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FOR DISTANCE AND OPEN LEARNING

Distance Education and Open Learning: Prospects for Jamaica

Public lecture by Dr. Dennis Irvine,
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Let me begin by first of all thanking Christine Marrett, and whoever else was involved in the selection, for doing me the honour of asking me to give this public lecture. I do not mean to dampen your expectations, but I think I should let you know, as an act of confession rather than contrition that, apart from an early acquaintance with UWIDITE at a distance, my knowledge and experience of distance education and open learning date back no further than July 1989 when I joined the staff of the newly established Commonwealth of Learning headquartered in Vancouver, Canada. I hope nonetheless that my effort today will receive a better evaluation than that given to a self-conscious young clergyman who was, to use a phrase, supplying the pulpit of a country church. After the service he asked one of the deacons, a grizzled, plain-spoken man, what he thought of his effort. "Well", answered the old man slowly, "I'll tell you in a kind of parable. I remember Tunk Weatherbee's first deer hunt, when he was green. He followed the deer's tracks all right, but he followed 'em all day in the wrong direction."

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND OPEN LEARNING: PROSPECTS FOR JAMAICA

Introduction

Although distance education and open learning have been around in one form or another for a long time, it is probably true to say that their rise to prominence owes much to the success of the Open University in the U.K. From very hesitant and uncertain beginnings in 1970, this radically "new" institution with its innovations of open admissions and multimedia distance learning, was to become a quarter of a century later easily the largest university in Britain, and the inspiration for the establishment of similar institutions in other parts of the world. But the appearance of clones of the UKOU was not the only striking sequel of the latter's success. Developments also took another and perhaps much more significant turn. Traditional universities and other institutions of higher learning soon realized that to expand access to tertiary education, a goal that had suddenly assumed critical dimensions, did not necessitate conversion to an open university; all that was required was the adoption of its methodology. The result was an exponential explosion in the use of distance education, and this explosion has continued unabated throughout the decade of the nineties. Indeed so extensive has been the spread and growth of distance education and open learning, fuelled in large part by the rapid advances in communications technologies which have been a defining feature of the last two decades of the 20th century, that countries whose institutions fail to keep in step with this onward march of the new education paradigm run the real risk of being marginalized in a competitive global economy where knowledge is indeed power.

Distance Education and Open Learning

It has become commonplace to use distance education and open learning as if they are inextricably linked. While this may be largely true <u>in practice</u>, it is important to realize that there is a significant difference <u>in theory</u> between the two.

Since the late 1970s there has been considerable discussion and debate regarding the definition of distance education. Whatever the differences of opinion that exist, there seems to be

general consensus that distance education should in no way be equated with the various methods by which courses for independent study may be delivered. Thus teaching by television, or by computer, would not by itself qualify to be called distance education. To quote Renwick[1], "the essence of distance learning courses is that they have been conceived, devised and produced to support guided self-instruction. The men and women who devise them begin with students and what they can be expected to bring to a course of study, as well as with bodies of knowledge and any difficulties there may be in 'teaching' them at a 'distance', and they employ principles of learning to guide students through the courses they develop".

Perhaps the definition of distance education most widely embraced by educators is that proposed by Verduin and Clark[2], based on criteria developed by Keegan[3]. Verduin and Clark list four defining elements of distance education:

(i)   the separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of the instructional process.

(ii)   the influence of an educational organization, including the provision of student evaluation.

(iii)   the use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and carry course content.

(iv)   the provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor or educational agency <u>and</u> learner.

A few observations about these elements are in order. The first element may be said to be a distinctive feature of distance education while numbers (iii) and (iv), which fall under the

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[1]The future of face-to-face and distance teaching in post-secondary education. <u>W. Renwick</u>. Paper prepared for the OECD Secretariat, 1993

[2]Distance Education. The foundations of effective practice. <u>John R. Verduin and Thomas Clark</u>. Josey Bass, 1991

[3]The Foundation of Distance Education. <u>D. Keegan</u> Croom Helm, London 1986

general category of student support services, are features which distinguish distance education from correspondence study. It should be noted that the use of educational media and communications technologies constitutes only a part, albeit an important part, of the defining elements of distance education. And it is worth remarking en passant that distance education as defined is very rarely encountered in real life situations.

Distance education can perhaps be regarded as a methodology of education delivery. By contrast open learning represents a philosophy of education. Open learning stresses the centrality of learner choice, and in a completely open system learners can learn whatever they wish, for whatever reasons, wherever they choose, and however they desire. One should point out that few 'open learning' systems are entirely open. However, this has not been a bar to the widespread use of the nomenclature.

According to Roger Lewis[4], the essential characteristics of open learning are:

X open learning is learner- rather than institution-centred

X open learning implies the use of a wide range of teaching/learning strategies

X open learning is about removing barriers to learning, particularly those inherent in conventional education/training provision.

Lewis identifies these barriers as:

physical/time -   location of course

       - time of classes

       - time of exams

educational   content of course

       - sequence of content

       - method of delivery

       - inappropriate objectives

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[4]What is Open Learning. Roger Lewis in Key Issues in Open Learning edited by Alan Tait. Longman in association with the Open University, 1992

individual	lack of awareness of what is possible
-	lack of confidence
-	entry requirements
financial	cost of travel and fees
-	cost of release from employment
-	cost of course material

I invite your attention to the barrier of entry requirements in particular. Progressive educators have long felt that higher education has tended on the whole to place too much emphasis on entry and not nearly enough on exit standards. Admittedly there has to be some means of ensuring that only persons who can follow and benefit from a particular programme of study are permitted to enrol in it. But this is quite different from laying down hard and fast admissions criteria, very often based on performance in a single examination. It is only fair to observe that in recent times, in response to the need and demand to increase enrolments in higher education, a more liberal approach to entry requirements is being adopted.

It is not too hard to see from the above that distance education and open learning are not in fact two opposing concepts. They deal with different things. Distance education, to borrow from Roger Lewis, stresses the means by which education is achieved while open learning emphasizes the objectives and character of the educational process. At the technological level there is little to choose between them. Thus the 'open learning' Open College in the U.K. provides courses through a combination of broadcasting on radio and television, workbooks, videos, audiocassettes, computer software where appropriate, and kits, coupled with "local support provided by colleges, employers and other learning establishments". Compare this with the 'distance teaching' Open University which teaches "through a combination of printed course texts, television, radio, audio- and video-cassettes, kits, computers, correspondence tuition, telephone tuition, compulsory residential schools, and optional face-to-face tuition at local study centres". Since in practice there is generally not much difference between distance education and

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open learning, in this lecture the terms will be used interchangeably, with reference made to one or the other where, in the particular context, its usage seems appropriate for purposes of clarity.

Because distance education had its real genesis and development in the higher education sector, it has tended to become associated in people's minds with higher education. But from earliest times, and in its primitive form as correspondence education, distance education had served a much wider clientele. And within relatively recent times we have witnessed the branching out and expansion of distance education into such areas as teacher education, where it has probably had the greatest success, extension education, adult education, workplace education and training, and continuing professional development of all kinds. It has been employed to widen access to secondary education, to educate refugees, to advance literacy, and to bring women into the education mainstream in countries where access to education through the normal channels has been closed. What is more, distance education is now no longer the prerogative of educational institutions. Companies are increasingly using open and distance learning to satisfy their training needs; International organizations are adopting it as part of the training component in projects they support; and the number of distance education initiatives emanating from non-governmental organizations has risen significantly. There is scarcely a field of study that distance education has not touched and limitations on its use in scientific and technological subject areas are being overcome quite dramatically with the emergence of computer simulation and the advent of virtual reality.

Until recently there were many, within and without academe, who regarded distance education as being inferior to conventional face-to-dace education, and indeed a substantial number of persons still hold to this belief. To borrow from Kirkpatrick and Jakupec[5], the view is that 'good' teaching can only be face-to-face, and learning can only take place in specific

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[5]Becoming flexible: what does it mean? <u>Denise Kirkpatrick and Viktor Jakupec</u> in the Convergence of Distance and Conventional Education edited by Alan Tait and Roger Mills; Routledge, 1999

environments and in the presence of a teacher. The onus has always been on distance education and open learning to demonstrate that they are able to fulfil traditional values, and meet normal expectations. The view that 'good' teaching can only be face-to-face derives of course from an idealistic view of what takes place in the encounter between teacher and students in the classroom. In practice as we all know the reality is far different, which accounts for the current frenzy of activity worldwide to do something about improving the quality of teaching in higher education, in many cases following the philosophy of instruction which characterizes distance education.

Of course one does not establish the validity of something by exposing the invalidity of another, and few would question the proposition that if distance education and open learning are to fulfil the fundamental purpose of higher education, which is not simply the transmission of information but the acquisition by the learner of critical thinking skills and of certain other qualities essential to living and working in a modern society that is changing rapidly, then their application must be such as to facilitate a true discourse between learner and teacher, and a sharing of ideas and experiences between learner and other learners occupying the same domain. New advances in communication technologies are beginning to make all this possible. As Mark Chambers[6] observes, "synchronous interactions with one's cohort via Web 'Chat' and INTERNET-based bulletin boards, as well as nearly synchronous e-mail interaction between tutors and their learners, raise the prospect that distance learning materials and procedures will increasingly resemble their contact course analogues".

Not everyone from the ranks of traditional academics subscribes to the notion of inferior status of distance education. Jevons[7], for instance, has argued that the 'second best' image of

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[6]The efficacy and ethics of using digital multimedia for educational purposes. Mark Chambers in the Convergence of Distance and Conventional Education, ibid

[7]Blurring the boundaries: Parity and Congruence. F. Jevons in Education at a Distance: from issues to practice, edited by D.R. Garrison and D. Shale. Robert E. Krieger, Florida, 1990

distance education is historical rather than grounded in fact. "Inevitably distance education will come off second best", he observes, "if it is compared with a rosily nostalgic view of campus-based education in which there is never a timetable clash to restrict subject choice; in which no student and no teacher ever has an illness or a family crisis; in which every student participates eagerly in tutorials and discusses work with other students late in the night; in which all teachers are in complete command over everything they teach and are adept in every pedagogic strategy and ruse". "I have repeatedly asked", he goes on, "if such a university exists will someone please tell me where it is?" Jevons contends that distance education has advantages as well as disadvantages compared with conventional education, and that it is therefore misleading to simply ask which is better when comparing the two modes. The question he says should be "better for what, and in what circumstances".

This is as good a point as any to dispel the popular misconception that distance education is a cheap option. The developmental cost of a quality distance education programme, in terms of learning materials, technological infrastructure, and training, is very high, and as a result the economic case for distance education generally only holds where the scale of operation is large, as for instance in teacher training. Since learning materials, in most instances, require review every five years or so to ensure their currency and there is a limit to what one can charge a student to recover cost, it is fairly obvious that small countries like Jamaica are at a disadvantage compared to large countries in operating a high quality, viable distance education operation. The 'second best image' to which Jevons refers is not just historical, but derives from cases where inadequate investment has fulfilled the prophecy of savings but at the price of dubious quality of output.

Jevons has cited six types of advantage in distance education, and quite independently Erling Ljosa[8] in his article, "Distance Education in a Modern Society", has affirmed several of

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[8]Distance education in a modern society. Erling Ljosa in Key issues in open learning edited by Alan Tait. Longman in association with the Open University, 1992

them while putting forward a few of his own. A distillation of their views on the uses of distance education leads to the conclusion that the following are roles which distance education and open learning may be reasonably called upon to fulfil in a 21st century society.

X   extending geographical access to education. This is particularly true of rural and remote areas. Even where at the lower educational levels access can be achieved through the provision of conventional schools, it is extremely rare that the education they provide compares favourably in quality with that available to their urban counterparts.

X   providing second chance education. A considerable number of persons leave the education system before completing secondary schooling or taking a higher education qualification. Such persons may or may not be employed. But whether for circumstantial or psychological reasons, the return to conventional 'schooling' is not an appropriate option for them. Millions of persons worldwide have now had a second chance education by means of distance education.

X   expanding institutional capacity for regular programmes as well as for new areas of study.

X   providing speedy and efficient training for key or neglected target groups. The prime example of training for a key target group is teacher training for primary and secondary education. Distance education is now used all over the world to train and upgrade such teachers in large numbers at relatively low cost. An example of a neglected target group is pre-school teachers, although it has to be admitted that there has been a recent change here for the better.

X   offering the combination of education with work and family life. This was the breakthrough which the UKOU achieved. Originally established with the objective of expanding access to university education by ordinary school leavers,

the UKOU very quickly became flooded with applications from working adults and housewives. Today they constitute more than two-thirds of the UKOU enrolment.

X   providing information and education for large audiences. Distance education, especially with the help of the mass media, can be an effective means of disseminating information and organizing short educational programmes when there is a need to educate large audiences. Primary health care and environmental education are examples of subject areas that come readily to mind.

X   providing on-the-job training. There are an increasing number of examples of companies making use of distance and open learning to train staff on the job, and thus maintain or enhance productive competitiveness. There are also many examples of educational institutions cooperating with industry to offer tailor-made programmes for the workplace. And lastly,

X   facilitating the process of lifelong learning and the acquisition of multiple competencies. People need to continue learning to keep abreast of new developments. We are also entering an era when persons will need to develop competence in more than one field, and also to change occupations during their life-span, e.g. an engineer who decides to take up a managerial position, a businessman who needs language training, or an administrator wishing to know something about database development, and so on.

This brief overview will, I hope, have given you a general appreciation of the significance and importance of distance education and open learning for widening access to learning opportunities, and for contributing to human resource development along a broad spectrum of need. I now turn specifically to a consideration of their prospects for Jamaica. The

prospects are governed by the twin factors of potential and possibilities, so these words will crop up in place of prospects from time to time.

Prospects for Distance Education and Open Learning in Jamaica

In considering the prospects of distance education and open learning for Jamaica, the logical frame of reference is the roles which have just been cited as ones which they should be called upon to fulfil in a modern society. At the practical level however a certain degree of overlap occurs among some of the roles. To address the complication, the headings under which the prospects are discussed below have been made somewhat broader and more generic. The possibilities mentioned are by no means exhaustive. I have selected those that satisfy one of two criteria. Firstly, there are those that may be considered to be of critical importance in so far as human resource, and by extension economic and social, development is concerned. And secondly, they are ones which experience in the rest of the Caribbean and elsewhere confirms are more readily achievable.

Expanding access in higher and tertiary education

At their meeting in Montego Bay a little under two years ago, CARICOM Heads of Government endorsed the philosophy, goals, and strategies outlined in the document entitled "Creative and Productive Citizens for the Twenty-First Century", which had been approved by Ministers Responsible for Education. Among the goals listed in that document was an enrolment of at least 15% of the post secondary age cohort in tertiary level education by the year 2005. Jamaica is committed to this goal, and has accepted the view expressed in the document that distance education should be a crucial element of the strategy to realize this objective. UWI, for all sorts of reasons not least prior experience in the field, an institutional framework islandwide, and the necessary technological infrastructure, clearly has a lead role to play, and UWIDEC has shown signs of rising to the challenge. Latest information shows that programmes currently on offer to Jamaicans include:

B.Sc. Social Sciences (Level 1 in Accounting and Economics)

B.Sc. Management Studies

B.Sc. Agribusiness Management

B.Ed. Educational Administration

B.A. in French Studies

Advanced Diploma in Construction Engineering

Certificate in Business Administration

Certificate in Public Administration

Certificate in Adult Education

Certificate in Educational Management and Supervision

Certificate in Education for the teaching of: Mathematics; Literacy Studies; and Social

Studies.

At first glance this seems impressive, but the pace of development of distance education programmes is put in proper perspective if we bear in mind that the decision by UWI to function as a dual mode institution was taken in 1993, and that several of the programmes listed, largely the Certificates, were on offer prior to that. To be fair to UWI it is not the only institution that has found the transition from the single traditional mode to dual mode painful. At the same time the marriage between potential and possibilities at UWI is unlikely to be fully consummated unless and until the majority of academics embrace the ideology and practice of distance education and open learning.

As part of its strategy to increase tertiary level enrolment, UWI is committed to working with tertiary level institutions, Schools of Continuing Studies, Community Colleges and regional organizations to develop distance education programmes for professional development and continuing education. But Community Colleges have the potential to play a much larger role, and in Jamaica the existence of several such Colleges, and the opportunity this affords to band together as a consortium to develop and deliver distance education programmes at diploma and

associate degree levels in particular, suggest possibilities that are not beyond the scope of careful planning and the pooling of resources.

In viewing access to higher and tertiary education one should of course think not only in terms of the contributions which local institutions can make to the process of satisfying demand. There is enough evidence to suggest that growth in distance education in Jamaica will not be confined to what happens in these institutions. Programmes in business and law from offshore universities are already widely advertised, and more will undoubtedly follow. One can also foresee institutions setting up local subsidiaries and making use of distance education methodologies to offer programmes of the parent body. Other likely developments include 'franchising'. This will take two forms. In one case an overseas institution will enter into an agreement with a local institution for the latter to deliver by distance the former's programmes, leading to the overseas institution's degrees. In the other scenario the local institution will use distance education courses of the overseas institution towards fulfillment of the requirements of its own degrees.

Developments of these kinds should be cautiously embraced rather than openly resisted, if only because it is clear that local institutions by themselves will not be able to respond to all the demands for access to higher education, within the requisite time frame. What is however crucial is that there should be in place mechanisms to ensure that the relevance and quality of the programmes on offer conform to established standards. The University Council of Jamaica has both the mandate and capacity to perform this function.

The Canada Caribbean Distance Education Scholarship Programme (CCDESP), a pilot project initiated by the Commonwealth of Learning in 1998 with funding and support from the Canadian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, is an outstanding example of expansion of access to higher education in the Caribbean through cooperation with offshore universities. In this project, in which UWI is playing an important collaborative role, three Canadian Universities (Memorial, Mount Saint Vincent and Athabasca) are delivering

degree programmes by distance to students from Dominica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines and St. Lucia, and Jamaica in Teacher Education, Tourism and Hospitality Management, and Information Technology respectively. It is estimated that delivery of the programmes by distance has reduced the cost per student from Cd$20,000[+] per year to approximately Cd$7,000 per year, inclusive of COL's administration and management fees.

Finally, the demonstrated potential of on-line programme delivery for increasing access to higher education offers distinct possibilities for the future of distance education in Jamaica. Currently the European Mission is supporting the development of seven graduate programmes being offered at a distance, using INTERNET technology, by UWI in association with three universities in the Dominican Republic. Also a few courses and programmes are being tested for web-based delivery by UWIDEC. And UTech is contemplating an INTERNET link with Community Colleges for delivery of franchised programmes.

Providing second chance education

Out-of-school youth and drop-outs from the school system constitute an immense challenge for all Caribbean countries, so far as providing second chance education is concerned. These young people represent a growing social problem, and the usual tried approach of trying to give them some form of employable skills by means of various non-formal training schemes can hardly be deemed an unqualified success; not surprisingly, given the weak educational foundation on which these schemes attempt to build. Conventional means of addressing the education of these youths have also failed to achieve desired outcomes. These drop-outs are simply not interested in returning to the form and substance of schooling that was largely the reason for their abandoning it in the first place. However, there is growing optimism that open learning and distance education, making use of the potential of what has come to be called the 'knowledge media', could be exploited to address the problem to good effect. I shall use the term open schooling to describe the conjunction of these three elements.

I include myself in the company of those who believe that over the long term open schooling has the potential to give rise to the most dramatic development in education in Jamaica, and indeed in the Caribbean, in the 21st century. I know of at least one country in the region that has shown interest in the concept of strategically sited learning centres, each fully equipped with the technologies to enable more non-traditional approaches to learning to be applied, and thus able to respond to the need of different individuals for different stimuli to learn. Self-instructional print materials, radio and television broadcasts with back up audio and video tapes, computer mediated and assisted learning, videoconferencing when affordable, computer networking and the INTERNET, would be the kinds of technological tools employed at each centre, which would also have the human support of tutors, counsellors, administrators and technicians. This decentralized 'school' model could serve a variety of purposes: from educating out-of-school youth, to skills training for persons in the production sector; professional updating; and general public education.

The attraction of open schooling is of course not limited to its applicability to the education of out-of-school youth. It is equally being viewed as a possible means of contributing to the goal of achieving universal secondary education which, from the experience of the newly industrialized countries, appears to be a sine quo non for rapid economic development. Nor does open schooling necessarily have to assume the sophisticated model I have just outlined. During 1994-96, the Eagle Foundation in Jamaica conducted a pilot project in which students participated in an open distance education programme using self-learning materials in four subjects - English, mathematics, integrated science and social studies - based on the respective CXC syllabuses. The results of the pilot were very encouraging, but alas the project had to be terminated for lack of financial sponsorship.

In certain other parts of the world, though, open schooling is not only thriving but expanding rapidly. Open schools for primary and secondary students can now be found in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and initiatives to establish

similar institutions are being considered in South Africa, Egypt, China and Nigeria. At the request of the Ministry of Education; COL is in the process of assessing the feasibility of open schooling for Jamaica.

The potential and possibilities for open learning in Jamaica are considerable, not just in terms of increasing access but also from the perspective to achieve equity by ensuring accessibility to quality education for everyone. The cost implications are however substantial, requiring relatively huge investments in learning materials, organizational framework and technological infrastructure. These requirements, and the cost involved in fulfilling them, must inevitably cast a shadow of doubt on the near term prospects for open schooling here.

Speedy and efficient training for key groups

From the point of view of numbers, and therefore of economy of scale, two groups readily spring to mind where distance education has been used with great success in other countries for the purposes of speedy, efficient training. They are teachers and nurses. In Jamaica distance education has been used for training teachers with considerable success, and several examples attest to this. Indeed it can be argued that distance education has now become a well-established, viable, and accepted alternative to the conventional method of training teachers Jamaica, and no doubt will come to be considered as a permanent and integral part of teacher education in the country in the very near future.

The failure, or reluctance, to employ distance education to address the shortage of trained nurses is inexplicable. But one of the tragedies about open learning and distance education in the Caribbean as a whole is the narrowly held view of it as having relevance only to the education sector. This has meant that important sectors such as health and agriculture for example, have simply failed to exploit its obvious potential, presumably because of ignorance of its relevance.

Public education

Radio and television are already being used for public education in Jamaica, but generally in a sporadic and haphazard manner. However the verdict is in and we need to be influenced by

it. A well-informed, literate population is a sine quo non for economic and social development, and a vibrant democracy. This being the case a much greater effort will need to be made to systematize the use of radio and television for public education. Health education, citizenship education, family life education, parenting, environmental education, etc. are all areas that lend themselves to radio and television broadcasts. The Caribbean Broadcasting Union, under COL sponsorship and with funding from CDB, has carried out a study on the feasibility of using the broadcast media in distance education. That study is supportive of a move in this direction. But there is a real danger of its languishing in the shelves of the CBU gathering dust. This would be a great pity and something of an indictment on our education policy makers. It seems to me however that there are enough education lobby groups around to ensure that the report gets at least a fair hearing, and one hopes that they will seize the initiative in this regard.

Public libraries have had a long tradition of being passive providers of education for the general public. The technology now available, which is considered very affordable from a cost-benefit perspective, affords them the opportunity to become active providers. I am aware that the Ministry of Industry and Commerce has plans to convert public libraries in Jamaica to learning centres, although I do not know the details. I hope however that the vision extends beyond the power of the computer, critical as that is to the concept of a learning society. A learning centre should ideally cater to different needs of the population and different styles of learning. In my discussion earlier of Open Schooling, I gave a picture of what one territory in the region saw as the features of a learning centre, and I would commend this approach to the Ministry if it is not already on their agenda.

Continuing education, professional development and lifelong learning

I have grouped these three things together because of the obvious links between them. There is general consensus that open learning and distance education have a vital role to play in all three areas, and that more and more they will come to constitute major items of the higher, further and public education agenda. Professions based on the so-called 'hard' sciences, such as

engineering and medicine, will be the ones most affected, because of the rate of expansion of knowledge in these fields and, by extension, the pace of obsolescence. This is also true to some extent for agriculture, but in Jamaica and other countries like it where much of the agriculture is in the hands of small farmers, whose educational background is somewhat limited, there are obvious constraints to the use of distance education as a continuing education tool.

In this connection it is perhaps worth mentioning in passing, nonetheless, a project that COL is currently piloting in the country. The project involves helping agricultural extension officers to produce and edit their own video productions for use in training farmers. The technique, one should add however, need not be limited to agriculture and there are obvious possibilities for application in fields such as education and health.

Engineering and medicine may be professional fields where the relevance of open learning and distance education for continuing education and professional development readily springs to mind, but that relevance can also be extended to Law and Teaching even if not with the same degree of urgency. Yet in the case of the latter it is possible to argue that the quality of education in Jamaica could benefit enormously from a policy of "recertification" linked to a programme of professional development for teachers. In such an event distance education would have a pivotal role to play.

The prospects for the use of open learning and distance education in continuing education and professional development in Jamaica depend to a large extent on how quickly and to what extent the new technologies taking root such as the INTERNET, and the older technologies such as videoconferencing, computer conferencing and computer based learning are embraced and exploited. There seems on the face of it no insurmountable reason, for instance, why every General Medical Practitioner should not be able with the help of the Faculty of Medicine at UWI to remain abreast of developments in the fields of medicine and public health pertinent to their practice. And the concept of just in time training, borrowed from production scheduling and now being applied in industrialized countries in the context of corporate training, appears to me to be

something which our educational institutions and professional associations could profitably discuss together in the context of technology-enhanced learning.

Workplace training

Workplace training as a subject area could quite logically have been subsumed under the heading of Continuing Education, Professional Development and Lifelong Learning. I have set it apart on its own in keeping with the practice in the literature to highlight the specificity of the locus of the training.

Bates[9] has suggested very plausibly that a major growth area in open learning and distance education is likely to be in workplace training. He was admittedly speaking from the perspective of the experience of the industrialized countries, but one could argue from the viewpoint of need that there is some element of truth in his projection even for countries like Jamaica. The pressure being brought on businesses to transform their labour force as a consequence of international competition and technological change is compelling them to adopt alternative training strategies that are flexible, convenient, and quick and effective in responding to change. In the developed world, the process is being aided by the pressure on universities to widen and enlarge their financial base by providing services to the private and public sector not just in research but also in human resource development at the workplace. Workplace training by distance as a novelty is now becoming so commonplace that books are beginning to appear on the subject.

In Jamaica there would seem to be distinct possibilities for workplace training by distance in various areas of the public sector, and in such industries as tourism, banking and insurance to mention the most obvious. In other countries, the management of small scale

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[9]An Introduction to the World of Distance Education. Technician Education and Training. A.W. Bates. Keynote address at 3rd International Symposium on Technician Education and Training, Vancouver, B.C., 1995

enterprises has benefited greatly from training on the job, and on the surface it is hard to see why this should not apply to Jamaica as well.

Having said all that it has to be admitted, and here I am citing anecdotal evidence, that workplace training in Jamaica, even using conventional methods, has been patchy and limited. In the circumstances unless there is greater commitment and more active intervention by government, employers and educational institutions, the prospects for open learning and distance education in on-the-job training cannot be viewed as promising.

Postscript

In this lecture I have tried to explain the concepts of open learning and distance education, and to discuss their relevance and significance for human resource development in Jamaica. This postscript has been prompted by recent thinking in some quarters about open learning and distance education vis-a-vis conventional education, and the implications of this for future directions in Jamaica.

Firstly the evidence presented by Alan Tait and Roger Mills[10] in a recent book seems to support the view held by some that there is a growing convergence of distance and conventional education. The blurring of the boundaries between distance and conventional education would seem to suggest that while those dedicated open universities in existence will continue in being, so-called dual mode universities in which the distance and conventional modes are separate and apart are likely to give way to mixed mode institutions based, as Jevons and Guiton[11] have suggested, on "the principles that the same curriculum is taught on- and off-campus and that the same range of courses is offered in each mode. Students can then choose which mode to study

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[10]The convergence of distance and conventional learning - edited by Alan Tait and Roger Mills, Routledge, 1999

[11]Distance education and internal studies: interlocking study modes. F. Jevons and P. Guiton in Distance Education as Two-way Communication. Essay in honour of Börje Holmburg. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang

in". Rumble[12] sees an advantage in the mixed mode institutions in that lectures can be video-taped and lecture notes and student guides produced at relatively little additional cost, thus providing off-campus students with a mediated version of an on-campus course. Distance education purists may raise eyebrows at this perversion but there is no denying the case for it on grounds of simplicity and economics.

The second part of this postscript invites reflection on the danger, which some people have pointed to, of education losing its identity and becoming training within an open learning and distance education framework. Ian McNay[13] speaks of the risk of reductionism in open and distance education, and a quotation from his article having this title is perhaps a fitting end to this lecture, if only because it cautions against being too overly uncritical in our adoption and embrace of open learning and distance education. This is not to suggest that open learning and distance education are not the way forward for the future; but there is still a lot of work to be done to maximise their strengths and minimize the weaknesses. Here is what Rumble has to say:

"My basic argument has been that in over-specifying everything, in trying to pin down the elusive butterfly of learning for the benefit of the learners, we constrict their choice, their freedom to be different, to challenge prescriptions; we deter them from diverting into discovery of a personal agenda and the delight it brings. We surrender to external prescriptions of what we should learn. We package flexibility in modules of a size which are too small to allow for flexing of the muscles of curiosity, detached from other related areas because all modules should stand alone. Through being decontextualised, they are devalued. They are offered to students in a system which fragments learner groups as soon as they move to the next module, and fragments and casualises the academic workforce, risking in both an anomie. We encourage in both groups

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[12]Mixed modes of teaching and learning: structures, resources and developments. Granville Rumble in Open Learning in the Mainstream edited by Mary Thorpe and David Grugeon. Longman 1994

[13]The risk of reductionism in open and distance education. Tom McNay in Open Learning in the Mainstream, ibid.

a dependence on a detailed text written elsewhere. Competence-based criterion referenced assessment can encourage instrumental approaches to learning with a conspiracy, overt or covert among learners, teachers and assessors to confine experience within defined limits."

I think that Rumble's comments should give all of us educators food for thought. It is of course important to emphasize that his critique, while specifically addressed to open learning and distance education, is not confined to them. It applies equally to conventional education in general, and to higher education in particular. Rumble's critique is a timely caution that while in the past we may have downplayed the competence aspect of education, we should be careful not to overstress it now. As Ronald Barnett[14] argues so persuasively in his book bearing the title, there are limits of competence.

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[14]The limits of competence. <u>Ronald Barnett</u> The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1994