty Collis and Jeff Moonen, is a practical, informative and well-researched look at the complex realities of providing learning

opportunities in today's higher education environment. The authors draw on their extensive practical experiences to present a number of conceptual models to frame the book. Flexibility is the core concept, and is defined as student choice, not just in technology, but in various aspects such as time, content, entry requirements, instructional approach, resources, delivery and logistics. They introduce their 4-E Model, one which suggests that an individual's likelihood of making use of technology is a function of four groups of factors—environment, educational effectiveness, ease of use and engagement—and use it throughout the book to highlight examples. Of most value is the introduction of 18 lessons, around which the majority of the chapters of the book are organized. These lessons provide useful touchstones for anyone responsible for implementing flexible learning in their institution. They've also got a companion website at <http://education1.edte.utwente.nl/00Flexible Learning.nsf/FramesForm?ReadForm> which offers an amazing amount of resources.

Chapter 1's opening lesson is to 'be specific', meaning to define terms and express goals in concrete and measurable forms. They provide a thorough description of how they have conceptualized and implemented flexibility in their own work. The second lesson, 'move from student to professional', is a challenge to view student learning as a gradual orientation and introduction to a profession, where members begin to take on a more active role in their ongoing learning and development. Although the terminology is different, Collis and Moonen advocate a more constructivist orientation to learning, similar to many North American authors (e.g. Palloff & Pratt, 1999). They suggest a shift from knowledge acquisition instructional models to participation and contribution models.

The main lesson framing Chapter 2 is that 'you can't not do it', a thorough, if obvious, look at the trends and factors which are influencing higher education today. These include virtualization, lifelong learning, personalization for the individual learner, globalization and internationalization. They end this chapter with the warning that institutions must find a way to stabilize flexible learning and technology.

Chapter 3, 'Will they use it?', provides a much needed and useful introduction and overview to how educators adopt technology innovations. They offer many suggestions for how to actually provide staff development, again building upon their 4-E Model. Four more lessons are introduced to highlight various ideas around professional development, the most useful to 'be just in time' with any activity. The most insightful aspect of Chapter 3 for me was their observation about how early pioneers often get left behind when the institution comes to a larger scale implementation. For those of us who spent countless hours working independently and without support, finding out that we were not alone in being left out of later supported initiatives is comforting.

Chapter 4, 'Something for everyone', is a detailed and informative chapter on technology and technology choices. Their four lessons for this chapter are particularly insightful, and mirror my own experiences of using technology in both the private and public sectors, especially 'don't overload', a caution that more and better technology does not necessarily mean a better learning experience. Collis and

Moonen offer a different and valuable perspective on choosing a course management system, by stressing the decision making process as opposed to functionality, the focus of many other authors. I was a bit disappointed in this section, however, in that I wanted them to elaborate in just a bit more detail about the decision making process.

Chapter 5, 'Making the U-turn', introduces an excellent instructional model, especially for those who do not have an education background. It's actually a model for another buzzword these days, *blended learning*, which is, quite simply, finding the appropriate combination of traditional face-to-face and technology based approaches. This model takes into account the degree of flexibility and the goal of activities as two dimensions, and then offers suggestions for how instructors can plan for and accomplish various combinations. Although the authors suggest their model could apply to a corporate setting, I found the connection a bit weak, in that a good majority of online corporate work involves independent as opposed to instructor led training. Another weakness of this chapter is while they advocate online group activities, they do not provide strategies for how instructors can effectively do that. In that regard, Palloff and Pratt (1999) provide more of a roadmap for instructors than Collis and Moonen do. Similarly, I found their discussion of how learners adapt to online learning brief and a bit superficial. While they do promote the concept of learning community, this chapter is light on the conceptual frameworks that inform this particular approach to online learning, and the practical strategies that could make it work.

Chapter 6 is a provocative look at return on investment (ROI), a concept perhaps new to some in higher education, and frighteningly familiar to anyone in the corporate setting. In that regard, they do again focus on the higher education setting, and suggest that we consider ROI from the institution, student and instructor perspective. Their ideas are challenging, and their lessons 'to get a new measuring stick' and 'play the odds' useful. They also introduce an intriguing ROI tool that puts 'numbers' to aspects such as time, effort and growth. While I don't think this sort of ROI would stand up in a corporate setting as it's not tied directly enough to the bottom line, it does provide a creative way to get higher education institutions to think about the issues.

Chapters 7 and 8 are called 'Practicing what we preach' and are a detailed account of their experiences at the University of Twente in the Netherlands from 1997 to 2000 in leading their faculty to more flexible learning with technology. They use the 18 lessons introduced in the first six chapters to highlight various aspects of the phases they went through—from pioneering to initiation to implementation to institutionalization. This is one of the real strengths of the book, their suggestion that moving to a more technology rich environment takes time … and to expect at least 5 years to actually institutionalize any sort of change to delivery methods.

The final chapter, 'A new economy for education', is a consideration of what lies ahead. Principles of the new economy and trends are suggested. They end with four scenarios they feel could typify institutions in the future—back to basics, the global campus, stretching the mode, and the new economy—again, a provocative look at where higher education is heading.

Collis and Moonen's book is an excellent resource for anyone just moving into using technology in a higher education setting, and a comforting reinforcement for anyone who may have been doing it for a few years. Their book is a nice blend of theoretical considerations and practical strategies and examples. I've been teaching online since 1995 and have been working with numerous educational institutions to help them transition their campus programming to include technology. There was much in their experience that reinforced my own lessons learned, and some new lessons for me to take away. While they do suggest it could be used in a corporate setting, this is probably the weakest aspect of the book for me. Their examples and conceptual frameworks just don't translate that easily to the corporate sector in my experience. More business examples and consideration of competency or perform-ance based approaches to learning would need to be integrated. How flexible learning (*e-learning* is the term in business settings) needs to be integrated into other human resource functions, such as career and knowledge management, for example, would also need to be addressed. In that sense, Rosenberg's (2001) *E-Learning: building successful online learning in your organization* would appeal more to the corporate sector.

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Reflections on Ten Years of the Commonwealth of Learning
Gajaraj Dhanarajan, 2001
Commonwealth of Learning Vancouver
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Available from the Commonwealth of Learning at: < info@col.org >

Once conceived as an open university for the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was created with high ambitions and minimal resources. The original committee of experts chaired by Asa Briggs argued for a multilateral University of the Commonwealth for Co-operation in Distance Education. Wel-comed by most Commonwealth Heads of State as imaginative and constructive at their 1987 Vancouver meeting, they decided nevertheless that the University of the Commonwealth should be only a long-term possibility once funds had been raised from donor agencies and the private sector. It was left to a working group chaired by John Daniel to produce a concrete plan for an agency that would support the distance learning capacities of Commonwealth nations individually and collectively.

Briggs had proposed a £5m budget; Daniel suggested a budget that would rise to £2.5m in the fifth year. In this book the current President and CEO of COL, Raj Dhanarajan, takes the opportunity to reflect upon the first decade or so of COL's operations and to consider the enormity of the challenge ahead. These deliberations provide a springboard for his thoughts upon what the next 10 years may and should bring for COL and the challenges faced by those charged with planning and managing education.

The first chapter on the history of the idea of COL serves two purposes. It encourages those who follow to be as imaginative as the earlier generation, but it also serves to remind us of the sheer scale of the brief that COL was handed. Mandated to mobilise knowledge and expertise in the field of delivering distance education in the context of human resource development, 10 functions were envisaged for COL. The first, *creating and developing institutional capacity*, underlies all of the work and is ably illustrated in most of the 10 brief case studies that illustrate the second chapter. These case studies of educational innovation and change in various Commonwealth countries are success stories in their own right, but they also convey some flavour of the methods adopted by COL. Stylistically, this approach inevitably works far better than the parallel expansion of the 10 functions which, like any list, hides much of the richness of real activity. This section of the book is plausible and largely convincing, but at times one is left hungry for some expansion. For example, we are told (p. 31) that COL has managed to become a part of the enormous innovation and development in Commonwealth distance education by identifying the important questions and devising strategic approaches to intervention. Some hints as to what are those big questions and more explanation of what constitutes strategic intervention in his context would have been welcome. Nevertheless, the evolution of the work and the changing pattern of involvement is well explained.

At this point Dhanarajan takes us through the vastness of the educational need that the world faces. Without even mentioning HIV/AIDS, he reminds us of the 960 million adults who are illiterate, the 130 million children who do not have access to primary schooling, as well as the functionally illiterate, the physically challenged, the gender gap, refugees and the long-term unemployed. These he sets in the context of four globally significant changes: technological development, the global nature of economic competitiveness, economic liberalism leading to greater requirements for efficiency and the wide recognition that education is an effective way to break out of the poverty cycle. To these he adds later the death of distance, the adoption of English as a global language, and the inability of governments to fully fund educational services. He reminds us too that as long ago as 1994 the General Agreement of Trade and Services included education in the list of services to be liberalised. No country meets the requirement for exemption that its education system is completely publicly financed and administered. GATT and its successor WTO list many barriers that need to be removed that include restrictions on direct overseas investment in education, high government subsidies and the existence of education monopolies.

He concludes this section by saying, 'It is in this milieu of ever changing circumstances that COL must define its role in the Commonwealth—that there

should be a role for it seems implicitly obvious'. The remainder of the book begins to clarify that role by identifying new directions for COL and the threats that the Commonwealth faces if it does not keep pace with the changing educational demands. For COL the considerations include building on COL's stated strength of conceptualising activities when often faced with 'questions raised and an almost blank sheet of paper', fostering alliances and partnerships and building practical demonstrations (models) of exemplary practice. On top of these he adds networking and advocacy and brokering access to information and rights to publish. He also sees the digital age as offering the opportunity for COL to provide commissioned generic materials that can be locally adapted.

Although there is almost no mention of funding in this book, it is the unspoken theme that runs throughout its 80 pages. The £2.5m proposed by Daniel now seems derisory in the face of the challenge the Commonwealth faces, and it is implied that the actually funding has fallen short of that figure, let alone the £5m originally envisaged by Asa Briggs. Dhanarajan is right to call for vision. The revolution that has created distance learning institutions and programmes that have been able split asunder any link between quality education and ability to pay has flourished in the Commonwealth. This revolution may have started in higher education but it is rapidly spreading to all levels and in so doing offers the promise of being a key feature of poverty alleviation and economic and social development. This book does us all a service by reminding us not just what COL has achieved, but how much there is to do. It challenges us all, not just the policy makers and funding bodies, to provide the support that is needed.

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Leadership for the 21st Century Learning: global perspectives from educational innovators
Edited by Colin Latchem and Donald E. Hanna, 2001
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267 pp.
ISBN 0 7494 3204 7

Leadership for the 21st Century Learning: global perspectives from educational innovators is published as part of the Open and Distance Learning Series. Latchem and Hanna take a very current topic and provide a basis for analysis and personal review by incorporating personal interviews with well known experts in the field of open and distance learning.

The book is presented in three distinct sections: the first five chapters are devoted to the development of the argument for change in institutions; the second component of the book is comprised of interviews of a variety of selected individuals

representing different institutions, roles, and personal perspectives; finally, the authors conclude with a summary of lessons for the future.

Kotter (1996) defines leadership as a 'set of processes that creates organizations … or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with vision and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles'. Latchem and Hanna have chosen a topic for their text, which is important for open and distance education, and one which transcends all forms of traditional and non-traditional institutions. Ensuring the viability and future of an institution is a challenge worth exploring and certainly this text provides an interesting collection of important insights from experienced distance educators.

Latchem and Hanna take the time to describe their view of the current state in distance education institutions today. They provide a solid overview of the environment, evolving organizational structures, the external factors at play and the responses to those external factors. The bias of the text is that the only constant in institutions is change and there is no way to control the systemic changes that have occurred. Rather, the task at hand is to find effective and innovative ways to meet these challenges of change. The editors have high hopes for the organizational structures of today to be adaptable and future oriented.

Written from a business perspective, the first section of the book has a harder edge to it than others we may see in this field, but it is accessible and practical in its approach. For example, they refer to customers as opposed to students or learners; they describe the entrepreneurial culture of an institution and they provide models for organizational change and organizational reform. The authors build a strong case for institutional change, they provide clear examples of evidence of change and they provide structures and terminology for leaders to use when communicating change processes. They also have provided clear examples for frameworks for planning and managing change processes within organizations. The first section of the book argues for a move towards a demand driven market, with changing priorities, and describes how leaders can guide their institutions through the necessary adjustments to make the transition to a supply driven model.

Finally, they take the time to differentiate between the role of an effective leader and the role of the effective manger in an educational system. The leader must be able to have a vision for the future and to communicate this to others in such a manner that they will be able to contribute to the development of that vision.

Latchem and Hanna address the creative tension between the social good of education and the economic imperatives that are driving change. They tackle the role of the academic in this period of change to a demand driven market and they make no apologies for the recommendations they make. Interestingly written and evocative the book provides a substantial amount of background information to inform the reader before they are introduced to the various perspectives of the experts who were interviewed.

Chapters 6–23 are a collection of personal interviews with individuals who represent a broad section of expertise in open and distance education. The interviews prove to be a very effective way of providing real examples of institutional

challenges and how practical leadership made an impact. The editors have been very good at shaping the interviews to respect the individual and their respective strengths; it is a real pleasure to read the interviews and to clearly hear the personalities of the individuals through their words. The editors are to be commended for the care that is obvious in reflecting the true nature of the personalities interviewed. We have the privilege of hearing a variety of well known individuals, including Betty Collis, Sir John Daniel, Dominique Abrioux, Dato' Gajaraj Dhanarajan and many others, speak of the challenges they faced in leadership positions and how they addressed them. Also included in the list of interviewees are individuals who spoke of leadership qualities in others and identified characteristics and traits that are important in good leaders.

Although the interviews are interesting to read, the structure of the questions vary from interview to interview; one can only assume that the reason for this was to preserve the individual personalities and to respect the position and experience base of the interviewee. This collection of interviews is a fine illustration of the quality of expertise that is available in the distance education field today. It is also a very valuable and effective way of sharing the lessons of experts in a candid and open format. The interviews alone make this text a worthwhile and relevant addition to the reading list of experienced and new comers to distance education. A common theme that ran through many of the interviews, in addition to having a clear vision, is the importance of developing solid, trusting relationships with the individuals in the institution. The focus on the human dynamic in the institution is very much a central theme of the leaders in distance and open learning.

The final chapter of the text provides a synthesis of the 'values, concepts and strategies' drawn from the interviews and the literature. Presented in bullet-form lists, the authors have provided qualitative descriptors of the characteristics of effective leaders including tolerance of ambiguity and flexibility as just two examples. They go on to illustrate an eight-part process for leaders to follow in transformational change processes that can be used at the institutional, departmental or programme level. One is struck by the practicality of the lists and the lessons learned; this demonstrates a true commitment to knowledge transfer and sharing. The challenge in any book of this type is to be sufficiently detailed to provide a good grounding while at the same time provide an interesting framework for others to be able to garner and adapt lessons to fit their own personal situation. The authors have accumulated a wonderful array of real case examples that could be used very effectively in a teaching situation. This text will be useful both with the learner and the practitioner as a guide, as an inspiration and as a comparative text. The inclusion of the interviews begins an interesting collection of legacy materials from leaders in distance education and warrants further effort and expansion. Perhaps their next project?

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Reference

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Internet-Based Learning: an introduction and framework for higher education and business
Edited by Deanie French, Charles Hale, Charles Johnson and Gerald Farr, 1999
Kogan Page (outside USA and Canada) and Stylus Publishing (inside USA and Canada)
0 7494 2935 6 paperback
0 7494 2936 6 hardback

Internet-Based Learning is presented as an introduction for 'every educator and trainer who wants to use to the Internet's instructional opportunities even if his or her own personal computer skills are limited'. What follows is a series of chapters (essays from different contributors) woven together and linked by a series of objectives that are described in the book's introduction. The result is a book that feels like a self-help manual where the development of ideas isn't always coherent. The lack of clarity in the structure of headings and the overall poor typography was annoying and a barrier to understanding. Having said that, *Internet-Based Learning* was thought provoking and contains some useful checklists and tips.

The first two chapters consider the environment of the web and the learner. Preparing for Internet-based learning introduces the concept of self-directed learning. It identifies the skills students and tutors need for successful self-directed learning, the potential barriers and ways of overcoming them. Learning to learn in a WWW-based environment articulates and illustrates the core components of learning to learn. A case study from the University of Twente in the Netherlands provides examples of how students can be supported in their learning using web technology.

The third chapter provides ideas on how teachers can start to augment their teaching using the web and includes lots of examples across disciplines.

The following two chapters describe web-based tools. Deanie French presents progressively more sophisticated ways for teachers to integrate the web into their work. The use of chat rooms, email and bulletin boards within a course is introduced, as is searching the Internet for instructional resources. Dave Harris' chapter on Internet-based learning tools is a well-written tour of tools such as email, listservs, bulletin boards, online courses, etc. Written by different contributors, there is some duplication between the two chapters which is annoying. These two chapters could be usefully combined to provide one coherent introduction to Internet tools and how they can be used to augment teaching. The book could have been vastly improved with the inclusion of a chapter showing practical ways to encourage learner participation over the Internet, but this was an opportunity missed.

The next chapter, 'What's in it for the adult learner', introduces 'the Model of Situated Learning', which identifies the factors that 'have an impact on the effectiveness of any educational experience'.

Chapter 7 describes the virtual classroom and considers the issues it raises for providers who haven't traditionally supported distance learning. The issues discussed include benchmarking, quality control, acceptance of Internet-based learning, revenue models, unpredictable enrolment and marketing. The chapter includes examples of different approaches to virtual courses and is supported by lots of web links.

Chapter 8 describes a three layer model (content, interface and infrastructure) that constitutes a complete learning environment. Some of the anecdotes in this chapter could have been used to add interest and depth to the chapters on web-based tools. I wondered why no mention was made of commercial learning environments and administrative systems as this book is aimed at business as well as higher education.

Chapter 9 pays a superficial look at web-related assessment and evaluation.

A final chapter looks at perspectives on the future of Internet-based learning, and a glossary of terms and an excellent index of Internet resources complete the book.

Overall, *Internet-Based Learning* is a useful introduction to the opportunities and issues associated with delivering learning over the web. It contains lots of useful web links and has a supporting website. Trying to link the chapters through a series of 'objectives' is clumsy and doesn't succeed. The book would be better presented as a series of essays from experienced practitioners, many of whom are based at the Southwest Texas State University. As such, the book could be forgiven its faults.

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