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# Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

K. Harry, J. Magnus, & D. Keegan (Eds.). *Distance Education: New Perspectives.* London & New York: Routledge. 1993. pp. xx, 348.
Reviewed by Ian Mugridge, Open Learning Agency of B.C. and the Commonwealth of Learning.

The aims of this volume of essays are "to give an international overview of the successes, the problems, the institutions and the structures that characterize the millions of students throughout the world who study at a distance in the 1990s" (p. xvi) and to provide "an authoritative picture of this field in the early to mid-nineties" (p. xv). To achieve these aims, the editors have collected twenty-six articles, many of them written by some of the best known practitioners of distance education, all published previously and covering the period from mid-1982 to mid-1992. The book is divided into six parts, dealing with the theory of distance education; organization and structure; administration of distance education; media in distance education; and the study of distance education; and in addition to a general introduction, each part is provided with a brief introduction.

The preface also notes that one of the subsidiary objectives of the collection is to bring up to date the picture presented by two existing major collections of essays on distance education, published at roughly ten year intervals in 1971 and 1983. Ossian MacKenzie and Edward Christensen published the first, *The Changing World of Correspondence Study: International Readings,* which provided an overview of what was then still called correspondence education up to the end of the 1960s; and this was followed in 1983 by a second comprehensive collection providing a similar overview of a field in which developments had been so dramatic that even the name had changed. Thus, David Sewart, Borje Holmberg and Desmond Keegan edited the collection which played an important role in the study of distance education, *Distance Education: International Perspectives.*

The form of this new collection is much the same as that of the latter volume – as one might expect when two books have an editor in common and when the first volume, reprinted by Routledge in 1988, was so successful. Reviewing this book in 1985, I noted that the editors had succeeded admirably in achieving their purpose and had brought together a collection that would fill an important place in the development of the field (Mugridge, 1985). Like any reviewer, I indicated that I would have questioned the inclusion of some essays and perhaps substituted others that I though might have been included, but that the selection was generally an excellent one. At this point, almost ten years later, I can say the same about this new volume.

In general, the essays have been well selected and provide a good picture of the state of the field in the early nineties. There are some omissions, of course, although some of these are welcome. We are not provided, for example, with any of the contributions to the long-running debate about the definition of distance education; and one can only hope that the last word on this rather fruitless exercise has been said by Doug Shale who closed a recent article by asking, "is [it] distance education? Does it matter?" (Shale, 1990). One would like to have seen greater attention given to the growing role played in distance education by inter-institutional collaboration: there is much good documentation on, for example, the Canadian experiment, Contact North, which might have been included (e.g., Croft *et al.,* 1990; Roberts *et al.,* 1988). It might also have been interesting to include some of the limited work that has been done to apply insights from other fields to distance education (e.g., Evans & Nation, 1989). There are other omissions, one of which I will refer to later. Furthermore, some of the essays are not particularly useful or informative and, particularly perhaps in the first section on theory, tend to re-hash arguments that have been rehearsed too long.

But there is also much that is valuable in the collection. The preface notes that "few major publications on distance education in the last decade do not list [Steward, Holmberg, & Keegan] amongst its list of references" (p. xv); and I would expect this volume to be similarly used. Tony Bates' guide to the use of media in distance education is, as one would expect, a sensible and useful discussion of the subject, as is Percy Marland and Ronald Store's paper on improving instructional strategies. The section on international perspectives includes much good material on the vital role of distance education in the Third World in the essays by Ram Reddy, Hilary Perraton, Zhao Yuhui and Solomon Inquai. Finally, the essays by Ian Mitchell on graduate education in distance education and Janet Jenkins on collaborative training for new practitioners are noteworthy contributions. The book achieves the aims laid out in its preface and will take its place alongside its predecessors, extending and providing a wider perspective on national collections published in the period it covers (e.g., Moore 1990, Mugridge & Kaufman, 1986).

So why am I so uneasy about this book? Why do I have the feeling that, while believing all the comments above to be the truth, there is something seriously lacking here?

I have to confess that this sense of unease began to emerge when I read the first sentence of the general introduction. It has occasionally been noted that one of the strengths of distance education is that most of its practitioners come to it from other fields, bringing with them the wide variety of insights that those fields provide (e.g., Calvert, 1986). The obverse of this is perhaps that one can occasionally get caught by those who pretend to more detailed knowledge of particular fields. Thus, as an historian, I was more than a little startled to read the phrase, "since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century" (p. 1). But this is a small point, and my unease springs from something much more serious than this.

One of the articles that I might have included in this collection is one by John Sparkes of the UK Open University, published in *Distance Education* in 1983. It was a contribution to the discussion of distance education as a separate discipline which was then proceeding alongside that about the definition of distance education and which, equally to the relief of some of us, has now also passed largely into oblivion. But the article itself asked important questions about the role of research in distance education, asking for "a new taxonomy or categorisation of *aims* and of *types* of courses," for "an explication ... of the various ways in which people learn, and can be taught" and of "the pedagogic capabilities and limitations of various distance teaching methods." Reading it at the time it first appeared, it seemed to me that here were issues that distance educators would have to come to grips with and that, given the important role attached to the proper design of instructional materials in our institutions, distance educators could make a significant contribution to providing answers to such questions, not merely for themselves, but for educators in general.

This is probably the case to an even greater extent now in the nineties than it was in the sixties and seventies, as the convergence between distance education and what is commonly called conventional education has increased. This was beginning to happen when Sparkes wrote in 1983, and has continued with growing speed in the ten years or so since. Concurrently, the debate about the relationship between open and distance education has begun and continues; and I am surprised to find that this volume contains no evidence of this debate (see, for example, Lewis, 1990; Nation, Paine & Richardson, 1990; Rumble, 1989).

This is one reason for the sense of unease about this volume that I mentioned earlier: there is little or no indication of the phenomenon that many of us have long felt to be present in what we do; that, to re-use the word I employed above, there is an increasing convergence between what used to be seen as distinct types of education. It is clear that, with institutions responding to new and changing demands from students and others and doing this by adopting new

methods and techniques and by using technologies, the distinctions between what we used to call distance education and other kinds are increasingly blurred and will eventually perhaps not exist at all. This is a phenomenon that this volume seems scarcely to recognize. Instead, it provides a conception of distance education that is hardly different from that given by its predecessor in 1983. In this sense, the book's title itself becomes something of a misnomer for these are, in the main, not "new perspectives' at all but simply ten year old perspectives recycled for the nineties.

To say this so baldly is, however, rather unfair to the editors of this volume who have, as I noted earlier, produced a collection that quite accurately reflects the field they are surveying. In other words, the problem is not the book but the field. If this book is an accurate reflection of the work done in the last ten years or so (which I think it is), there has been remarkably little development in what we write about and how we think about it. It is thus overstating the case to claim, in the words of the introduction to the final section, that "it is only in the 1990s that distance education has come of age as a field of study" (p. 289). It is true that there are now a number of good degree programmes that deal with matters related to distance education and that are taught both at a distance and face-to-face. But this does not, I believe, mean that the study of distance education has "come of age." We have remained so concerned with examining and describing the bewildering variety of methods by which we teach and by which we organize ourselves to do it that we have focused on this rather than on the larger and more significant questions, some of which were posed by Sparkes, that would demonstrate real maturity. The writing included in this volume reflects that; and, while it is necessary to keep examining the problems it discusses, one might hope that by the time a fourth collection is added to the list in ten years or so, the wide and ultimately more important questions about distance education in particular and education in general will have been examined systematically.

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D. Bertrand, R. Foucher, R. Jacob, B. Fabi, & P. Beaulieu. *Le travail professoral remesuré– Unité et diversité.*

Recension par Jean Yves Desrosiers, Economiste, Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la science.

Jusqu'à ce jour, le travail des professeurs d'université a fait l'objet de peu d'enquêtes approfondies au Canada. À vrai dire, on en retrace deux qui ont permis de recueillir une masse considérable de données, la première étant réalisée à travers le Canada, pour l'année 1986, par le Professeur Jos Lennards de l'Université York et la seconde, mais pour Québec seulement, produite, à partir des données de l'année 1990-91, par le Professeur Denis Bertrand et ses collègues, dont on vient tout juste de faire paraître les résultats. Le Professeur Lennards n'a pratiquement rien publié lui-même des résultats de son enquête (1), le principal utilisateur ayant été en fait le groupe de travail Archambault sur la tâche des professeurs d'université. (2) Une partie substantielle de l'analyse faite par ce dernier a découlé des constats résultant de l'analyse des données de