

**QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE
LEARNING:
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

An international conference on issues of quality for new models of education

28-30 September 1993 Downing College, Cambridge

CONFERENCE PAPERS

**edited by
Alan Tait**

**Organised by the Open University East Anglian Region
in collaboration with the
European Distance Education Network (EDEN) Academic and Professional
Section
Empire State College, SUNY
Laurentian University, Ontario**

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Conference Papers

edited by Alan Tait

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Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning: international and European Perspectives

CONTENTS

		<i>page</i>
Alan Tait	Foreword	3
Adrian Allen	Culture as a learning variable: implications for Quality Assurance in Distance Education	7 <i>Am</i>
Meg Benke and Caroline Jarman	Quality Assurance in a student centred program: the tutor as a critical factor	27
Mick Champion	Achieving Quality in Higher Education: an outline of some aspects of contemporary Australian policy and a critique grounded on an analysis of its utopian foundations	37
Ellie Chambers and Margaret Winck	Collaborative evaluation of inter-culturally developed distance learning material 'What is Europe?'	49
Carol Ann Edgington	An integrated approach to teaching English in communication in China: a multi-media distance learning course	59
Terry Evans and Daryl Nation	Education within and without classrooms: sustaining Quality through technological change	69
Clark Everling	Quality of work, quality of life	81
Judith Fage	Meeting information needs - a Quality Assurance approach to systems development in distance education	91
Sarah Guri- Rozenblit	Quality Assurance procedures in developing academic courses: a comparative study of five distance teaching universities	101
Margaret Haughey	Can Quality Management help us cope with change?	117

Jack Koumi	Quality Assurance, rather than control, of materials	129
Victor Lee and K.S. Yuen	Ensuring the Quality of tutoring in distance education	135
Helen Lentell and David Murphy	Neats and Scruffies: approaches to Quality in Open Learning and Distance Education	147
Jane Massy	ISO 9000: using a systems based approach to drive and develop TQM	161
Alistair R Morgan	Theorising Quality and Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning	175
Ted Nunan	The role of stakeholders in achieving or improving Quality: exploring some issues in the context of Australian Higher Education	187
Dave O'Reilly	Towards Quality in Open Learning	195
Amnon Orent	Quality Assurance and monitoring an overseas program	205
Jennifer O'Rourke	Quality in the eye of the beholder? Strategies for self- assessment of Quality in distance education	215
Noel Parker	Distance Teaching from the Tower of Babel? Achieving Quality in a multi-sourced European course	227
Ormond Simpson	Quality in staff development - carrots or sticks?	235
Alan Tait	Systems, values and dissent: Quality Assurance for Open and Distance Learning	241

FOREWORD

This collection of papers reveals a number of things about the field of Open and Distance learning. Firstly, the topic of Quality Assurance is of considerable interest, and practitioners as well as senior managers are enthusiastic about its discussion and implementation; secondly, there are long standing achievements in Open and Distance Learning in Quality Assurance even if that term has not always been used; and thirdly, there is a considerable variety of view as to how best to proceed with the introduction from the industrial and business world of Quality Assurance systems, often at government insistence. That Quality Assurance in Open and Distance learning is a subject of considerable topical interest can also be ascertained from the fact that it has already been the theme at other recent conferences, perhaps most notably those of ASPESA (The Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association) in 1991, and the main conference of EDEN (the European Distance Education Network) in Berlin in 1993; it has also been chosen as the topic for the ICDE World Conference in Birmingham UK in 1995.

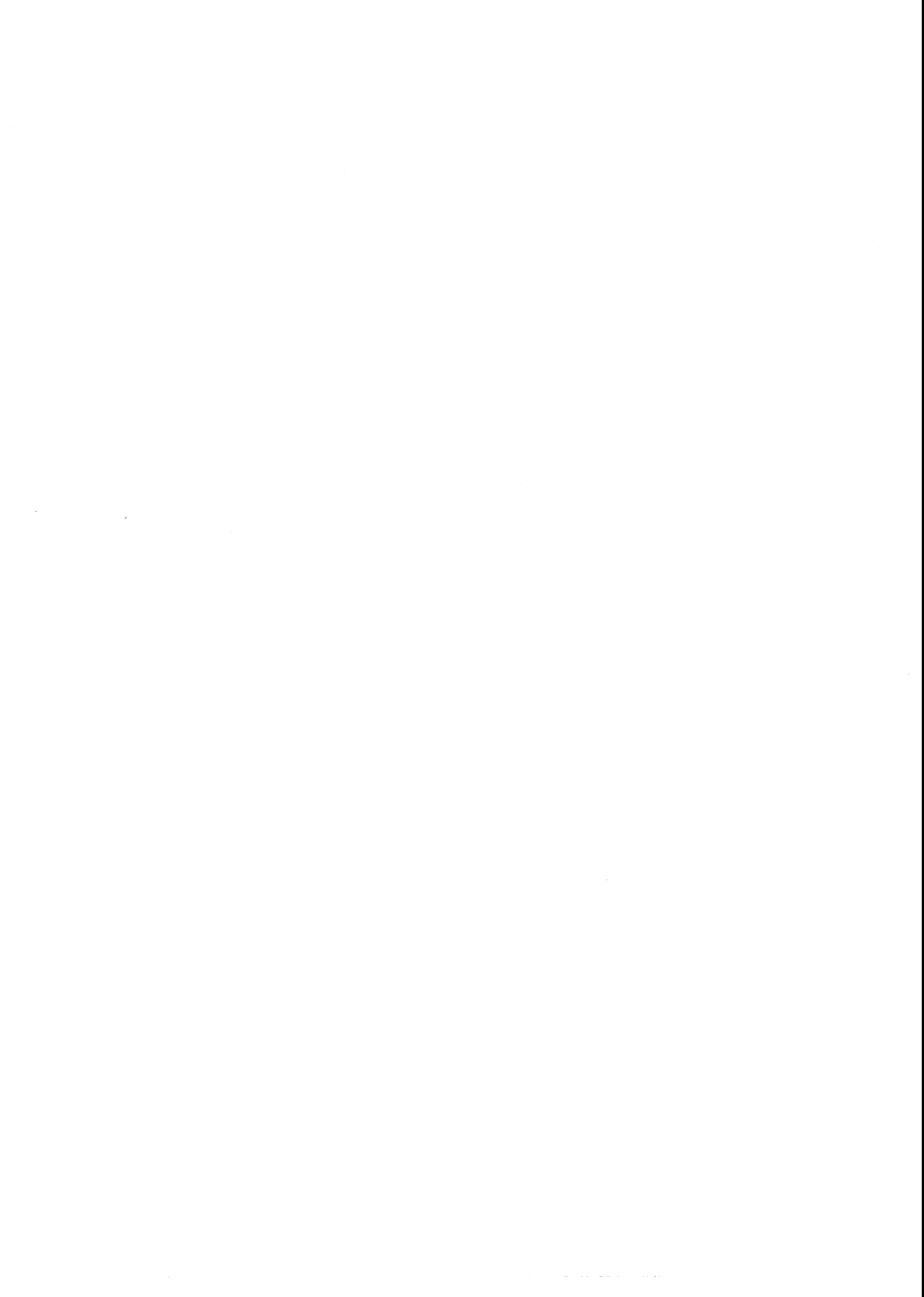
In publishing this range of papers in support of the conference *Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning: international and European perspectives*, the organisers can at least feel satisfied that, in what can now perhaps be thought of as the tradition of the so-called Cambridge conferences, a lively debate on principles as well as practice will be engendered.

The papers included here range from the enthusiastic adoption of fully developed TQM approaches which aim to achieve ISO 9000, as described in Jane Massy's paper, through the description of a range of Quality related exercises and activities without formal Quality Assurance methodology, as for example in papers by Jack Koumi, Amnon Orent, and Jennifer O'Rourke, to a group which reflects more on the problematical nature of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, like Mick Champion, Clark Everling, Terry Evans and Daryl Nation, and Helen Lentell and David Murphy. The question implicitly put by the publication of such a range of approaches is whether Quality Assurance can be accepted on its own terms, involving an essentially technical exercise for educators in its adoption and working out, or whether far-reaching discussion about the nature of management, education and social change is necessarily involved.

It should also be acknowledged that the conference is intended to act as a forum for the Academic and Professional Section of EDEN which complements for the individual practitioner the EDEN activities at organisational level, and we hope it will provide a basis for that organisation to grow. Thanks are due to Erling Ljoså, President of EDEN, and to Kerry Mann, EDEN's Executive Secretary, for their support. For the first time at one of the Cambridge conferences there is a significant attempt to acknowledge a European dimension, reflecting the new wider Europe which is accessible to us all - most appropriately, given the location here of EDEN's predecessor *The Budapest Platform* during 1991, and of the *OU Eurodesk* which from the Open University's Cambridge Centre established a network for promotion, teaching and student support across 11 continental European countries between 1990 and 1993.

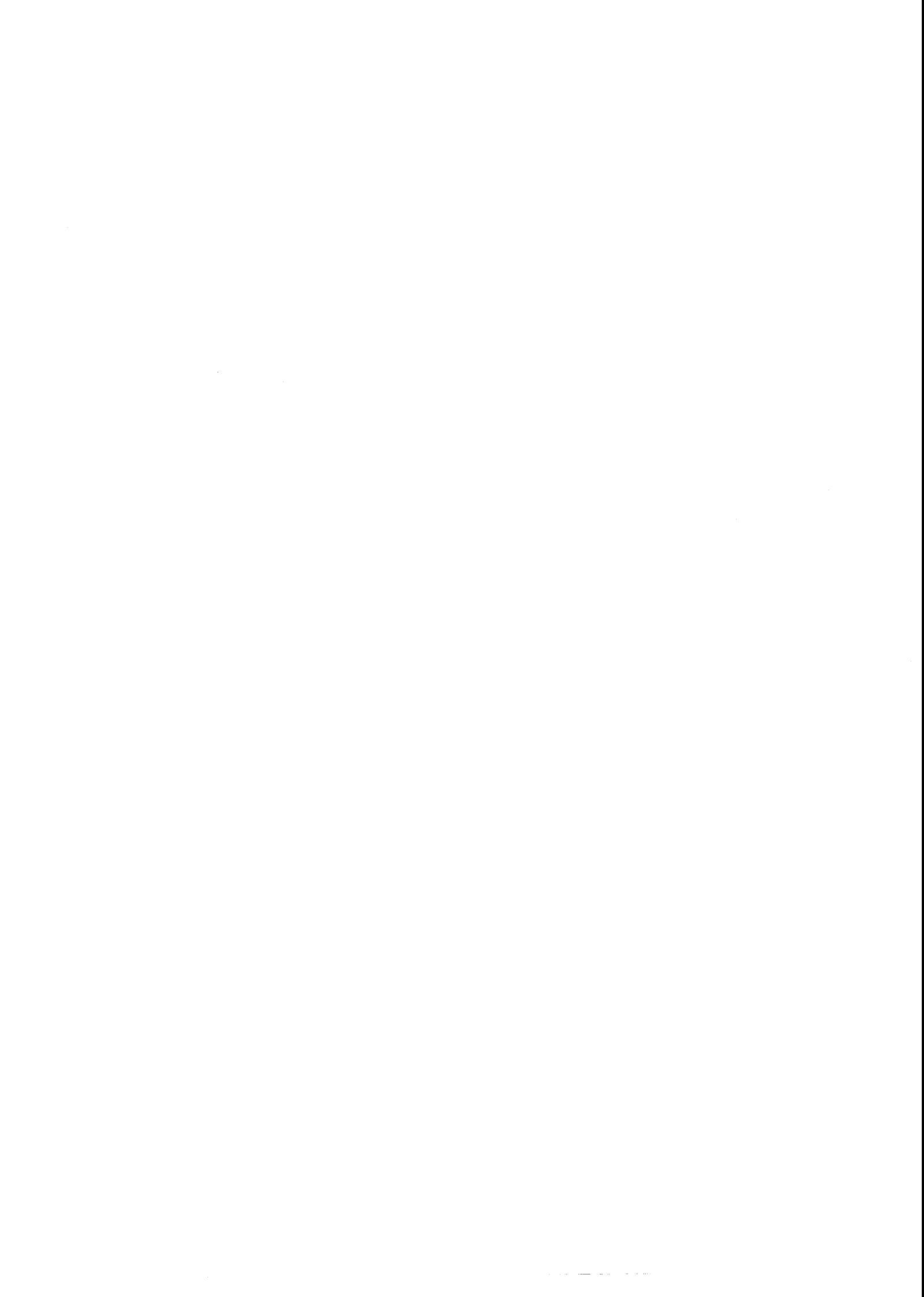
It is appropriate also to acknowledge the successful partnership with Empire State College of the State University of New York, and Laurentian University, Ontario. The transatlantic dimension of the Programme Committee's discussions have been based on a shared commitment to open and flexible approaches to student learning, and thanks are particularly due to Presidents Jim Hall and Ross Paul of the respective universities, and to Jane Brindley, Dan Granger, and Elana Michelson, who have made the partnership with Roger Mills and myself in Cambridge so fruitful.

Alan Tait
Open University
Cambridge



**CULTURE AS A LEARNING VARIABLE: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

ADRIAN ALLEN



CULTURE AS A LEARNING VARIABLE - IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

ADRIAN ALLEN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Introduction

As Distance Education in Australia becomes increasingly competitive, and the domestic market nears saturation, traditional providers of these services, mostly universities, are now directing their attention off-shore, particularly to Asia and the Middle East. These institutions generally offer traditional university courses embodying modes of teaching and learning that reflect essentially an industrialised society's view of education complete with in-built western assumptions. This can sometimes take the form of presenting or representing knowledge from only one perspective, the 'right' perspective, whilst others are 'wrong' - a subtle form of neo-colonialism. Furthermore, as Henderikx¹ points out, university teaching staff, as instigators of these courses, tend to

'offer study programmes which in general reflect less the needs and demands of society than academic, scientific domains.'

From domestic on-campus, to regional, to offshore learning, the basic pedagogic processes and assumptions tend to remain substantially unaltered. Whilst the methods of teaching and learning may be such that high levels of quality assurance can be maintained domestically, when it comes to providing off-shore clients with the same learning processes and packages, quality assurance is much more difficult to provide. The high quality packages and the very best instructional design techniques remain constant. What changes is the relationship between distance education learners offshore and the ways they approach learning, the ways they perceive and utilise the materials provided for them, as well as how they view the providers themselves.

For Australian universities launching out to tap the impressively large distance education markets in Asia, there are some important problems to face.

There is a knowledge gap. Despite third world distance education receiving increasing research attention, for example Guy² and McIsaac,³ only recently has this been based on the Asian world. For example Arger,⁴ Dunbar,^{5,6} Benn,⁷ and Cannon⁸.

Not all potential clients fall into the "Third World Category". An advanced industrial nation

like Japan, as well as the newly industrialised countries like Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, fall outside this description, and yet present some of the largest potential markets.

- . Most clients, because of the commercially driven motivation of Australian universities to engage in off-shore activities, are likely to be full fee paying, and therefore middle class.
- . It cannot be assumed that just because these clients' 'bourgeois' status may have been a direct result of western inspired industrialisation processes that they have necessarily abandoned all, or even most of their traditional cultural values.
- . Cultural backgrounds (and there is enormous diversity across Asia) closely affect how students react and relate to learning processes. Evidence for such differences can be clearly seen from on-campus Asian students studying in Australia. Note, for example, the findings of such authors as Ballard and Clanchy,⁹ Burns,¹⁰ Gassin¹¹ and Samuelowicz¹²

In applying these concerns about cultural values in Asia to the continuing debate about quality and quality assurance, it is important to stress that quality is a relative term, not an absolute, and as such it is subjective, socially constructed, and culturally bound.

As Robinson¹³ reminds us

'it can mean different things to different interest groups. Quality, like education, is a contested concept.'

When the appraisal of quality becomes a cross-cultural exercise, such variation is even more poignant. Thomas and Jegede¹⁴ note

'if there is difficulty in agreeing what quality is then it appears inevitable that there will be difficulty also in determining what constitutes acceptable criteria by which quality is assessed to be adequate.'

No small wonder that the mechanistic notions of quality assurance centred on BS5750 have, mercifully, very little application to the creative human mind.

This paper stresses, that quality in distance education Asian students is an attribute that needs to be evaluated within the cultural context of these students rather than exclusively applying western methods from outside. Furthermore the process of quality assurance not only applies to the organisation providing distance education,

but is also a process that will be used by the clients themselves in evaluating their own role in the learning process. Incongruencies between this process and cultural context could arise. Guy¹⁵ As Freeman¹⁶ points out, quality assurance carries with it the implication of preventing failure.

Arger¹⁷ suggests that

'in order to be successful, certain student predispositions such as a fairly high level of reading ability, high motivation to read and a capacity to organise independent study projects must be present.'

Perhaps it is a truism, but quality can only really be measured qualitatively. Qualitative techniques of research largely focus on ethnography (for example, see Wilson¹⁸) as their main object. This paper draws on thirty years of experience teaching in and about Asia, in order to focus on a number of important cultural influences that affect the way that students in Asia learn.

In so doing, this contribution may have gone a little way towards compliance with Harris,¹⁹ who noted

'Even rarer and still rather obscure, are discussions of the 'cultural needs and customs' of different national or ethnic groups, the historical antecedents of demands for adult education, or the connections with occupational or economic systems.'

Asian Cultures and Learning Variables

At the outset it is important to acknowledge that there is no one Asian student. The great cultural diversity to be observed across Asia is reflected in significant differences in attitude and behaviour in educational settings. Certainly there are themes and tendencies but the level of generalisation built into, for example, Dunbar's²⁰ paper on culture-based learning problems where a stereotypical Asian student is used, is just too great. Let us take several key areas for elaboration.

Social Hierarchy

Many Asian societies are much more overtly hierarchical than those to be found in the west. In India, even now, the Brahmin or priestly class tends to reinforce the concentration of the literate in the top echelons of society. In eastern Asia the Confucianist concept of scholarship and extolling the virtues of the educated man, though differing in detail from India, led to a similarly high value being placed on education, and correspondingly the teacher. There evolved on the one hand the guru - pupil relationship, and on the other, in

Japan and Korea, for example, the sensei - pupil ranking. This huge social gulf is reinforced by:

- . notions of obligation and indebtedness respectively (the concept of 'giri' and 'on' in Japan, for example)
- . the teacher as an authority figure
- . desire of students to be submissive and seek approval from the teacher
- . authority figures are almost invariably male
- . teacher is a conduit to pass on correct knowledge to the pupil
- . reluctance to question a teacher as this will adversely reflect on his ability to teach well
- . age superiority where older is wiser.

These didactic teaching methods may create an impediment to achieving western education goals, including the acquisition of higher levels of cognitive skills.

Such ranking is also reinforced by behavioural characteristics of the student - as Dunbar²¹ in another paper has pointed out for Indonesian students

'unconditional deference to the authority figure in matters of taste, judgement, knowledge, and opinion.'

and again

'social behaviour delineated by numerous implicit rules which establish 'correct' behaviour and attitudes.'

The emphasis in Japanese society for excruciatingly correct behaviour and the subsequent departure from these norms by modern youth has led to them being referred to as "Shin jin rui", a whole new breed of Japanese people.

The significance of these societal attitudes for distance education in Asia is substantial

- . the teacher, even though far away is expected to be male, and mature in years,
- . he is seen as an authority figure rather than one who shares a journey of intellectual discovery with the student,
- . the learning process is centred on one way teaching,

- . his word, in printed form, is also correct knowledge,
- . if the teacher does not provide answers he is not doing his job and is therefore considered lazy,
- . he is not to be questioned nor questioning.

Departures from these expectations can lead to considerable tensions arising in such a relationship and as far as the students are concerned it will be difficult for them to rate very highly any efforts at quality assurance.

Recent work in the field of cross-cultural communication has revealed that it is not so much the mechanics of the communicative act such as aspects of language and non-verbal cues that centrally determine the process, but the perceived status of the actors from which all else flows. Putnis²². Such findings tend only to reinforce the importance of the teacher-student contact in distance education.

Often Asian students are far more status-conscious than western societies. Many university students see themselves as the cream of the crop, the new elite who have scholastically outshone a large number of their school mates to win the right to a tertiary place. So competitive is University entrance in Japan that once in, all but the technology students, (medicine and commerce eg) view it as a four year holiday. University study even by distance mode may be perceived as not being demanding. Easy entrance to university studies, such as in Open Learning situations may result in tertiary studies being seen as doubly slack, with neither a hotly contested entrance exam, nor (in their view) a demanding course of study. This kind of misplaced bias partly stems from an unawareness of what a university experience should really be, and partly from ineffective marketing of the concepts and philosophy of distance education and open learning.

In addition, the children of rich Asian families will also view themselves as privileged and elite. To study with a foreign university has huge snob appeal. To study with a famous one has more. To study at an open university in Taiwan has no credibility at all. Industry says learning belongs in the class room!

It is quite likely that the ranking of Australian universities according to assessed quality will exert an influence on Asian student choice.

Such elitist attitudes are less articulated by women. Asia, particularly East Asia still holds tenaciously to Confucianist ideas of female inferiority. Less women are likely to be allowed or encouraged to take up distance

education opportunities, but because it is largely home-based this may act as an advantage in some social contexts, for example in Islamic Asia.

Chauvinism and issues of gender flow directly on to how women are viewed in the learning environment. East Asian men, particularly, are uncomfortable deferring to women when needing assistance. Buddhist Thailand shows much greater equality of sexes. The status of women in the Islamic world of Asia may be noticeably below that of men - Indonesia is an exception.

Perhaps some of the strongest male views preventing women gaining access to distance education are to be found in the Japanese concept of the ideal woman - Ryo sai kembo - (good wife, wise mother). A well educated woman may be seen as an unsuitable partner and may well end up as the "Spinster academic" phenomenon. Power in Asia is largely a male attribute, as is the power of the teacher - and not only in Asia!

Role of the Individual

When different Asian learning models are explored it is possible to observe a widely differing emphasis placed on the individual distance education learner.

They may be constrained by concern to act in the best interests of a group:

- . extended family loyalties of the 'Bapak' or father system in Indonesia and a strong communal sense,
- . the collective welfare of the clan in Chinese communities beyond China - leading even to pressure from stakeholders in an individual's training,
- . the 'uchi' (inside) group in the Japanese context and the need for close conformity to group norms. "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down."
- . the development of consensus mechanisms that result in group opinions in Japan.
- . Group action also surfaces amongst Pakistani students where close friendships amongst male students leads to group assignment work, recycled assignments and identical assignments with only a name change - clearly a substantially different benchmark for collegiate co-operation from the western viewpoint!

In the latter example, such incidents whether testing the limits of the system to see what can be got away with or

not, may reflect a much deeper aspect of ethical standards which in some Asian societies are not absolutes, but relative. In Japanese society a concept such as 'honesty' is assessed according to the situation, in other words, case by case. For example, no censure would be applied to someone who lied in order to protect a close friend. Friendship is a higher virtue in this instance and Japanese would recognise and accept that.

Mainland Chinese students by contrast tend to be more individualistic, confirming more closely to the model of the autonomous distance learner in the west who tends to develop skills that enable the student to be nearly teacher-independent - a student often able to study in isolation from his/her peers.

Again, the implications for distance education in Asia are profound. For those for whom learning is a communal activity, we as distance educators should not necessarily expect to see individual performance as clearly identifiable, as in Australia. Notions of collective responsibility may need to be explored. And what of evaluation? From the instructional design perspective, group activities designed to lead individual learners from that group, gently, along a particular path may be preferable to the more 'conventional' lone student exploring for him/herself independent of a teacher. This raises the question of value shifts, explored later on (Feather²³ and Keats²⁴).

Intellectual Approaches to Learning

The ways of transmitting knowledge in Asia vary enormously, and as in mediaeval Europe, religious organisations frequently played a key role. So it is that in Islamic societies in Asia, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia, oral traditions and memorisation of texts have played an important part in passing on not only religious but secular knowledge too. Islamic traditions in Turkey, as Murphy²⁵ has described, have been shown to influence students in similar ways by placing high emphasis on rote learning and recitation.

Coincidentally, in Eastern Asia, despite the central importance of writing, beginning 2,500 years ago, the growth in popularity of Confucianist principles of education also led to an emphasis on rote learning. Success in the civil service examination system which represented the main ladder for upward social mobility, depended very largely on the student's ability to recall, and to quote memorised passages from the works of the great masters.

Both systems thus encouraged students to use the actual words of other authorities. There was nothing dishonourable about unacknowledged quotes from the great works. Plagiarism was not an issue. Indeed, such copying was to be encouraged at the expense of an

individual student's untutored contribution, opinion, or even thought pattern. Written authority was vested only in the works of the mature scholar, not the neophytes. Furthermore, students wrestling with a foreign language are more easily persuaded to use the fluent text of a native speaker rather than their own words. Hence innovation was seen as a departure from the ideal, and acknowledgement of other's ideas or works was not considered a necessary convention. Encouraging individuality and personal thinking processes could quickly be seen as selfish, anti-group, anti-social and at worst even anti-intellectual - a clear indication of a rejection of age-old wisdom.

Even worse, the accepted western techniques of questioning and challenging authoritative writers, arguing and debating issues of intellectual import can be interpreted by students from East Asia as presumptuous, rude, counter productive and likely to disrupt the harmony of the group to which they may belong - in short, to be avoided at all costs. Reconciliation of different view points is often seen as a more socially appropriate essay activity than 'compare and contrast', 'criticise' or 'analyse objectively' directives.

In Japanese society the heavy emphasis placed on the written word, originally Kanji (Chinese characters) then later Hiragana, a short hand Japanese designed syllabary, has led to basic distrust of oratory and persuasive discourse as exemplified in the western world. Several common proverbs provide reinforcement

'Honey in the mouth, dagger in the belly'
'Speech is silver, but silence is golden'

Japanese emphasis on written forms of communication (and incidentally heavy non-verbal cueing) is in stark contrast to the skills in persuasive discourse exhibited by South Asian students from India and Pakistan who may adopt a linear model of argument closely identifiable with European styles.

Ginsberg,²⁶ writing of Chinese intellectual approaches, has this to say:

'The Chinese world view is non-linear, with no starting points. Historical events are seen as unrelated events, a process of endless returns within a closed circle. The western way of viewing events is linear, an analytical, cause-an-effect sequential way of explaining phenomena. Chinese essay paragraphs seem to have no direction, no starting point. They turn the topic around, treating it from various tangential perspectives if they inappropriately personalise their writing, they run the risk of being classed as cognitively under-developed. ... they may use an excessive amount of hyperbole and illusion, and

devices valued in Chinese writing, but not tolerated in English academic writing.'

Likewise, Japanese student writing may frequently take the form of a 'naniwabushi' or story telling formula which opens with a very general (and to western minds quite irrelevant) section whose purpose is to gather together loosely all of the remotely connected aspects of the story before moving to describe the narrative itself. The formula ends with a personalised plea for the reader to empathise with the participants. This same formula frequently forms the basis for Japanese business negotiations, so that distance education courses tackling cross-cultural work situations need to keep these considerations to the fore. Allen.²⁷

In practical terms, the previously exclusive emphasis on teaching English through literature across ten years of Japanese school grades, left children with the ability to write an essay on the development of the 18th Century English novel, but unable to tell you where the toilet is. English language based distance education can clearly capitalise on both these strengths and weaknesses.

This leads to a consideration of text and language.




Text and Language

A straight text based learning package using only print materials is likely to be approached in a number of different ways by students in Asia. First, as text, it possesses intrinsic authority - far greater authority than its authors would have considered or liked, when they wrote it. The responsibility is awesome! Second, it will most likely result in unquestioning acceptance and compliance. Third, it will be the focus of student attention to a far greater extent than for western students, even to the point of memorisation of large sections. Fourth, it will be understood that in order to gain a satisfactory result in the unit the student should be able to reproduce its contents (but not necessarily understand it). This impinges directly on the deep versus surface learning debate. Morton.²⁸

For distance educators however, text materials have the advantage that they transcend problems of English language fluency, limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation and speed of comprehension. It may be that because of these advantages, distance education is the preferred option over campus-based education. The crunch may come at exam time when arguments about fluency versus functional literacy surface, or when marking mailed assignments heavily worked over by "spell check" and friends, but hopefully to a large extent the result of the student's own effort.

A different set of problems arises if the learning package is multi-media based, as they often should be. Audio tapes may require on the part of the student greater language fluency, even, in some cases, to understanding slang, different accents and even different Englishes.

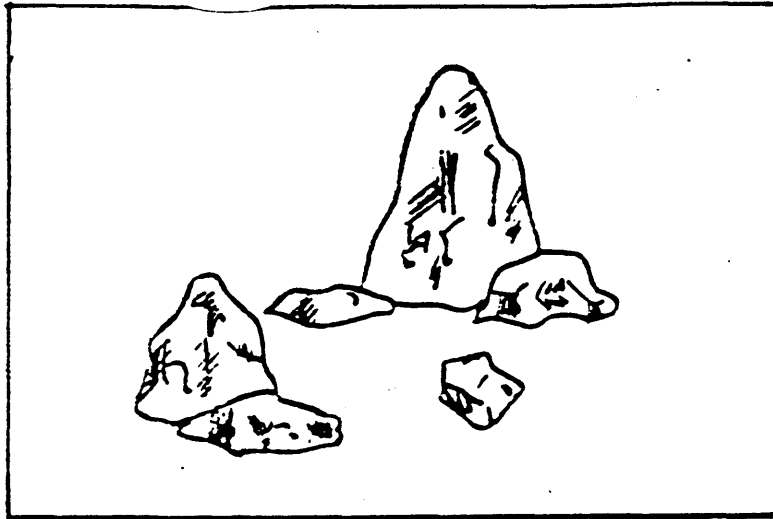
Video tapes bring on another dimension of issues centred on the question of whether Asian students 'see' images in the same way that western students and teachers are culturally conditioned to? The short answer is 'no'. The longer, partial, explanation lies in the field of semiotics.

Japanese people, influenced in no small way by the study of aesthetics in Zen Buddhism, tend to focus on emptiness bounded by contrived borders or fixed objects. Focussing on space allows the mind to move unfettered, whilst, as in the west, focussing on fixed objects tends to direct thought along pre-ordained paths. Consider some examples: the Kanji (Chinese-derived ideograph) for hut or cottage can either be seen as brush strokes portraying the roof and walls of a house, (the western viewpoint) or brush strokes that are the external attributes of the house-space within (a Japanese view). Furthermore, the cottage roof , the symbol for earth  and mouth  together make up the character, but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is even more clearly seen in the Kanji for house. In its original pictographic form, the character is made up of the roof line of the house and a pig. In its subsequent ideographic development, it came to mean not only a house, but home, the people within the home and the social group thus bonded together by virtue of living under this one roof.

By association with other Kanji, the concept is broadened in many directions to create, for instance, 'farmer' 'specialist' and so on. This way of thinking is multi-directional, like the processes in a game of Scrabble and therefore demonstrably different from the more lineal intellectual process behind western syllabary.

舍 家

Similarly, the rock arrangements in the "dry garden" section of a traditional Japanese garden can be viewed as just that. Alternatively, the same can be considered as empty space intruded upon by rock forms and so insisting that we focus in the first instance on the character of this emptiness.



This may appear to be far removed from the concerns of distance education, but I don't believe so.

Such culturally derived differences in the perception of images of all kinds exercises an enormous influence on learning processes. Well designed, high quality learning packages tend to make increasing use of a wide range of images, see for example the work on concept maps by Lai.²⁹

Implicit assumptions by western university educators lead to the expectancy that all students should be able to (or should be capable of being trained to) interpret these images in the same way. This too is a cause for concern. We need to heed Guy's³⁰ warning

'Control may be in the form of course writers, or a team consisting of academics and instructional designers, who make a selection of content from stocks of social and cultural capital available to them, but which may not necessarily be from knowledge stocks that are familiar to students in the third world?'

Conclusions - Quality Assurance Revisited

If all of the bewildering variations that influence learners across Asia noted here seem to be a daunting task for the distance educator to cope with, there is one positive aspect to keep in mind. Asians studying in their home pitch are not directly confronted by the culture shock of relocating to a foreign country. They can still draw on the support of home and a familiar cultural background. For the Japanese, this overcomes

the problem of the "smell of the Gaijin" (foreigner), a condition of western contamination of ideas and behaviour from too long a stay away from Japanese culture.

On the other hand, they most certainly will be surprised if not shocked by what the mail brings them. The central assumptions typifying the western approach to learning may be very alien.

Reminding ourselves that there is no one Asia, to what extent, as distance educators, should we demand or expect students to shift their values towards a western model? To what extent should we be accommodating Asian approaches to learning? How does all this relate to the theme of quality assurance?

Before attempting some answers to these questions it is important to indicate a major dilemma facing learners in Asia. A poignant ambivalence exists in the mind of nearly all Asian students. On the one side, there exists the conservative, government controlled, traditionally based curriculum, using proven, time-honoured, socially compatible teaching techniques to produce citizens who know their place and will fit smoothly into Asian societies. On the other side there is the acquisitive, development-oriented, technology-seeking learners wanting to grasp what is new with both hands and apply it to the serious business of making money, so they head for the courses that will give them the key to wealth. In so doing they tend to avoid the airy-fairy areas such as Philosophy or even the Humanities. They are concerned with the here and now, rather than the condition of mankind. Generally, Asian students today have neither the time nor the inclination to reflect at this stage in their lives. Life is about doing.

Such materialistic attitudes lead Asian learners especially towards applied university course, for example Commerce, Management even language, and away from the less practical areas of study. Fee paying students feel emboldened to insist on courses that are relevant to their needs, up-to-date (in Japan two year old statistics are history) and good value for money.

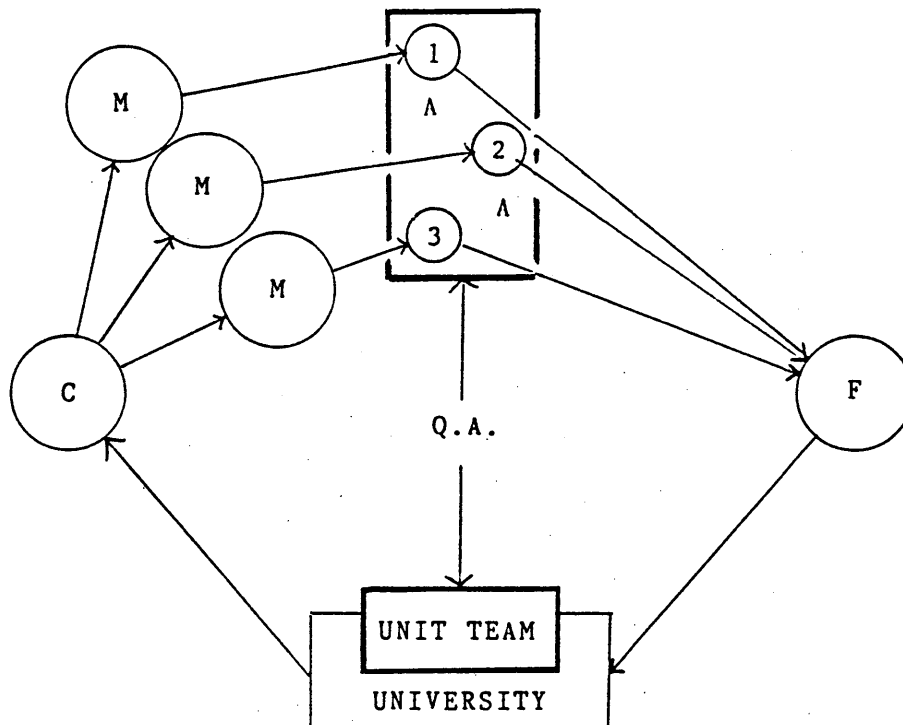
When these conditions are met by the distance education providers to Asia, so that the relative costs of the products are so competitive as to be indistinguishable, then the promise of better after sales service wins the salesperson's day (Japanese and Swedish marketing trends!). This clearly translates into quality assurance and a very competitive situation.

All levels of distance education leave themselves open to quality assurance assessment, but these interlocking, interdependent levels of quality assurance cannot be conceived as closed systems, neat industrial feed-back loops between producer and consumer, as Freeman³¹ discovered. They must be viewed as open-systems

responsive and fine-tuned (in this case) to the staggering range of cultural values extant in Asia, to bring about the very best we are capable of.

Earlier, the question of value shifts was raised. It is quite evident that there exists a large gap in the techniques and approaches to learning between (and amongst) Asians and western learners. Who should close this gap? The solutions lie in both camps for the internationalisation of education should not read 'westernisation' or it will end up the poorer for it.

The diagram below illustrates these principal relationships.



Learning Circuit

→ information paths

- C Core unit focussing on the understanding of western learning styles.
- M Modules tailored to different cultural approaches to learning.
- A Asian students - distance education learners.
- 1,2,3 etc Groups of Asian students sharing a particular approach to learning.
- F Feedback. Modification of university teaching/learning strategies. Unit team response to cultural demands of Asian students.
- Q.A. Quality Assurance interconnection.

Note: Each of the separate elements in the diagram lends itself to quality assurance evaluation.

Western models of university teaching in the distance education mode should move in the following directions

- . a more personalised model of lecturer and teaching materials - more humanistic, less mechanistic.
- . greater relevance of materials to regional needs in Asia (bearing in mind the logistic constraints in the Hershfield³² study).
- . design of activities to help move students gently towards greater independence of work without alienation from group. (What do you think about...? Can you recall from your own experiences...? How do you feel about ...?), hence...
- . a conscious effort to allow students own perspectives, life experiences, cultural values to be brought into the learning relationship, to help shrink the Confucianist gap.
- . the establishment of a student network to reinforce or create a study group, along the lines suggested for Indonesia by Dunbar,³³ and developed on-shore by the University of Southern Queensland.
- . where relevant, the incorporation of Asian examples, case studies, techniques to encourage cross-cultural awareness and understanding.
- . self answering questions with teacher's comments, to build confidence.
- . a greater awareness by teachers of the need to cater for students whose English is a second, third or other language.
- . an effective feedback and review programme to allow student tensions to surface and be addressed.

Whereas, Asian student learners might respond to:

- . a reduction in the role of teacher as authority figure - close the gap.
- . a more critical questioning approach to text analysis, de-emphasising the need for rote learning.
- . a move from surface learning to deep learning.

- . an appreciation of the western modes of argument and essay writing in addition to, but not as a replacement for more Asian approaches.
- . greater need to give personal opinions rather than answers to please the teachers.
- . increasing competence in English.
- . a refutation of the idea that teaching and learning only takes place in the classroom.
- . build on the "learning by doing" traditions already in Asia.
- . a switch from passive receiving to active learning.

One way of bridging the learning gap is to offer a carefully prepared University preparation course as culture-broker, so that students embarking on their main course of study will have gained greater skills, greater awareness of western learning and teaching methodologies, as well as raising their own levels of confidence in themselves and in their own cultural values, at the same time minimising failure and drop out rates with the attendant agony of loss of face.³⁴

Whilst quality assurance can be applied with different levels of clarity and precision to all aspects of the distance education process, this paper is concerned with the client - the student - who really should be thought of as the beginning stage. We can assure the student of the quality of our courses only if we listen to what they themselves need, be aware of where they are coming from culturally, respect the values, skills and life experiences that they own, and work towards solutions which, at the same time, don't compromise the educational and intellectual integrity of the unit of study we offer. Educational relevance has to be one important aspect of quality assurance.

If this is done well we can then assure the university and the tax paying public beyond, of the quality of our students.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN A STUDENT CENTRED PROGRAM

MEG BENKE AND CAROLINE JARMAN

**QUALITY ASSURANCE IN A STUDENT CENTERED PROGRAM:
THE TUTOR AS A CRITICAL FACTOR**

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The widely accepted concept of quality assurance usually includes freeing the learning environment in advance of problems. The result of this focus is frequently a highly structured design and delivery system. In an academic program which is philosophically student-centered, such a structured design becomes inherently problematic.

Thus the goal of quality assurance in a student-centered program includes some potentially strong contradictions. This paper seeks to explore the integration of quality assurance in a student-centered program, with a focus on the tutor as the key.

Before addressing the idea of quality assurance in the context of the critical factor of the tutor, it is important to clearly establish what it means for a program to be student-centered.

A student-centered program requires an overall focus in which each student integrates prior knowledge and incorporates learning activities built on that knowledge to achieve the student's goals. Philosophically it means that the student provides the guiding momentum for his or her learning in the context of both the ability of institution to provide the instruction and the greater economic and social environment. It also requires a balance between flexibility to meet individual student goals and standards for quality which are not based on a few anecdotal perceptions.

Because the Empire State College model of distance learning occurs in the context of a larger, student centered program, quality assurance rests on two basic factors: a quality academic program and a quality delivery system. Each of these integrally involves the tutor as a critical factor of success. While it is not possible in education to anticipate all problems and demands, it is possible to assist tutors in understanding the basic premises of distance education and in addressing the individual learner's needs. Quality will follow.

How is the tutor a critical factor in the design of a quality academic program?

Because a student-centered academic program must meet both

criteria: flexibility and academic standards, it becomes a continuing challenge to develop courses which respond to the needs of students with a variety of backgrounds. While it is frequently possible in many fields, such as business, to understand and incorporate expectations from the business or the nonprofit environment, it is not as easy to plan for the range of backgrounds which students bring to their learning experiences.

Tutors who have experience in the work world related to the course and who have gained knowledge of the variety of students in the Empire State College program bring invaluable expertise to the course development process. Certainly one person cannot provide all the wide-ranging knowledge and experience, but as part of a course development team, the tutor's contribution is significant. Thus, the experienced tutor works well with the academic area coordinator and others in developing, piloting and evaluating new courses and programmatic revisions.

Research on learning indicates that learning is improved when the student is actively engaged in the study activity and when the content mastery is personally important to the student. What students know and how it is known are inseparable from who the students are. The recognition that distance learning programs assumes multiple profiles of intended learners -- in terms of prior knowledge and preparation, of skill levels, of language and culture and of interest -- is foremost. The learning program itself is designed with a notion of these typical learners but with capability for the tutor to adjust for the individual student.

Quality educational experiences are also ones which take into consideration learning activities well suited both to the subject matter and to the delivery mode. Tutors who have worked with students on other courses become increasingly expert in identifying concepts which will be difficult to learn at a distance or to discuss or explain over the telephone or computer. As a consequence, these people become creative in thinking about a variety of activities to facilitate a student's understanding of difficult concepts and subsequent application to real world situations.

Today the design of a quality academic program and its continued maintenance includes the growing presence of technological integration. As part of the course development team, the tutor can use his or her expertise in delivery and in the prior course adaptation to make judgments about the effective integration of technology. For example, tutors themselves often anticipate the anxiety students feel about the use of technology and can offer a range of possible strategies.

In many academic fields, learning is enhanced at a distance by the inclusion of computer simulation and conferencing. However, the decision to include such learning activities is multi-faceted. It requires an understanding about exactly what the student will learn using this computer simulation or conferencing and exactly what the student will need to know before being able to engage the activity. Such a combination of knowledge is brought to the development process by someone who both understands the student-centered approach to learning and the specific backgrounds and experiences of the types of students in the program. The experienced tutor is this person.

One component of a quality academic program includes current and timely information. Tutors who see, as part of their position, understanding the current situation and then devising methods to encourage student cognizance of the environmental context of the particular course make the accompanying contribution of currency and timeliness of information.

Development of a solid academic program in the context of a student-centered approach inherently requires high student motivation. The obligation for learning rests with the student who must engage the material, independently without the external motivation of the group.

Wolcott and Burnham (1991) found that learners preferred strategies which build confidence and enhance course relevance. These strategies included

- clear requirements for success
- clear benefit from the knowledge
- useful information
- high standards
- timely feedback

Each of these strategies should be included in the effective course design. The potential contribution of an experienced tutor is clear. Bringing experience in the delivery of the courses and in the greater work-related environment surrounding the course under development the tutor is well positioned to incorporate the above strategies which enhance student motivation and subsequent success.

How is the tutor a critical factor in the academic delivery system?

In a student-centered environment, the academic delivery system should allow tutors the flexibility to individualize instruction while providing students with clear expectations. If

the focus is on quality assurance as the guiding concern, a program might choose to give tutors pre-packaged responses which are programmed for a variety of situations. In a student centered program, the focus would be on preparing the support system for tutors to provide more spontaneous comments with an emphasis on creating an exchange relating to the individual student.

The greater the tutor's understanding of the student's goals and motivations, the higher the quality of the total learning experience. Thus, one fundamental component in quality assurance is tutors who are student centered.

How do tutors become student centered?

*** Careful Selection.** The selection process for tutors should include the use of criteria which screen for supporting characteristics fostering student-centered instruction. These include practical experience in the field in addition to content expertise and an openness to differing perspectives as strengths. For example, people with job responsibilities requiring extensive use of the telephone are potentially effective tutors. The group of tutors should be as diverse as the group of students we serve.

*** Access to Appropriate Information.** Providing tutors with information about students will increase a tutor's ability to be student-centered. Information about students can be acquired in a variety of ways. Basic information on a student's first inquiry or program application can be critical. Some programs develop explicit diagnostic exercises and other early assessments to determine student needs and expectations. Learning autobiographies, in which students relate their past experiences and knowledge to their current program goals, can reveal strengths and weaknesses.

*** Orientation.** In designing new tutor training activities, the context should be on student-centered approaches. Tutors need to learn more about who the students are, why they are taking the course and what the tutor can do to support and assist that learning.

While this seems like simple information, often the answers are assumed or overlooked in the focus on the technical or course development aspects of the delivery system such as choosing packaged materials for the average learner. In distance learning programs, frequently there is no average learner. Thus, the assurance of quality begins with a clear understanding on the part of the tutor of what the student-centered context implies. Certainly there are other factors which contribute to the quality

of program delivery by tutors.

What is quality tutoring?

As indicated previously, in a student-centered program, quality assurance does not depend only on the design of course materials. Effective tutoring serves to expand student learning and independence. How do you define quality in tutoring?

There is a delicate balance between flexibility and standards. Effective tutors are able to provide flexibility in meeting student goals and encouraging student motivation while adhering to standards for student performance and for tutor performance. This balancing implies an understanding of adult learners and a sensitivity to cultural and experiential differences which enhance student learning.

Good tutors can also communicate effectively at a distance in writing, by telephone, and increasingly using the computer. Willingness to evaluate and improve their teaching at a distance includes openness to the use of technology in teaching and to other evolving aspects of educational change. Such openness by the tutor encompasses a willingness to encourage and assist students in their own exploration of technology for greater and more valuable learning. Such encouragement also enhances student confidence.

How is quality monitored in a student-centered environment?

In a student-centered distance learning environment, it is often difficult to measure the effectiveness or quality of instruction. There is a continuous risk in potentially losing control over the learning environment. Careful attention to initial and on-going training, combined with responsive academic support systems, can minimize these risks. The focus for tutor quality assurance is not a token evaluation system but a more collaborative and developmental approach.

These are approaches we have used:

- * setting clear standards for tutoring which relate to timeliness and quality of feedback to students;
- * monitoring academic quality through review with the academic area coordinator;
- * monitoring reports which relate to student and program improvement;
- * conducting student evaluation of instruction and course materials;

- * monitoring summary comments of student assignments and final student evaluations for student-centeredness;
- * collecting informal feedback through logging of information from support staff and advisors;
- * on-going training to exchange ideas with others engaged in student-centered distance learning;
- * encouraging tutor engagement in revision of systems and materials.

Some approaches to on-going training and development of tutors include:

- * continued dialog with the academic area coordinator;
- * group discussions with other tutors for courses in the same or other academic areas;
- * discussion of feedback from students and mentors;
- * systematic review of feedback from the tutor to students;
- * continual discussion of quality indicators and commitment to change.

Throughout the training, it is critical to quality assurance that a community of tutors be created to enable tutors to learn from each other. Three times a year a development meeting is conducted to encourage the exchange among tutors and others of strategies for facilitating student learning. It is critical to continued quality assurance that tutors engage in reflective practice and such that regular opportunities are provided.

While there are potentially different developmental needs of new and more experienced tutors, the interaction is fundamental to the continued motivation and growth of both groups. Encouraging projects to promote collaboration on a more individual basis such as evaluation and integration of new computer conferencing methods are eminently valuable.

Conclusion

Quality assurance in a student-centered environment requires a strong commitment to flexibility and adaptability on the part of the institution. Single surveys and end-measures will not insure that the objectives of the course or program are met. Quality assurance is a continual and on-going process. Quality must be addressed in the design of courses and in the design of delivery. In a student-centered program, the integral involvement of the professional who facilitates the learning and

who understands the basic design and content needs is paramount. At Empire State College, that person is the tutor. Without good selection of these people, effective and on-going training, and involvement in the instructional design, this student-centered program would not consistently deliver the quality which students deserve and demand. The tutor is the key.

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**ACHIEVING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OUTLINE OF SOME ASPECTS OF
CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN POLICY AND A CRITIQUE GROUNDED ON AN
ANALYSIS OF ITS UTOPIAN FOUNDATIONS**

MICK CAMPION

**Achieving Quality in Higher Education; an outline of
some aspects of contemporary Australian policy and a
critique grounded in an analysis of its utopian
foundations.**

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Brief Abstract

A schematic overview of the characteristics of two differing utopian perspectives with a specific focus upon their implications for higher education will be presented. In this way attention will be drawn to the limiting nature of the parameters within which dominant contemporary educational discourse takes place and the boundaries generated for debates about the quality of distance education will be revealed. Attention will be focussed upon the recent Australian policy document "Achieving Quality". A number of recommendations are drawn from this particular analysis which enable us to orient to the future of distance education in a more carefully considered and less constrained manner.

Simpson commences a recent piece in Open Learning with the following statement. "Quality has suddenly become the buzzword in Higher Education. It is often a negative buzz, used to disguise the meretricious, or to distract from dwindling resources."⁽¹⁾ I suspect that all too frequently the quality assurance process will be used to engage in meretricious behaviour rather than to disguise it. An example of meretriciousness might be the flier for this conference with its upfront windowed image of a serene traditional elitist environment within which scholarly pursuits take place whilst in the body of the flier, e.g. the guidelines for papers (back page), a list of examples is provided which reveal a very different set of interests.

However, I want to begin this paper by illustrating how the matter of quality assurance goes well beyond buzzwords and is cascading, even if perhaps only superficially, through higher educational systems. I work in a university in Western Australia a long way away from Cambridge and these are some of the issues requiring my attention at the time I write this paper.

(1) The unit I work in is about to be restructured and merged with another unit. One major plank in the argument presented in favour of this merger is a stated desire to enhance the quality of

services to on-campus students. It also just happens to be the case that by merging the two units the university will reduce the level of funding below that which currently exists.

(2) I am chairing a subcommittee of the University's External Studies Committee which is currently considering the recommendations of the NDEC Report 'Quality and Standards in Distance Education' (2) in order to make recommendations concerning quality assurance practices in relation to the external mode.

(3) I have until the end of June to complete a detailed questionnaire for the University's Planning Office which is drawn from Warren Piper's recently released report 'Quality Management in Universities'(3).

(4) Since the beginning of this year I have been involved in a project designed to (a) produce a strategic plan for the External Studies Unit and (b) to enhance staff skills in strategic planning. Given the nature of strategic planning this has been closely related to the quality assurance agenda.

(5) I am a member of the University's Committee on Teaching Excellence which was set up early in 1992 at least in part in recognition of the fact that the quality assurance agenda needed to be taken seriously in relation to the processes of teaching and learning. A new national report entitled 'Judging the Quality of Teaching' (4) arrived on my desk 2 working days ago.

I mention these matters for no other reason than to indicate the rapidity of the spread of this discourse within the Australian Higher Education System; an intended product of Federal Government strategy, but also to illustrate one of the unintended consequences of this process which is that, in the short term, the effort to reorient institutional discourses, processes and procedures soaks up vast amounts of resources.

It is clear that following remark of Richard Johnson could be applied to the quality assurance agenda;

The fact is that all the serious push towards open learning and improvement of teaching, on or off, campus, is coming in Australia from the centralised power, the Commonwealth bureaucracy - which alone can push the sometimes sluggish institutions. (5)

What is not clear at this time is whether this use of resources will or will not be worthwhile.

The explanation for the increased attention to these matters in some Australian Universities which, as elsewhere, are not recognised for their ready willingness to take on new agendas is, at least in part, their awareness of the impact of the recently set up Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Whilst the funds this Committee will distribute (76 million for 1994) are not without significance institutions are also aware that the rankings awarded by this group may well take on a meaning which has far broader and more significant

implications in a period of ever increasing competition between institutions for both students and sources of funding.

Campus Review (6) cites Don Aitkin, University of Canberra VC, as describing the extent of this process as fascinating and unparalleled elsewhere in the world. More generally Calvert and Nunan put the point well when they say;

The prominent place of quality and performance monitoring on the Australian educational agenda has parallels in other industrialised countries. It is, in fact, the current phase in the intervention by the state into the affairs of the higher education system. Institutional autonomy has been replaced by conditional autonomy as governments have sought to assert a management role over education systems in an attempt to direct them towards particular sociopolitical and economic ends.(7)

Porter, Linguard and Knight (8) indicate how the notion of national development which currently drives these processes has been narrowed and is now restricted primarily to economic development.

The consequence of the rapid insinuation of this agenda through so many nooks and crannies in the system is that it can in a very real sense draw effort away from more scholarly pursuits which may have been more fruitful. An example would have to be this conference paper which as a result of the issues mentioned above fails even to begin to approach the level of scholarship I would have wished to achieve. However, the paper illustrates one of the major dangers in the current period which is that in the face of insistent demands for greater productivity the place for contemplation, a necessary part of scholarship, and more importantly of a thoughtful life, is squeezed unmercifully.

(Perhaps I should mention at this point, lest any are not aware, that in Australia single mode distance education institutions do not exist, and that distance education takes place in a range of dual mode institutions. This is important for it means that in this context the broad higher education policy orientation plays a far more significant role than might be the case if a discrete single mode distance education provider existed which was subject to separate policies).

Marginson in a recently published work entitled 'Education and Public Policy in Australia' (9) concludes by arguing that:

The problem is not simply that the economic policies in education are sometimes incompetent, or that the underlying economic philosophies are undesirable, or even that the pursuit of economic objectives in education is often destructive of other, non-economic objectives - although there is evidence to support all of these criticisms. The deeper problem lies in the employment of a singular, dominant educational discourse, in which the purposes of education can all be traced back to one overriding rationale - in this case, the development of a productive economy.(10)

The conceptual constraints referred to by Marginson flow from the dominance of the discourse engendered by the specific utopian vision of Saint-Simon, and

whilst I want to do enough in this paper to illustrate this, my major objective is to broaden the debate by using references to an alternative utopia to heighten our awareness of the blinkers which all too frequently we wear without complaint. Peter Beilharz in the first chapter of his recent work 'Labour's Utopias: Bolshevism, Fabianism, Social Democracy' (11) provides us with a stimulating contrast between the Technocratic Utopia of Saint-Simon and the Erotic Utopia of Fourier. In the former

... we find the identification of the categories of life, or society, with Industry....

... he (Saint-Simon) raises the issue of status or legitimacy of citizenship with reference to productivity....

... he (Saint-Simon) introduces into social theory the theme of idleness and parasitism as social problems consequent on the evasion of the central social responsibility ascribed to citizens: the duty to be productive....

... For the logic of Saint Simon is that the only legitimate social functions are those of production, and those of the scholarship which aids production. (12)

As Beilharz points out given the esteem with which labour is held in this scheme it can come as no surprise that labour movements defend this account (13). Before moving to less familiar territory I want to ensure that all readers note the limitation this places upon scholarship and the manner in which a notion of idleness might militate against contemplation to say nothing of play. As Beecher and Bienvenu put it "For Saint Simon society becomes a factory and, as in any factory, the work to be done is the organising principle." (14) Beilharz contrasts this utopia with that of Fourier which he refers to in the following terms:

Fourier's fantasy was rather different. His utopia was romantic and anti-industrial, privileging the image of the body in an erotic rather than a physiological way. Where Saint-Simon saw insufficient industrialisation as the problem, Fourier already viewed factory civilisation as a culture of degradation....

... Each individual, in Fourier's view, was the receptacle of no less than twelve distinct passions; the challenge was to organise a social form which was harmonious and yet encouraged difference....

... Evidently Fourier's was a libertarian utopia, Saint-Simon's something more authoritarian.' (15)

Before proceeding to look in a little more detail at some aspects of Fourier's work I would stress that the Australian policy agenda concerning quality in higher education is completely wrapped up in a conceptual quilt sewn in a patchwork of Saint Simonian assumptions. This quilt has become something of a linus blanket for policy makers but until it is discarded the real debate about the creation of a multifaceted high quality higher education system cannot commence.

In this context I can at most provide some fragmentary glimpses of elements of Fourier's thought and would remind you that the reason I am doing this is simply to reveal the restricted nature of current educational policy discourse. Listen to what Fourier in contrast to Saint-Simon has to say about work:-

Work, Fourier shows, can be nothing but 'eternal torture' unless it is done to fulfil a passionate desire, and every aspect of life on the Phalansters is designed to transform work by making it stem from one of man's passions. (16)

Furthermore he remembered that work should always be a source of pleasure. He saw that in existing society work was made repellent rather than attractive, so that the best energies were held up rather than utilized. (17)

Fourier believes 'that work can be transformed and turned into a joy, triumphing over its weariness and its pains' (18)

His aim is to see that each individual's potentialities- manual, sensual, intellectual- are discovered, and that they then find pleasure and satisfaction in industrial productivity. (19)

....industrial affluence, important though it is, is never an end in itself. Work is rather an indispensable means for man's fulfilment. (20)

This version of the nature of work can be best understood by situating it within Fourier's conception of the relationship between the individual and society

The aim for the individual must be the prevention of frustration through unrestricted opportunity for self-expression. Civilized education, says Fourier, can see nothing but vice in all the impulses that nature has given the child.(64) It therefore attempts to change our natural instincts.(21)

Man can never be satisfied, at peace with himself, with his fellows and with God, as long as he remains hindered and thwarted in his endeavours at self-expression. (22)

Fourier's plan was a recognition that social organisation must group itself around the requirements of industrial life, and still further that industrial life must be subject to the desires of the individual human mind. It was a theory by which personal freedom was to suffer no restraint. (23)

The natural goal of man was an affluence of pleasures and riches not penury, chastity, and self-sufficiency; order and free choice, not individualistic anarchy; instead of the negative philosophy of repression, the positive one of attraction. (24)

Virtually all men - not only the proletariat - are poor, because their passions are unfulfilled, their senses are not appeased, their amorous emotions are curbed, and their naturally complex social sensibilities can find outlets only in pitifully limited channels. (25)

The new social order which he proposed to establish would be based on the liberation and utilization of erotic energies that had long been ignored, misused, or misdirected. (26)

It is a fundamental principle with him that the misery and discord of the social world came from checking and thwarting natural passions, impulses and instincts. (27)

Turning briefly to education

The education of the individual, says Fourier, must be based on his needs and these needs arise from the nature of man. Spontaneity and freedom are essential, but perhaps paradoxically Fourier maintains that man's needs and desires require development, training and education. (28)

But Fourier would not have worried if a child never learnt to read or never attended lessons. Intellectual learning is firmly subordinate to the desires and wishes of the child, the primary aim is of the individual's potentialities which need not include 'book learning'....

....When a child does however eventually decide to attend classes, this may be at any age. (29)

As must well be clear the education that Fourier commends has, like Summerhill and A. S. Neill, like the universities of the late 60s and Marcuse, freedom of expression and liberation rather than a narrow vocationalism and discipline as organising concepts. Even this very brief glance at Fourier reveals how very very narrow and restrictive contemporary notions of 'Open Learning' really are.

The Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee recently issued a set of Guidelines for Effective University Teaching in which they begin by acknowledging that:-

.... it is a special responsibility of universities to foster and preserve the scholarly values of search for truth, of curiosity, integrity and critical appraisal, and to nurture these values in their students. (30)

I would contend that the dominance in educational policy making circles of an instrumentalist orientation wedded to a narrow notion of national interest (economic development) militates against these scholarly values. Consequently if distance educators working within the university sector want to discuss quality assurance in distance and open learning it is my view that we must play our part in seeking to articulate alternatives rather than silently acquiescing and becoming purveyors and part of a culture of compliance.

It is interesting that the authors of "Higher Education: Achieving Quality" mention that some

...institutions argued that these dangers (of infringing university autonomy) would be magnified and a culture of compliance developed if the structure were to be in any way linked to payment by results. (31)

Later they go on to say that 'In responses to the draft advice, there were even fewer universities still opposed...' (32) but what they, the authors, fail to point out is that this might very well be indicative of precisely the development of the culture of compliance to which they previously referred. In my judgement given dominant perceptions of the current financial environment, and of the broader risks, already referred to, of not engaging in a competition for a share of \$78 million on offer, it is very likely that a culture of compliance will now spread rapidly to encompass teaching and learning activities.

Research, of course, given the need for outside funding, is already increasingly tightly enmeshed in this way.

Throughout the documentation on quality assurance in Australia the core value of 'diversity' has been commended, however, given the nature of the national agenda it is difficult to see how this can be interpreted as anything more than lip service.

One of the guidelines recently issued by the minister is as follows;-

- Diversity in the higher education system will be promoted through an approach which emphasises quality within the context of an institution's own mission statement and its stated objectives; institutions' missions and outcomes may be regional, national or international to varying degrees. (33)

However, later in the same piece it is suggested that 'he (the Minister) expected the universities would review their mission statements in increasing numbers in the light of the Quality Committee's work.' (34) Here is where Piper's recently released work (35) may very well be influential for institutions may treat it as a resource which is seen to provide an authoritative source of ideas for use in the formulation of a response to the varied requests that are about to arrive in relation to the forthcoming quality audit.

Whilst Piper's work is lucid and systematic I am reminded of the process of painting by numbers; a system that may seem a straight forward way of learning to paint, but which I suspect, in the end has never led to the production of a fine work of art.

We need to be wary, for example, of geographical metaphors such as the notion of mapping used by Piper for the key contours are likely to be socially constructed and contested and not in any sense natural. (36)

Piper's work is extraordinarily clear and hence is very persuasive, but I remain resistant even though I cannot formulate a succinct and articulate critique. I continue to suspect that much of the quality assurance agenda is not too far removed from earlier managerial strategies such as time-and-motion studies. Such processes will generate a tendency to engage in comparisons which may well lead to a superficial set of choices which generates a notion equivalent to the one-best-way. Such measures will gain no more than a superficial and perhaps cynical commitment from both institutional management and the academic workforce.

This, if I am correct, is a shame for clearly there is much that needs to be done in higher education, but it will not be done if deeply held scholarly values are replaced by mission statements which have been hastily created in the interests of institutional self preservation.

We need to remember that clear and succinct institutional strategic plans are by no means enough for, of course, one could have a concentration camp with a very clear mission, very clear goals and objectives? Some years ago I referred to a remark of Harold Perkins that seems just as appropriate in the current context

...its triumph [the university over the medieval church] paved the way for the rise of the secular nation-state which was to be a more serious threat to the independence of the university than ever the medieval church had been. (37)

I will conclude by mentioning that with a colleague I have recently argued elsewhere (38) that there are potentially negative consequences if an academic community becomes committed to an emasculated professionalism through a half-hearted acceptance of an uncritiqued, imported set of managerial tools from industry. We stressed that by frequently using an ambivalent, contradictory, divided, and at times, muted voice on specific issues, such as the current debate about goal-setting, and in this context quality assurance more generally, the academic community allows the prospects of domestication to increase.

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**COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION OF INTER-CULTURALLY DEVELOPED DISTANCE
LEARNING MATERIAL 'WHAT IS EUROPE?'**

ELLIE CHAMBERS AND MARGARET WINCK

Collaborative Evaluation of Inter-culturally developed Distance Learning material: 'What is Europe?'

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'What is Europe?'

This course is the first to be produced under the auspices of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). It was prepared collaboratively, between members of British, Danish, Dutch, French and German universities. Funding for the course was provided by the participating institutions, with support from the EC Erasmus and Jean Monnet programmes and the Bosch Foundation.

In the course, political, social and cultural conditions of European integration are explored in a scholarly manner. The course consists of four modules, each prepared by different national groups, as follows:

1. The history of the idea of Europe (The Netherlands and Denmark)
2. Aspects of European cultural diversity (Germany)
3. European democratic culture (France)
4. Europe and the wider world (UK)

Basically, each module comprises specially prepared core texts ('Essays') in book form, and printed 'wraparound' study guide material. Core texts are the same in all countries but study guide material is prepared by each institution according to its particular national and educational context. Teaching is in the mother tongue or English.

The course is so designed, then, that it may accommodate national and institutional differences, and different target groups in each country. It both embodies principles such as 'particularism' (developing content and methods around the specific context of each country), 'biculturalism' (understanding the assumptions others make) and 'lateralism' (understanding one's own and others' histories) -- which Linstead¹ identifies as necessary for successful inter-cultural collaboration -- and, through the course material, makes such "cultivated double vision" (p.61) available to others. Evaluators in the UK and Germany now propose to discover whether the model chosen to achieve such accommodation works well in practice. In the process, they are themselves mindful of these collaborative principles.

The complete course in English is being presented to UK Open University (OU) students for the first time from February-October 1993. It is an OU half-credit course in the undergraduate programme (AD280), representing around 230 study hours. Meanwhile, in Germany, the materials are being used largely in professional development contexts; in particular, as in-service material for teachers, helping to raise awareness of the 'European dimension' they are recommended to include in their curricula.

Research aims

The evaluators are setting out to explore the conditions of preparing, exchanging and adapting distance education materials of high quality in the European context. We hope to identify the problems involved in transferring courseware between countries; owing to cultural and linguistic differences, and different educational traditions and assumptions about 'quality', as well as the more obvious structural differences between the countries' educational institutions. We believe that such investigation is most fruitful when based on attempts actually to produce collaborative courses and exchange them, and when it explores the processes involved in such collaboration as well as the outcomes of it.

In short, as a result of our research we hope to:

- transfer the experience of making this first collaborative European course;
- make recommendations regarding preparation of courses of high quality in the future;
- improve understanding of the (cultural and educational) problems involved in exchanging courseware between European countries;
- identify further research needs, for which funding will be sought from European sources.

We are beginning with a limited evaluation project: in the first instance, the British and German collaborators will investigate the ways in which module 2 of the course (prepared in Germany) and module 4 (prepared in the UK) are perceived and studied by British students and German addressees, respectively. We will try to identify any study problems associated with the different cultural and educational contexts within which the materials were produced and are studied. And we hope to develop further those principles which will help us prepare collaborative, culturally transferable courses of high quality in the future.

'Quality' in distance education

In order to do so, collaborators in the different European countries must try to reach agreement about what constitutes courses 'of high quality'. In other words, they must agree upon certain standards; or, criteria against which quality of course provision might be judged. But when, as Neave² points out, "What the concept of quality means precisely...varies from one country to the next", what exactly should we be setting out to judge, and by what standards?

Within higher education generally there does at least seem to be agreement that 'quality' is a complex issue. (De Weert³ records how even the Dutch Council of Higher Vocational Education, when introducing sweeping measures to restructure health education, "went so far as to say that these were not based on quality judgement, as the council did not feel competent" to make such judgements.) (p.59) First, it is agreed that quality is a multi-dimensional concept, so that attempts to assess it from any one perspective (such as, 'fitness for purpose') can only result in a partial conception of it. As we shall see, what is meant by 'quality', as well as what judgements are made about it, largely depend upon who is doing the viewing or judging and from what point of view.

Second, it is a dynamic concept: perceptions of it change over time. And, third, such perceptions vary according to the subject-matter in question.

On these latter points, Sylvia Wicks⁴, then of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), has argued:

Standards have always been those appropriate to the current cultural context and body of knowledge of the subject. Standards have not been maintained as they were at some point in time past. Such cultural relativity is a feature with which higher education has always coped as knowledge expanded and theory changed to accommodate the new information. (p.68)

In an overview of the CNAA's position on the debate about quality, Harris⁵ provides the following, cogent, summary:

Perceptions of quality vary in relation to the purposes of the perceiver (for example, the academic quality of a course is not necessarily the same as its quality as a vocational preparation), they vary over time, and they vary between subject disciplines. Absolute judgements are not achievable. (p.41)

The debate itself is similarly complex. Harris and Wicks write from the position of academics within the British higher education system. To Thompson⁶, then Director of a Polytechnic, judgements about quality involve assessment of both staff performance and the nature of the students' experience of learning (as well as their performance). From the point of view of the manager in Open higher education, the issues seem to be different again. In an article in EADTU News, Henderikx⁷ identifies four aspects of quality: quality in relation to an organisation's mission statement (its goals and standards); its orientation towards needs and demands (its ability to satisfy its students and society); its strategic institutional plan; and its product management (technical excellence). With Robinson⁸, who also takes the European perspective, we may wish to conclude that:

An important first step in the construction of acceptable standards for quality assurance is the creation of a shared language and concepts.

Like Henderikx, Robinson goes on to identify four aspects of quality, though only two of them coincide with his; her 'general philosophy' with his 'mission statement', and (approximately) her 'products' with his 'product management'. As a distance educator and researcher, Robinson focuses rather more on quality in relation to processes of teaching and learning, and to systems for the production and delivery of courseware.

As teachers and researchers ourselves, we share Wicks and Harris' conception of 'quality' as a multi-dimensional, dynamic concept which is associated with the values inherent in different academic subject-matters. And we prefer Robinson's identification of what is to be judged over Thompson's more narrowly-focussed, or Henderikx's essentially business-orientated, views. Accordingly, as regards our present enquiry, a comprehensive review of quality would encompass the following.

- a) **General 'philosophy':** the beliefs underlying the making of the course 'What is Europe?'; its aims; the approaches to the subject taken by the contributors, and the values inherent in the course.
- b) **Process:** the processes involved in developing the course; the chosen methods of teaching, monitoring, supporting and assessing its students or addressees.
- c) **Production and delivery:** the systems for scheduling, producing and delivering/transmitting the various course components; the management of those systems.
- d) **Product:** the materials themselves; the rate of drop-out from the course, and students' performance in assignments and examinations.

It remains to be seen what standards of judgement might be brought to bear on these four aspects of educational provision. Here it is helpful to make a distinction between those aspects we can in principle make objective statements about, and those which involve normative judgements and are contentious. Judgements about the quality of systems for course production and delivery would appear to come into the first category, since it is possible to compare different practices and possibilities with respect to their relative costs and efficiency. This is true, too, of some of the processes involved in the making of a course -- it is possible to assess the relative costs of text-based and face-to-face teaching methods, for example, although assessing their relative benefits would involve value-judgements -- and of some ways of assessing the quality of the product (for example, over a period, student drop-out and exam pass rates).

However, when it comes to aspect a) above, and to judgements about the quality of course material, we are squarely in the realm of the normative. How are we to assess the 'quality' of the aims of a course of study, for example, or the approach that teachers take to the subject-matter, and to judge its effectiveness as teaching material? Recently, attempts to answer such questions have tended to refer to purposes that are 'extrinsic' to education itself. Henderikx's emphasis on the importance of a 'needs and demands orientation' (or, "demand-driven academic curricula") within Open higher education is a case in point. That is, such matters are to be judged against the criterion of satisfaction in the market-place; at the levels of both society's need for a well trained work force and the individual consumer's demands. Leaving aside the conceptual and practical difficulties in the way of establishing either of these things satisfactorily, a major objection to this solution is that much of what goes on in institutions of higher education is not vocational in nature. Nor, beyond a certain point, is it open to negotiation. And Pring⁹, in a paper in the symposium on quality in education mentioned above, argues that it should not be.

Pring characterises the relationship between purposes and standards in vocational learning in the following way:

Successful learning signifies fitness for purpose; one first identifies the requirements of the job and then one specifies...the competences that enable one to do the job. The competences, revealed in the undertaking of...job related tasks, constitute the standards...Essential to the whole

enterprise is the precision with which competences are stated and the performance indicators made explicit. (p.13)

In academic study, by contrast, standards are implicit. That is, academic standards are the measures of "correctness, appropriateness, stylishness, validity, within distinctive traditions of enquiry". Moreover, they are:

acquired slowly over a period of time and always are only more or less understood; they are passed on to the next generation of students..through correction of the particular, not through the definition of the universal."
(pp.18/19)

He argues that these different traditions, of vocational and academic study, can happily co-exist side by side. What he, and we, object to are certain more recent developments which tend to conflate them. The first of these "trades on the vocational but wants to expand into the academic, thereby transforming it into something different" (p.19) -- as promoted, for example, by the Further Education Unit's notion of 'core skills', the NCVQ's 'General National Vocational Qualifications', the TEED's promotion of entrepreneurial qualities in higher education across the board, and the adoption of systems such as 'Total Quality Management' from business studies. The second is a 'radical interpretation' of standards that distrusts any values other than those which consumers wish to adopt.

With Pring we conclude that, in academic study, the criteria by which we judge quality depend upon the purposes of the activity and the values that are embodied in it. With respect to 'What is Europe?', then, quality is to be judged by contemporary academic peers -- other experts in European Studies and in the field of pedagogy -- as well as by those who study the course. Evaluation of the course involves exploration of the reasons given by both groups for finding these aspects of it satisfactory (appropriate, valid, correct, effective), or not¹⁰.

In this, members of the evaluation team are aware that they must decide what is to be seen as significant -- what to include and what leave out of account -- which necessarily involves judgements of value. With Jungmann and the ECCE group¹¹, we "believe that there is a possibility of arriving at a judgement on the adequacy and value of a particular educational programme, provided the criteria for the evaluation are made explicit and can be agreed upon". This belief underlies our attempt to evaluate the course collaboratively -- together to set aims, determine methods of collecting, analysing and interpreting data -- and is reflected in our research design.

Subsequently, peers' and users' judgements may be put together with our findings regarding the other aspects of course provision (the quantitative data), towards the comprehensive survey of quality outlined earlier. As in all such attempts, the basic assumption is that where there is quality of provision there is quality of education.

Research design

The quantitative data -- information about the systems for production and delivery of the course, some of the processes involved in making it, and about student drop-out and performance -- along with the judgements of tutors of the course, will not be available until our present research is complete. Present research, then, is limited to evaluation of the users' views and experiences of studying the course itself: the appropriateness of the course's aims and of the approach taken to the subject-matter; its scope and validity; the correctness and stylishness of the course material; the extent to which it is judged to teach effectively -- in the context of the requirement that the course should accommodate national and institutional differences, and different target groups, in the UK and Germany.

As the earlier analysis suggests, qualitative research methods are to be preferred here, in order that we may explore users' responses to the courseware in-depth. To be feasible, this entails a small sample of respondents. However, the chosen, matched, sample of 20 OU students and 20 German addressees is designed to represent the range of users in both countries and to reflect gender preferences within the humanities generally. Accordingly, each sample is stratified, as follows.

	High qualifications (including teachers)	Medium quals.	Low quals.	Totals
Female	6	3	3	12
Male	4	2	2	8
Totals	10	5	5	20

A larger proportion of those with 'high' previous educational qualifications is included in order adequately to reflect the nature of the target population in Germany.

During the study period, of February-October 1993, both sets of respondents are sent a series of questionnaires related to their work on modules 2 and 4 of the course. Each module consists of a book of Essays, or core texts, and associated study material. In the UKOU context, the Essays are accompanied by Study Guides, maps, supplementary material contained in a Sources and Commentaries booklet, and audio-cassette bands. In Germany, no audio-visual components are provided and all supplementary material is bound in with the individual Essays. The questionnaires sent to the UK and German groups of respondents take account of these differences in course presentation, but are otherwise identical. The questionnaires include both coded items and open-ended questions to which respondents may answer freely.

Module 2, prepared by German academics, consists of four Essays: Languages; Education; The mass media; Everyday culture. At appropriate intervals, all respondents complete four questionnaires; one in relation to each of the four Essays (and associated material) contained in the module. Here we are

particularly interested in how the UKOU students experience and respond to the material, with the German addressees acting as a kind of 'control group'.

Once initial analysis of questionnaire responses is complete, a list of questions in need of further clarification and comment is to be drawn up and agreed upon by the collaborators. The researchers then conduct semi-structured interviews with respondents by telephone. This sequence of events is repeated in relation to module 4 of the course, prepared by UKOU academics, from around the end of August 1993. In this case we will be particularly interested in how users in Germany respond.

Following an award from the British Council, Germany, for an exploratory visit to Tübingen in December 1992, funding for the collaborative evaluation is being sought from that body and from the German Research Council (DAAD). If granted, this will enable the researchers to meet on four occasions between September 1993 and February 1994 in order to steer the project, compare results, and prepare joint reports and papers. But the research team has already begun work.¹² At the time of writing, stratified samples have been selected in the UK and Germany, and evaluation of module 2 is underway. However, it is too soon to present even preliminary findings here. We expect this part of the project to be completed in February 1994.

Conclusion

Following production of project reports, and when all the data regarding course production, student performance etc. are available, we intend to prepare a paper for publication. Also, a proposal for further research will be made, which will build on the work just completed and, we hope, extend the analysis to include the Danish, Dutch and French collaborators.

This project will address directly the issue of different perceptions of standards in higher education in the European countries. If collaborative work in distance education in Europe is to have a future, it is vital that we work towards solving the practical problems involved in producing collaborative courses and adapting them for use in different countries. But, beyond that, if we are to facilitate the production and exchange of material *which is perceived as having equivalent status* within Europe, we must investigate those differences between our perceptions of 'quality' in education which underlie our different practices and products. We regard the present research into 'What is Europe?' as a first step towards achieving that more fundamental goal.

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- 9 Pring, R. (1992) 'Standards and Quality in Education' *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. XXXX, No. 1, pp. 51-56.
- 10 The purpose of this discussion about academic and vocational traditions is to reassert the importance of making proper, and helpful, distinctions between them. Appropriate criteria for judging quality may then be applied in each case. Insofar as the orientation of German addresses of the course is vocational, this will be reflected in their perceptions of the course material and, similarly, in the evaluators' judgements of its effectiveness.
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- 12 The team consists of the following members, from the UKOU and the DIFF, Tübingen, Germany: Ellie Chambers (UK project leader) and Kevin Wilson (AD280 course team Chair); Hans-Peter Baumeister (German project leader), Klaus Linke and Margaret Winck (academic staff members, the DIFF).

**AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION IN
CHINA: A MULTI-MEDIA DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE**

CAROL ANN EDGINGTON

An Integrated Approach to Teaching English as Communication in China: a Multi-media Distance Learning Course

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People's Republic of China

Introduction

Since 1981 the Chinese State Education Commission and the British Government's Overseas Development Administration (ODA) have been funding and staffing a materials writing project at China's Central Radio and Television University (CRTVU). The University claims that the course will be "new and unique" for China. The writers are attempting to integrate the novelty with traditional styles and expectations of teaching and learning.

ELT in China

There is an enormous demand for English as an international language and it is an essential instrument for China's modernisation and Open Door Policy. There are four million adult learners of English enrolled on courses in institutions outside the conventional universities, plus many millions of Free Viewers who learn English from broadcast Distance Education courses.

Ten years of Cultural Revolution isolated teachers in China from developments in the theory and practice of language teaching which has as a result remained teacher-centred, with emphasis on knowing rather than on using the language. Traditional Chinese teaching and learning patterns militate against the use of a communicative, problem-solving approach advocated by the expatriate writers.

Involvement of the British Government's Overseas Development Administration

The ODA has been involved in ELT in China since the Open Door Policy was implemented in 1980 and there are currently more than thirty projects in 26 universities involving 43 British lecturers. Since the ODA advocates local involvement in projects, they are jointly funded and controlled by the ODA and the SEdC. One of these projects is my materials writing project at CRTVU in Beijing where there has been a long involvement of British lecturers.

During the first phase, 1981 to 1988, a series of 4 books and associated materials were produced and have been broadcast since 1985. Subsequently it was felt that these needed rewriting in order to update them as well as to ensure consistency of methodological approach throughout the series, and to comply with changes in curriculum, credit allocation and cuts in TV hours.

The current second phase of the project began in 1989 with major rewriting and revision of the syllabus and course components.

The scale and importance of the project is the main reason for the ODA's ongoing support of CRTVU: this is potentially one of the most

influential language training ventures ever launched in Southeast Asia with a target audience of 600,000 TVU students and countless millions of Free Viewers. Nevertheless, in order for continued expenditure from the aid programme to be justified, not only must the course meet a clearly defined need, but it must also be acceptable and appropriate in the local situation. The concept of integration is therefore paramount and reflected in the way in which the development of local expertise and self-reliance is part of the project through the transfer of experience in the writing team, made up of two British lecturers, a Chinese supervisor, three Chinese counterparts and Chinese support staff.

The Central Radio and Television University - China's Open University for Distance Education

In a country the size of China, with a population of over 1.1 billion, where schooling has been intermittent and educational opportunities inequitably distributed, for political as well as social and geographical reasons, distance education represents a vital component in improving access to post-secondary study.

The CRTVU was established in 1979 and is now the major large-scale distance learning facility in the PRC. The CRTVU in Beijing is the administrative hub of the TVU network, where policy is decided, curricula are developed and courses are planned and written. Its founding was followed by the rapid spread of Provincial Radio and Television Universities, of which there are now forty three in cities all over China, with hundreds of satellite study stations in more remote areas, teaching 20,000 classes in 130 different subjects. There are thousands of full or part-time teachers, some trained and some not, and hundreds of thousands of students enrolled nationwide. The students are adults, studying without supervision, mostly in their spare time, and attending weekly contact sessions only when they can.

The CRTVU English Course

Design and objectives

English is compulsory for all TVU students taking a degree course. The course we are designing is a fully-integrated multi-media foundation course for false beginners who are not majoring in English but in Sciences, Technology and Engineering. The course is based on the principle that students should attain the ability to read about their own specialist subject area with the aid of a dictionary at intermediate proficiency level. The design of the course is in accordance with the characteristics both of current ELT methodology and of multi-media distance education.

Course components

It was decided to create a multi-media course since there are strong arguments in favour of the use of combined media:

- a wide range of instructional voices can enhance the

effectiveness of teaching materials and paedagogic strategies;

- a variety of teaching activities and agents provide for alternative routes to the same goal;
- there is scope for different learning styles.

The components and media used on the course are the following:

1. Audio-visual media

2. Print media

3. Contact sessions

1. Audio-visual media: 198 hours of TV; 24 hours of listening material on audio cassette tape.

Audio cassettes

These contain the Situational Dialogues presented on TV and provide supplementary listening material for use with the print materials.

TV

It was decided to make TV the nucleus of the course, despite the disadvantages of inconvenient viewing times and the ephemeral, uni-directional nature of broadcasts, because not only can television take the place of a teacher (especially in a country like China where shortage of teachers is one of the key problems), but also the techniques of television present material to learners in ways in which a teacher cannot, and thus TV is the best medium for certain aspects of language teaching; it is especially powerful when teachers lack resources, are untrained and inexperienced in both using and teaching the target language. In addition, it offers blanket coverage and helps to overcome geographical barriers.

Although the use of TV is central to the course, it must be integrated with classroom teaching in contact sessions. There is no direct feedback from learner to instructor with home viewing, so there must be proper preparation and follow-up if technology is to interlock with educational criteria and demands and thus justify itself by the part it can play in a total teaching system. Since the range of structural and lexical material is too great to be handled by TV alone and a restricted amount of subject matter is suitable for TV teaching exclusively, TV cannot provide the intensity of practice required for successful language learning. So, it is important for additional resources to complement, support and reinforce the TV component if communicative fluency is to be achieved.

2. Printed media: the course lasts four semesters, or stages. There are three books per stage, each of 18 units: the **Coursebook (CB)**, the principal text, integrally connected to the nucleus of the course, with each unit covering two, and later three, TV programmes. It is supplemented by, and cross-referenced with the **Student Handbook (SHB)** and supported by the **Teacher's**

Guide (TG). The accompanying print support materials are not optional extras, but an integral part of the course.

The structure used on the course is the following:

- The CB is divided into three parts :
 - "Pre-TV" used during contact sessions before viewing presents the structures, functions and lexis of the unit.
 - "TV", a viewing guide to be used by students during unsupervised viewing, when new language is practised, speaking and listening proficiency is developed and further explanation is provided of language structures and cultural background. "TV" contains speaking, listening and reading tasks .
 - "Post-TV" contains self-study follow-up activities: listening, reading and writing tasks, which consolidate and recycle language.

The SHB is a grammar reference book and self-study guide relying upon more traditional language activities to practise structures and teach vocabulary.

The TG, a tutor's reference book, is an integral part of the package comprising detailed lesson guidelines, classroom techniques and activities for supervised contact hours indicating problematic areas of each unit and explaining key teaching points. It also contains a rationale of the course, its underlying principles and methodology, since otherwise the materials may go against teachers' expectations and appear to undermine their position. It prepares them for a different role by helping them present, practise and integrate the content of each unit.

3. Contact sessions: There is a two-hour contact session per week, to deal with any problems arising from a previous unit and to prepare students for the TV programmes for the next unit.

TV language programmes cannot be seen as the mainstay of the learning process. Although distance learning implies a more student-centred approach, the teacher is just as important a course component as any other and retains a key role, whether as didact, guide, facilitator, animator or writer (the hidden teacher).

We try to emphasise this key role of the teacher in the use of TV in the learning process in order to raise teachers' self-esteem and build their confidence in the use of new technology so that contact sessions do not re-teach the TV programmes, but extend them: the teacher has to relate the broadcast material to learners' needs and promote active viewing. The teacher must not feel that he

is in competition with the medium, but that it is a tool to assist him in the performance of his tasks.

In this respect, there is a need for special training to enable teachers to exploit the medium and to be aware of the limitations as well as the possibilities represented by TV: he must know what television will do in the teaching scheme and understand the rationale behind the activities. Without this assistance, local teachers will not understand the potential of the medium and without such understanding, the materials in themselves will have little value.

A fully integrated course

Ideally these different instructional voices should be closely integrated and complementary, but a multi-media approach, i.e. integration of the components of the course, does not per se imply an integrated approach to language teaching. A multi-media package may contain only a loose relationship between its various components and it is necessary for close links to be established to ensure this integration is successful. A genuinely integrated multi-media package suggests a well-planned design which promotes the close integration between individual components at both macro- and micro-levels such that each component contributes to a whole.

Integration at micro-level

This is important since English is not a content-based subject: command of the medium is the goal, and in accordance with the theories linking linguistic competence and performance, communicative skills cannot be developed without a thorough knowledge of the language system. An integrated skills approach is needed (although prominence should be given to different skills at different learning stages); and we need to use integrated media (since different media are better suited to different skills) in order to bring linguistic skills and communicative abilities together into one integrated process. For course components to fit together in a close and complementary relationship the various teaching and learning activities must be integrated. TV viewing is central while contact sessions and home study prepare support and follow-up language material presented on TV. Each learning method (TV, contact sessions, home study) is an indispensable component each with its own focus and advantages: appropriate teaching methodology must be matched with appropriate technology so that specific learning goals are allocated to suitable media. This reflects the integration of printed and AV materials, the two main teaching media of the course: the former provides the basis of teaching and the latter is the main means by which the course is presented, so both should be used to their full advantage, supporting each other without unnecessary repetition.

Integration at macro-level

At this level, there are principles which need to be integrated to guarantee the validity and value of the course, in order to humanise distance learning.

1. Production values with pedagogic principles;
Although the universities have their own publications departments, production centres and broadcasting channels, and therefore should be able to ensure such integration, consideration must also be given to integrating materials and resources, for example, TV classes are often broadcast at inconvenient times, with no repeats.
The project must fit the requirements of both provincial and more central authorities, for example in some regions there is less need and therefore less opportunity to use English for communication.

It must be borne in mind that close integration at the micro-level may discriminate against students who cannot attend contact sessions, who do not have access to a TV set, a cassette player or even books.

2. The teaching of English with ideological education;
In China, Marxist ideology is seen to be an integral part of the subject to be studied. The aim of educational provision is to develop personnel with the moral, mental and physical skills for all fields of socialist construction.
3. Common core English with English for Science and Technology;
4. Needs and expectations of local teachers and learners with the objectives of expatriate writers;

The course should be new and unique for China, not for Europe.

Teacher training must respond to teachers' needs and prepare them for a new role.

5. Course development with course evaluation and with examinations;
 - a. There should be feedback opportunities included in the whole process for materials or strategies to be adapted where necessary. Locally-initiated evaluative frameworks in the form of "Approval Conferences" have been established at strategic stages of course development and dissemination: to evaluate and approve the curriculum, syllabi,

sample units, pre-publication proofs and pilot broadcast materials. These are attended by local and expatriate team members, with participants from Central and Provincial TV universities. This is an important step towards establishing relevant and appropriate materials which are ideologically appropriate and pedagogically sound.

b. It is important that the materials respect the students' entry level. A Placement test will be designed to ensure this.

c. Testing should reflect both the course content and methodology in order to evaluate the teaching and learning of the course to help revise and improve it.

Conclusion

The experience already gained from the project I have described has pointed to the usefulness of multi-media distance language teaching in the political, social and geographical reality of China. The medium of TV is particularly appropriate in such a context. Nevertheless the medium itself will not enhance the learning process unless there is full integration at micro- or course level and at macro-level with the underlying principles that govern Chinese tradition and current approaches in ELT methodology and in Distance Education. Approval Conferences represent a planned structure at the receiving end of the materials to evaluate their effectiveness and to ensure their effective use, and help to introduce as unthreateningly as possible the most effective ELT methodology that can be adapted for China by ensuring that reasonable compromises are reached, that professionalism is not eroded, but that the project fits in with the requirements of provincial and central authorities. Local expertise in exploiting the materials is vital: the central role of the teacher and, therefore, the crucial importance of proper teacher training in use of the package, matching the training to the teacher's role, are factors which are essential to the success of the project. Without such integration and training, the huge potential demand in China for English language learning will continue to remain largely unsatisfied.

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**EDUCATION WITHIN AND WITHOUT CLASSROOMS: SUSTAINING QUALITY
THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE**

TERRY EVANS AND DARYL NATION

EDUCATION WITHIN AND WITHOUT CLASSROOMS: SUSTAINING QUALITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

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Introduction

By definition distance education has been concerned with teaching outside classrooms. In practice this has not meant a total rejection of classroom methods, as these are generally the basis of the occasional meetings of teachers and students common in some systems. It has meant, however, that practitioners of distance education have given very careful attention to teaching methods which are effective in the absence of the teacher and which encourage students to become independent learners. It has meant also that distance education, as a diverse field, has taken a serious interest in educational technology.

In recent years many within distance education have spoken of a convergence between our field and mainstream education.¹ More recently educators from outside the field have manifested an interest in applying its methods to their own endeavours. The authors wish to encourage both groups and contend that educational technology should be regarded as a central concept for these purposes. Many of the arguments which have occurred within distance education with regard to educational technology should prove very instructive to those interested in reforming classroom teaching.

This paper begins with a review of recent developments in Australian higher education, wherein policy makers charged with addressing 'quality issues' have identified teaching techniques from distance education as a useful means of reforming teaching practices more generally in Australian universities. It proceeds to caution against a blind faith in the reforming capacities of 'educational technology' and to argue a case for a broad ranging approach with links to a diverse range of practical, research and theoretical endeavours.

Quality issues in Australian higher education

In keeping with international developments, 'quality issues' are currently of major concern within Australian higher education. Responding to a ministerial directive given in June 1991, the Higher Education Council (HEC) embarked on an extensive review culminating late 1992 with its final report—*Achieving Quality*.² The HEC is the Australian Commonwealth Government's supreme policy advisory body regarding universities. The Council employed a consultative process initiated by its own discussion paper, involving submissions from and meetings with interested individuals and organisations and invited discussion papers from bodies representative of some key stakeholders—university administrators, students and staff.

It is not intended to canvass the broader aspects of these issues. Readers interested in discussions from Australia and New Zealand, emphasising distance education, could consult work by Ted Nunan, Jocelyn Calvert, Andrea McIlroy and Robyn Walker.³

The focus is upon matters relating to teaching and specifically to proposals for reforms using educational technologies.

The HEC regards the attributes acquired by graduates during their university education as the most significant factor in determining the achievement of quality at both the institutional and system levels. The paramount objective of a university education should be to 'support learning through life'.⁴ The attributes required by graduates can be classified into three categories: 'generic skills, attributes and values; a body of knowledge and professional/technical or other job-related skills'.⁵

The first category includes:

... such qualities as critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, problem-solving, logical and independent thought, effective communication and related skills in identifying, accessing and managing information; personal attributes such as intellectual rigour, creativity and imagination; and values such as ethical practice, integrity and tolerance.⁶

From the Council's perspective, the 'acquisition of a body of knowledge' in a particular field of study is an important but subsidiary objective to the development of generic skills, attributes and values. Such a body of knowledge provides a useful 'theoretical base', but its most important function is as a context for the development of the more valuable general knowledge. While vocational skills are important, especially when graduates initially enter the workforce, they are the least important of the three categories.⁷

With regard to these desired attributes of graduates, on the basis of its consultations, the HEC ascertained almost universal agreement amongst stakeholders, at a general level. After consideration from the perspective of actual curricular and teaching practice, however, the Council expressed concern that many institutions placed insufficient emphasis upon teaching generic skills, attributes and values and too much emphasis upon teaching bodies of knowledge. It was particularly concerned by assessment practices, such as multiple choice testing, which encourage 'factual recall' rather than 'complex cognitive abilities'.⁸

The HEC's critical comments are made briefly and cryptically in the main report in *Achieving Quality*. An appendix contains 'examples of practice' which demonstrate that the Council places considerable faith in the reforming powers of newer educational technologies and links beyond the campus to industry.⁹ Educational technologies based on computers and telecommunications can, for example, strike 'a more efficient and effective balance between student managed self-paced learning and formal classroom time'.¹⁰ The Council draws attention to the capacity for inducing institutions to reform their teaching practices through the activities of the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) established by the Government in late 1992.¹¹ It is significant that the CAUT has given preference to projects that employ newer educational technologies. In its first round the CAUT funded 88 projects, 61 of these use computer based technologies and a further 24 are based upon models of teaching reflecting instructional design.¹²

In conjunction with the development of *Achieving Quality* the Government requested the HEC to establish enquiries into 'alternative modes of delivery in higher education' and into the possible application in conventional universities of techniques used in distance education.¹³ These investigations occurred throughout 1991 and 1992 and led to a consultants' report,¹⁴ a detailed advice to the Minister¹⁵ and a response from the Minister.¹⁶ With the March election behind it, the Government has continued to pursue these objectives and the HEC announced two new studies in May 1993.

It is very difficult to summarise economically the key points in this diverse range of papers. The revolutionary scope of the policy and practical implications of the Government's objectives are lucidly stated in the Minister's terms of reference to the HEC, which requested it 'to consider the extent to which distance education materials developed by the DEC's (Distance Education Centres)¹⁷ and their modes of delivery have been used and/or have the potential to be used':

- to supplement or replace aspects of conventional on-campus teaching in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- through a "mixed-mode" format, to cater for the needs of a range of students who cannot easily attend campus for normal teaching periods because of location or other time constraints;
- to facilitate the further development of approaches such as co-operative education and the provision of higher education in the workplace;
- to deliver part or all fee paying courses for overseas students in-country on a viable basis.¹⁸

The consultants' report was based on a series of visits to the DEC's and some other universities and a review of various reports on policy, practice and research. Its general conclusion is that conventional universities make no use of teaching materials produced by the DEC's for their distance education programs and there is limited use of these materials in the teaching of on-campus students within the DEC's. 'The use of distance *methods*, while not altogether widespread, is much more frequent than the use of materials, and in most cases is not the result of direct influence from a DEC'.¹⁹

In addressing the Minister's reference to supplementation and replacement of on-campus teaching, the HEC returned to the theme dominating *Achieving Quality* expressing concern that university staff regard 'choosing, developing and shaping content and then presenting that content through a teaching performance of some kind' as a central element of their academic legitimacy.²⁰ Rather, the HEC maintains, more emphasis should be placed upon face-to-face teaching in small groups and 'in the use of distance education materials to supplement, and to some extent replace, the traditional face-to-face lectures'.²¹

The Minister has accepted the Council's key recommendation that it 'be asked to investigate different expenditure patterns and other structural changes that might be required to enable institutions to engage more fully in using distance education materials, methodologies and technologies'.²² This enquiry is to address some of the difficult issues associated with the employment of academic labour and especially those related to its conjunction with investment in technology. It may come to grips with the development of an alternative to student contact hours as a measure of teaching effort. It may create funding patterns whereby institutions are given higher levels of funding per student during the (shorter) development phase of a course and lower levels in the (longer) presentation phase.²³

Prospects for technological solutions

In turning to distance education as source for new teaching methods the HEC has identified a field in which practitioners, researchers and theorists have achieved substantial success in the quest for techniques that replace and improve upon classroom methods. Most experienced members of the field will welcome the attention and the challenges it poses both for themselves and the potential converts; they will also point out that the road to the 'Promised Land' is still in the preliminary stages of construction.

The authors have engaged with many of these challenges and continue to urge others to join the fray. They remain concerned that advocates of some approaches to educational technology are proponents of an 'instructional industrialism' which has little chance of effectively educating students to become critical, independent, lifelong learners.²⁴ It must be recognised that in turning to distance education and educational technology, the policy makers have chosen fields in which there are many disputes over practice, research and theory.

The discussion paper circulated by the HEC in November 1991 was headed with a quotation from B. F. Skinner: 'Education is what survives when what has been learnt has been forgotten'.²⁵ It appeared originally in a short article, 'New methods and new aims in teaching', that was part of a *New Scientist* series published in 1964 dealing with 'Education in 1984'.²⁶ Skinner articulated plans for a 'new technology of teaching' which applied theories derived from 'the experimental analysis of behaviour' to 'programmed instruction' in which "teaching machines" are used to individualise instruction; an approach in which content occupies a subordinate role to the shaping of 'intellectual skills, abilities, attitudes and tastes'.²⁷ In other contexts the authors have questioned whether this kind of approach can create critical independent learners. They have also advocated an alternative approach based upon a humanistic set of assumptions.²⁸ The discussion turns now to some relevant examples from their own and others' work.

Ross Paul has accepted the challenge to provide a sustained analysis of management issues in distance education in the light of research, theory and practice in both contemporary management and distance education.²⁹ Significantly, in the light of the HEC's recommendations, Paul regards 'the development of independent learning' as the 'fundamental institutional value' against which to measure quality of performance.³⁰ He offers support for approaches which eschew instructional industrialism.³¹ A more detailed and practical discussion of the issues facing managers pursuing quality in distance education is offered in a recent collaboration with Roger Mills. A 'commitment to service to students', they conclude, 'ultimately enhances the institution's commitment to research, scholarship and learning'.³² They believe 'the quest for quality is not just a new management tool, but the very foundation of what a university is about'.³³

Mills and Paul speak very much from within distance education. Their ideas are likely to be practically and theoretically comprehensible to practitioners within the field, but less accessible to those who still regard distance education as a marginal activity. Christopher Knapper and Arthur Cropley, in their review of *Lifelong Learning and Higher Education*, have been able to locate a consideration of the contributions of distance educators within broader ranging discussions of 'lifelong learning and instructional methods' and 'instructional technology'.³⁴ This type of analysis is more likely to encourage innovative teachers within conventional institutions to consider integrating distance teaching methods into their own practice and to gain access to the research and theory which inform them. In this regard, their critical support of Alistair Morgan's work is important.³⁵

Morgan is a long standing advocate for 'project work' in distance education.³⁶ He is also well known for his criticism of those who regard independent learning as a handy slogan for withdrawing support from students and who place complete faith in teaching materials developed using principles from 'traditional educational technology'. Those searching for assistance in employing distance teaching methods in conventional settings should find his recent book of immense practical value, especially if they require methods which assist students to improve their generic scholarly skills.³⁷

The book is written on the bases of substantial research, a review of an extensive range of theoretical work on students' learning and the author's practical experience. It is addressed to readers requiring practical knowledge. It understands that virtually all university students are troubled by the teaching methods which confront them and proceeds from a perspective connecting theories of 'deep learning' with many approaches to educational theory and practice. Above all, it is founded upon research which engages students in their 'natural settings'.

Morgan's work also illustrates the time needed for educational innovations to establish themselves and the importance of individual persistence and institutional support. Based in the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University (OU), the work commenced in a context which deliberately promoted post-Skinnerian programmed learning and an alternative approach had to make its way on the bases of persistence and critical argument.³⁸ Both the research and theory associated with the work were able to be tested practically within OU courses and in other contexts through consultancy work.

Any attempt to encourage university staff to go beyond the confines of their academic disciplines and to regard themselves as 'teachers' rather than 'scholars' is fraught with difficulty. Don Anderson, the chair of the CAUT, has reminded Australian academics recently that the obsession with research and the neglect of teaching within universities during 'the last half-century has been an aberrant period in the 800-year history of the modern university'.³⁹ Universities catering for a mass rather than an élite group of entrants cannot expect 'pre-formed "independent learners"', they must expect to make their contributions to the continuing development of learning skills in their students.⁴⁰

Those university staff who have practised as teachers and trainers in schools and industry and who may have had some relevant professional education generally understand the principles of teaching. They are aware of the importance of both 'content' and 'method'. Teachers are required to treat classrooms as professional territory. They cannot take them for granted. This training engenders a respect for those who can create strategies for engaging students even outside conventional classrooms.

The authors have both worked as schoolteachers and this has influenced all aspects of their work in distance education. Nation's experiments with different text forms in teaching materials owes a lot to these experiences.⁴¹ For example, the use of the spirit duplicator as the basis for project work in secondary schools had an important influence on the later use of a Macintosh computer in the creation of printed teaching materials. Unsupervised independent learners in universities are little different, in principle, from secondary school students doing their homework!

It is well known that many distance education programs in universities have been initiated to provide professional education for teachers. Some years ago a substantial amount of the authors' work was in this field. From that experience grew a research project attempting to understand the responses to distance education of teachers whose occupational life was centred upon classrooms. While some may have preferred not to have been studying in response to professional demands to 'upgrade qualifications', most were very satisfied to study in a different mode to that of their own students. The courses which were most valued were those which made connections with the teachers' professional lives and avoided lecturing them in print about theoretical principles.⁴²

In recent projects the authors have been researching three different applications of educational technology. The first investigates the development of 'telematics' in isolated rural schools in Victoria.⁴³ The term 'telematics' is used to signify the use of telecommunications to teach students who are studying at a different school from their

teacher. Principally this means the use of microphones and loudspeakers connected by a telephone 'bridge' to allow teachers and students, usually from two to four schools, to talk and listen to one another during the course of a lesson. Outside of the lessons, and sometimes during them, fax machines are used to submit assignments, provide teaching materials, comment on students' work, obtain teachers' advice etc. A Macintosh computer is used to provide an 'electronic whiteboard' connection between the sites. The system has been developed as an alternative to correspondence education. Its creators were trying to retain the classroom model as the basis for their new technology. It works, it gives the teacher a chronic presence. However, only the most skilled of teachers can avoid 'teacher domination' of lessons.

A second study, conducted by Evans, is researching a program using interactive, satellite broadcast television for the professional development of teachers.⁴⁴ The research is in its infancy, however, it is clear that a struggle exists to develop technologies which use the available communications media to create quality professional development activities for teachers to use in their schools, principally outside school hours.

A third study investigates O'Shane University and Bells Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College, which have established an Industry Centre through which workplace based courses are developed and taught in partnership with industries.⁴⁵ This development represents a sophisticated blend of educational technologies to achieve ends which are at the forefront of those demanded by government and industry. Their courses range from TAFE Advanced Certificate and Associate Diploma levels through to University degree (Bachelors) level. The awards are accredited by one or both institutions and are articulated with other awards of those institutions. The Industry Centre establishes 'strategic alliances' with particular industries which lead to the development of courses relating to the particular circumstances of the employees and workplaces. Typically, the courses are developed as print-based materials for individual study and are supported by regular tutorial contact sessions in the workplace. Students use laptop or other computers and modems to access a mainframe computer at the University which provides them with Computer Managed Learning (CML) facilities—especially testing and assessment—and with email contact with their tutors. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is embedded within the Industry Centre's activities to provide for advanced standing for those employees who have completed equivalent studies before commencing their Industry Centre courses.

These research studies are informed by a theoretical approach emphasising the facilitation of dialogue in distance education and of the development independent learning skills in students. Despite the creativity and energy of the key people involved in the projects under study, it is significant that in practice they find it very difficult to achieve objectives in harmony with the theoretical approach informing the research studies. Practitioners in distance education are not alone in falling short of these objectives, as the HEC has established in *Achieving Quality*. Much more practical, research and theoretical work is needed before the HEC's faith in the reforming powers of distance education can be fully justified. An important issue for investigation, as part of this work, is the reluctance by staff in conventional universities to recognise the utility of approaches developed in distance education. It is encouraging to note in closing, however, that there is much work occurring currently within distance education which could justify the faith of the policy makers. More is required! It is also important that those working within distance education, in various capacities, make the effort to communicate the results of their work to educational communities more generally.

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- ¹ For a detailed discussion and references to relevant work of others see Evans, T. D. and Nation, D. E. (1993a) 'Educational Technologies' in Evans, T. D. and Nation, D. E. (eds.) *Reforming Open and Distance Education*, Kogan Page: London, pp. 209-214 and Evans, T. D. and Nation, D. E. (1993b) 'Distance Education, Educational Technology and Open Learning: converging futures and closer integration with conventional education' a paper presented to the Eleventh Biennial Forum of the Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association, 21-23 July, Adelaide, pp. 1-4. The second section of the present paper is an edited version of parts of pp. 5-7 of Evans and Nation (1993b).
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- ¹⁷ In 1987 Minister John Dawkins initiated a massive reform of higher education in Australia which abolished the distinction between colleges of advanced education and universities and encouraged many amalgamations. As part of this process and following years of attempts at rationalisation provision of distance education was forced into eight Distance Education Centres (DECs). The DECs were to concentrate resources in an effort to improve performance, smaller 'specialist providers' were required to work with a DEC. See Livingston, K. (1990) 'The Shake_up in Australian Higher Education and its Impact on Distance Education', *International Council For Distance Education Bulletin*, Vol. 24, pp. 52-59. In February 1993, Minister Beazley abolished the distinction between DECs and specialist providers thus 'deregulating' distance education. See Beazley (1993) op. cit. pp. 4-5.
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QUALITY OF WORK, QUALITY OF LIFE

CLARK EVERLING

Quality of Work, Quality of Life

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Quality assurance in industry is usually examined exclusively as a workplace issue, as the quality of the work that each of us does in producing goods and services; a general outcome of competition on the one hand and pride of craft on the other. I want to argue in this paper, first, that quality assurance in its current form must be understood as an outgrowth of a particular stage of development in the global economy and, second, that quality assurance must be seen as a product of mutually determining relationships of individual, workplace, and society that extend far beyond, but are always implicit in, work and the development of quality production and service. Our ability to think and communicate effectively within those relationships decides whether we understand a commitment to quality as an expression of our own activities or as an arbitrary and external requirement. Quality assurance programs can depend upon understanding responsibilities through more detailed instructions to employees or increased employee involvement in making decisions about how work will be done and for whom. But any employee-management interaction always includes not only the social relationships where we work but also those where we live and participate as citizens.

Quality assurance in today's global economy centers around the development and delivery of customer service, that is, around identifying and developing products and services for the specific needs of specific customers or groups of customers and insuring quality and integrity at each stage of this process. Customer service in these ways guides production and decides its expansion or contraction, while how best to produce for and satisfy customer needs guides the development of services. Customer service is the standard by which all companies, large and small, within the global economy are judged.

Customer service as I have described it is sometimes referred to as simply the "market." But this is much too vague and ahistorical a designation. Rather, customer service must be seen as developing out of the contradictions in the mass production/mass consumption societies that emerged in Japan, North America, and the European Economic Community in the generation after the Second World War. Originally a result of the expansion of mass production, mass consumption within these countries has come to be supported increasingly by government taxing and spending policies as movements of capital and production have reshaped or eliminated the mass production industries upon which mass consumption originally rested.

Mass consumption, then, is a social phenomenon which derives

its existence from a variety of sources but is increasingly at a distance from production. If you can turn out 1.5 million computers a year from one plant, employing 200 people, as Apple Corporation can, for example, then the primary relationship of most people to that activity is not as employees but as consumers or potential consumers. In fact, this form of intensive production expresses explicit relations to all of us of social production as well as of social consumption and use, but our only access to it is as consumers or, more precisely, as customers. The identification and satisfaction of those who can consume becomes crucial to the expansion or contraction of production.

Thus the structure and operations of today's corporations and their emphasis on customer service indicates growing differentiation within mass consumption. In part this differentiation indicates the extensive development of mass consumption and the specialization of customer tastes within it; in this connection, customer service represents a positive social development, a product of closer human interaction and mutual recognition. But, also in part, this differentiation reflects decline within markets previously associated with mass production industries. The elimination of many jobs, industries, and geographic areas of employment within nations which provided the basis for consumption during much of the twentieth century means that globalized high technology production often takes the form of underproduction directed toward those customers remaining.

In our roles as employees and citizens, there are a number of social relationships which define the contexts within which considerations about quality assurance take place. First, production and service created most centrally through global corporations and high technology has made relationships within national economies increasingly social and similar. As individuals, we find increasingly similar technical skills requirements, needs to think and communicate effectively, and common needs for access to employment and mass consumption processes. In workplaces, we find that the numbers of those involved in actual production has diminished while services identifying customer needs and linking these with production have grown dramatically.

Second, changes in the global economy have meant that human beings have become connected in new ways. Societies are at once national and global and production, service, employment, consumption, and participation in civil society all interact within that context. If global corporations are the essence of these social and economic relationships, they are also the products of those relations. It is what we as citizens do to restructure the interdependencies within our societies that will decide our futures.

As educators, we are concerned with all of the unities and diversities of current economic and social relationships in developing and delivering quality education. We attempt promote educational development which is both responsive to personal needs and consistent with given economic and social requirements. What I want to explore in this paper are some of

the ways that we can best assure the quality of our own performance by understanding the increasingly social and diverse linkages that I have outlined above. I am suggesting that it is in understanding the synthesis of these relationships that educators can best approach questions linking quality of work and quality of life.

I will provide examples of three apparently diverse kinds of workplaces and emphasize the essential customer service orientation of each. I will then explore how issues of quality assurance in production and service cut across a variety of concerns for employees and managers in their simultaneous workplace and societal roles. Finally, I will indicate some of the ways that education might address these concerns and in so doing realize new unities, and to my mind improve the quality of, our own educational services.

The first of my three brief examples is that of steel production. In this case, I am referring to US Steel, but this could be any number of steel companies in global competition. What was a classic mass production industry during most of the twentieth century has moved from employing thousands within a worksite to employing hundreds. Increasingly the products to be produced are determined through discussions of sales representatives with potential customers who may be located anywhere within the global economy. These discussions identify how speciality steels can best be used in the development of complex structures. This involves close interaction between customer and business at all levels of this process from the development of appropriate metalurgies to the installation and testing of the structures.

My second example is that of a women's clothing retailer, The Limited, with an international chain of shops. This retailer also controls the manufacture of these clothes, but only by contracting out to manufacturers anywhere in the world. Customer choice is determined by sales, the results of which are communicated by computerized cash registers to the central computers and then to the present manufacturers of those particular items. The results are then communicated back to sales personnel who use this knowledge of customer choice to help them in organizing displays of merchandise, usually arranged according to instructions from a central office, and, in influencing their new customers potential selections. The turnaround time between initial customer selection, manufacture, and having the replaced item available to new customers, at any of these stores anywhere in the world, is usually no more than one week.

The third example concerns ConRail, a previously nationalized and now deregulated and privatized freight railroad in the United States. This railroad identifies its market increasingly as large transnational corporations for which it attempts to provide complete transportation services. This means that the railroad becomes the manager of multimillion dollar accounts for a company's shipping and in return makes arrangement for any form of transportation from the shipment by rail and truck of large quantities of manufactured goods to providing

overnight delivery service of documents and packages by subcontracting with airlines and other companies. Not only does this railroad manage increasingly diverse services in this way, but recently it purchased a hazardous waste disposal facility in Canada. The railroad is now being encouraged by financial analysts to move its capital out of rail lines not committed to transnational corporate networks and into global hazardous waste management.

What is striking about all of these businesses is their emphasis upon customer service, which here represents a wide and even global set of social relationships in which manufacturing, sales, and transportation are pieces to be rearranged in the identification and meeting of particular customers needs. Relations among things, among all of the commodities involved in these processes, therefore takes the essential form of relationships among people. In addition to obvious needs for technical knowledge such as metallurgy or textile manufacturing or computer programs, most of the processes involved here are dependent upon direct communications among people in workplace and marketplace. Quality assurance in all of these cases depends upon the kinds and qualities of human communication, which, in turn, are always dependent upon our senses of ourselves as individual and social beings and therefore upon the conditions of our social existence.

Yet it is also obvious that the powers of communication involved in these settings are highly differentiated. All or most of the workers in the steel mill may need an active knowledge of the processes involved in making a particular kind of steel and may have substantial interaction with sales representatives and management concerning this, while workers in the clothing and railroad businesses will have quite disparate access to communication networks. The clothing store company, like all of these companies, relies upon a variety of individual consultants, even ones that they employ on a fairly continuous basis, who have a great deal to do with problem identification and solving and the facilitation of communications within wide ranges of production and service connections. But those working in the women's clothing stores themselves, who are most probably women, play little or no role in store management and are communicated with from corporate headquarters mainly by computers. Those planning delivery systems for major corporate customers in the case of railroads may have a good deal of say in the way those customer needs get met. But those employees working on the rail lines themselves may find that their corporation's reorganization diminishes their voices and threatens their benefits and job security. At the same time, all of these companies need a commitment to quality from all of their employees. The women working in the clothing stores are the crucial link between the store and its customers and not only the expansion of sales but the success of those lines of apparel which the company has decided to produce. The railway workers dedication and success is crucial to the railroad's major corporate deliveries and their assumptions about the importance of the quality of what they do may decide their company's competitiveness.

Thus, the centrality of communication and customer service in the development of the global economy have shaped the emphasis upon quality assurance. At the same time, changes in production and service arrangements have led to changes in social security and social mobility which are highly contradictory. The clothing stores, for example, may offer increased opportunities to women, including women of color, just as new processes in other industries may offer opportunities to previously excluded workers. But these opportunities occur in the context of the multiplication of relatively low paid and temporary employment, both full and parttime, and the decline of available benefits, such as pensions and health care. The point is that quality assurance within the workplace becomes increasingly problematic when the bases for consumption and the qualities of national life are precarious or declining.

Social mobility is both upward and downward in new ways. While all of these forms of employment rely upon new levels of communication and interpersonal skills, there is a lack of personal security and reward attached to lower level positions and it is very hard for persons so situated to see themselves in or even know about the higher level skills involved in such activities as consulting. Consequently, levels of social frustration may increase as we fail to match social circumstances, education, and potentials for social mobility. In many cases, whether for sales personnel or electrical engineers, it is highly unlikely, especially given the relationships necessitated by new technologies, that they will be employed full time or have their benefits come primarily from corporate sources. It is again necessary, then, that we look to the general and social character of all of these relationships and understand that opportunities for mobility, security, and benefits, and the education necessary to connect people with job opportunities, are going to have to come from government. Otherwise, it is most likely that workplace and social power differentials that I pointed to above will undercut quality assurance in many workplaces and make programs for it appear as something that the company wants in the work process but denies in employee's access to quality of life.

I have tried to suggest throughout this paper that quality assurance issues in general center around the customer service orientation of workplace activities. I have suggested further that the effectiveness of the human interactive, communicative and problem solving inherent in this orientation is contingent upon the ways in which all participants see and understand their own social positions and possibilities. Stated most broadly, in terms of the workplace examples that I have provided above, there is the question of how one understands his or her workplace activities in the full extent of their social connections. To what extent, for example, does the steel worker understand not only the full process for making various kinds of steel but also other possible social uses of steel products? Do we build intricate stairways while bridges collapse? Can the woman in the clothing store examine not only her relations to customers but also to the product that she sells? How does women's apparel furnish women with particular images of themselves? Can the computerized process of the kinds of clothing to be produced

involve multilateral communications and considerations? Does the movement of the deregulated railroad industry into lines of work quite apart from transportation mean that rail service becomes increasingly unavailable for renewed urban and national economic and social development? Will a US-based railroad's control of global hazardous wastes decide the human and ecological impact of their disposal in Canada? In what contexts and social forums can any or all of these issues be discussed and decided and by whom?

The present global and national economies and the social relationships which compose them raise important concerns for educators with regard to our own quality assurance. What should be the roles of technical education and of the liberal arts? How do we educate our students to be most personally effective given social relationships which place high demands upon individuals and provide disparate opportunities and rewards to them? How do we build educationally upon interactive human linkages which draw us ever closer together in economic and social life?

Education works best and provides its own best quality when we understand who our students are according to their own individual desires and social relationships. The seemingly neat, but often highly distorted categories of individual and nation, have given way to mass global societies where it is the relation of social individuals to themselves and to one another that is at the core of all of the processes which create that society as a relation of production and consumption. Consequently, the ancient dictum "know thyself," has an increased relevance at least equal to the technical knowledge necessary to production and service processes today. In fact, if we stress the technical too narrowly, we diminish the usefulness of the student's knowledge for the highly communicative and interactive processes in which they must engage. This argues for approaching technical knowledge as interdisciplinarily connected with other forms of knowledge and problem solving.

In all of the ways that I have indicated above, the humanistic and socially responsible thinking and communicative skills which are traditional aims of the liberal arts become of crucial importance. It is also necessary that the contexts of the sciences, humanities, and social sciences be fully inclusive of people in all of their national and global connections, both contemporaneously and historically, and that these interconnections be understood as relationships within the whole. These goals enable our personal understanding as well as equip us for participation as citizens in all of the connections that I have outlined above.

Individuals' effective participation in workplace and society very much depends upon opportunities for full development of their own abilities and for appreciation of their own and others' social positionalities and diverse heritages. This means understanding one's individual relationships as a series of social relationships to oneself and others and understanding the historical origins and development of those relationships. This argues very much for educational formats which encourage analysis of one's own knowledge in all of its forms, without initial

regard for its academic creditability, as a means of beginning this process of social and self understanding. This process begins also the student's exploration of his or her own full range of academic interests and possibilities. These goals are best realized in curricula which emphasize analytical thinking and communication skills. It is only by understanding ourselves and our institutions according to all of their social linkages that we can also understand their interactive character and can best attempt to build and assure quality within any one of them.

**MEETING INFORMATION NEEDS - A QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH TO
SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

JUDITH FAGE

Meeting Information Needs - A Quality Assurance Approach to Systems
Development in Distance Education

Judith Fage, UK Open University

The CIRCE concept

In 1992 the UK Open University had around 126,000 registered students, and over 8000 part-time tutorial and counselling staff directly supporting those students by correspondence, telephone and face-to-face teaching and guidance, and by marking coursework.

Those figures alone indicate the essential need for a reliable and user-friendly computerised system; maintaining paper records would clearly be a process so labour-intensive that it would cost the earth (an apt phrase too in terms of its impact on the rain forests!), and too error-prone to be remotely acceptable either to students, or to staff (who depend on the system for their payment).

The current 'Student Records' system is known as SRNew, and is the 1980 replacement of the original SR system set up when the University began. It covers all student services and teaching support, including enquiries handling, admissions, fees, registration mailings, allocation to tutors, assignments, residential schools, and examinations - a huge and complex system. It has served the University well, but its expected life span of 10 to 12 years is now past, the University has changed almost beyond recognition since it was first introduced, and moreover has a target for expansion to around 200,000 students worldwide, by the year 2000. Redevelopment is now urgent.

The original intention was simply to transfer these present systems to a new technical platform, which would, with admirable logic, be called SRNext. However, during the development of a user strategy, a rather wider view of future University needs was identified, which covered all aspects of handling customers, of whatever kind, from first to final contact. This wider view gave the new system its second name: **CIRCE**, standing for **Corporate and Individual Records for Customers and Enquirers**. The mythical goddess Circe, despite a rather alarming initial tendency to turn men into pigs, nevertheless provided Odysseus and his companions with a year of lavish hospitality, and is thus a not entirely inappropriate name for a system intended to be above all customer-centred and user-friendly, usable by the wide variety of units and areas in the OU now directly handling customers and students, and able to support the OU's plans for development, including expansion.

The creation of new computer systems has been a risky business in the past few years. There have been some major failures in the UK, notably the disastrous collapse of the London Ambulance Service's new system almost as soon as it was introduced; the Stock Exchange TAURUS project failure; the rejection of the Performing Rights Society's central system; and as this paper is being written, there is news of the abandonment of a huge Department of Employment computer records project, not before creating widespread chaos and a loss of £48 million. While there are a number of features contributing to these disasters, many of them can be considered as failures of quality assurance and quality control, including in the critical area of project management, allowing errors to compound and failure to be, in the end, inevitable and irretrievable.

The OU is in a stronger position: it has a history of successful computer development, a user population experienced in computer systems, and an efficient Management Services Division. Nevertheless, it was aware of the significance of the new system both in its impact on the University's activities and in its potential cost. So a decision was made early last year to contract the consultants Ernst and Young to review the intended strategies and report on their soundness. They supported the strategic view inherent in CIRCE, but advised us that we first needed to develop an **Information Systems Strategy (ISS)**, which would draw on the aims and objectives of the institution and relate them to the information needs of the area. The ISS would in turn provide a structure for the individual information systems operated within the University, initially within the area encompassed by SRNext (CIRCE).

This approach differs from previous systems developments in ensuring that before we embark on the systems applications themselves, we have a good view of the overall structure of the systems and activities they should collectively be serving. One member of the study team likened previous approaches to 'designing the doors, windows, walls and roof of our home before considering whether or not it is actually a house, bungalow, flat or some other residence we actually want'.

The CIRCE ISS

It is not the purpose of this paper to describe in any detail the results of the ISS. Rather, the intention is to highlight those aspects of the process which assure the quality of the development as it progresses through its initial phases, and in particular the quality assurance built into the methodology used to establish the Information Systems Strategy. Needless to say, the overall objective is to ensure that the system that emerges genuinely meets the needs of the 'business area' and of the University as a whole; in other words, that it is truly 'fit for its purpose'.

The first 'quality assurance' feature lies in the existence itself of a strict, objective methodology, enshrined in a Project Charter, providing the maximum possible independence from personal bias or vested interests within the institution. The phases of the strategy development involve specific processes which must be adhered to, and the ISS Team of mixed user and technical staff was bound by this, and advised and monitored throughout by Ernst and Young consultants.

In general terms, the stages of the strategy study are:

Scoping study	Definition of scope of CIRCE business area
Project Initiation	Preparation and planning of project management
Existing Systems Review Information Needs Collection	Assessment of current systems support Refinement of information models through extensive user interviews
Analysis and Subsystem Development	Building of business area models
Information Needs Workshops	Further refine and agree models with users
Strategic Options Analysis	Define and describe strategic options, including applications and costings
Strategy Refinement	Full documentation of chosen option
Project Completion	Review of Study

The Study is thus very much at the strategic level, providing a structured way forward, but not at the level of detail required to define individual sub-system user requirements or to design specific operational procedures. However, these more detailed phases, and the ultimate achievement of the project's objectives, are dependent on the proper implementation of this strategic phase.

Quality Assurance Features

The Strategic Plan

The methodology seeks to ensure that every stage of the study is linked back to the University's Strategic Plan. This process starts with the initial establishment of high level strategic aims and objectives for the CIRCE area, and some critical success factors and assumptions essential to the achievement of those aims and objectives . These are confirmed and agreed by senior managers in the area during the project initiation phase, and at every subsequent stage functions and processes are linked to them. They thus act as a continuous test of relevance (fitness for purpose) and help, through the methodology, to assess priorities, right down to the selection of candidate applications for the various business areas within CIRCE.

Of course, the process can only ever be as relevant as the Strategic Plan was in the first place. There will always, in an institution the size of the OU, be people who will argue that the strategic direction is wrong; nevertheless, it is firmly linked to a Plan which has been agreed through the OU's formal (and informal) consultative and decision-making structures, and not, therefore, subject to the whims or prejudices of anyone involved in the ISS study.

User involvement

User involvement in the Study has been extremely heavy but also highly structured. It has focused largely on the Existing Systems Review and the Information Needs Collection.

For the Existing Systems Review, each system was assessed from the user perspective alongside a technical assessment by Management Services; some 560 forms were completed in response to structured questionnaires.

The Information Needs Collection involved 55 meetings with around 150 users (managers, administrators and academics) across the area, again according to a pre-agreed formula within a framework defined by the methodology. An important feature was its focus on functions, independent of existing organisational structures or systems. The emphasis was on information needs, factors and assumptions crucial to the area; problems, opportunities and initiatives.

From this information a series of models was built, subjected to the scrutiny of users in two intensive workshops, and altered and refined as a result.

The Study Team

While this may not seem at first sight a quality assurance mechanism, it has nevertheless acted as one. Firstly, the Team, like the methodology, is business led. The Study Manager is a senior business user, working with four other users, and the two core Management Services members were selected as much for their wide University view and their experience of working effectively with users on previous projects, as for

their expertise in IT. Secondly, every important activity and draft 'deliverable' has been subject to frank scrutiny by the Team as a whole, which, while representing different perspectives and skills, has been encouraged and expected to comment freely on all aspects of the project work. It has something of the effect of a course team preparing a new course; everything is subject to internal scrutiny before going outside the Team. Indeed, team reviews are an important part of the methodology, and guidelines for their management are included in the Quality Plan (see below).

The Project Assurance Team (PAT)

The management of the study has also adopted a recognised methodology, with a Project Board, and a Project Assurance Team and Project Study Team (described earlier) reporting to it.

The Project Board, comprised of managers in the area and chaired by the Project Sponsor who is a pro-Vice-Chancellor, have some specific quality assurance terms of reference, including ensuring that the products of the Study are of an acceptable and appropriate quality, and meet criteria defined in the Study objectives; and to ensure that those quality criteria are objectively defined in advance.

The **Project Assurance Team (PAT)**, consists of 5 senior members of staff selected for their combined ability to absorb and assess the output of the ISS regularly throughout the Study. Its key role is to review the products of the Project Team and to advise the Project Board as to their acceptability. The focus of its reviews are generally to ensure that quality management processes have been adhered to; user needs and expectations addressed; that the project work plan is based on appropriate methodologies; and that reviews have been performed and their results incorporated. Its Chair is a member of the Board, and as such has a pivotal role in taking forward key issues. This has proved to be particularly important in freeing up policy logjams, where the long-standing postponement of decisions required for the development of the business area are affecting the progress of the project itself. The critical importance of this role will be seen below.

Project Quality Plan

The Quality Plan sets out 'those planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that the Study will satisfy given requirements for quality' (the definition of quality assurance in BS5750). It defines quality guidelines for the work of the Study Team, and establishes a framework for the quality assurance task of the PAT. It does this by setting out quality principles; describing the roles and responsibilities of bodies and individuals in relation to quality assurance; defining the content of each of the study deliverables and listing points to consider for producing them to requirements; and specifying the method of endorsement for the Quality Plan. This framework includes six pages of concrete, often quite detailed quality principles; for example:

' A detailed Work Plan shall be produced and documented for the six week period immediately ahead; the Plan shall be reviewed weekly by the Project manager and thus constitute a six-week rolling plan';

' A training programme shall be devised during Project Initiation and reviewed regularly throughout the Study';

'A risk analysis and plan shall be prepared, maintained, and regularly assessed by the Project Manager during the Study, and significant risk factors shall be brought to the attention of the Project Assurance Team and the Project Board.'

The Quality Principles also include guidelines on the preparation, conduct and conclusions of questionnaires, surveys, interviews and workshops; and there is an important section on review processes.

The Issues Log

It is sometimes easy, when engaged in a struggle with an unfamiliar and difficult methodology, which is also relatively value-free, to forget that beyond the walls of the Team offices is the real world of University policies and, indeed, politics. One of the features of the Study methodology designed to keep us linked to reality is the Issues Log. This is formally described as 'a record of each issue which arises during the project and which potentially impacts the achievement of the Study aims and which ought therefore to be resolved.'

Some of these issues can be quite small, and capable of resolution within the Team. However, the majority, and the most important, have turned out to be substantial policy issues which must be resolved. They are not, of course, easy decisions to make in a climate of great volatility; what has been required is a forward-looking strategic approach to reflect that of the Study. These major issues have been referred to the Project Assurance Team, which has had the task of taking them up with the Project Board.

It is probably fair to say that this has been one of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of the project, requiring considerable upwards pressure on the Senior Management of the University by the Study Team leader and the Chair of the PAT. In order to complete the CIRCE development to time, a real start has to be made by September 1993. This requires the speedy resolution of some crucial policy issues which have been simmering on back burners for some time without being fully addressed. For example, the OU at the time of writing has at least 5 different admissions systems; there is a widespread desire to see these systems unified, and this must be clarified by the time the first CIRCE analysis, which will be concerned with enrolment, is begun. The OU's structures are not particularly conducive to rapid but sound decision-making; however, these issues are now moving towards resolution, but not without a certain degree of institutional pain! It is significant that it has been the strategic approach of the ISS, with its rigorous quality assurance features, which has forced the institutional change required, in fact, by the OU's own Strategic Plan.

A Customer Records System for Quality

So far, this paper has concentrated on the process of assuring the quality of the ISS development, and ensuring, as far as is possible, that the resulting system meets the needs of the University and the business area in the fullest sense. However, there is still some way to go. The Study Team has recommended that the business and user led approach which has been the guiding principle of the ISS should continue into the systems development itself, as a major quality assurance feature. Accordingly it is envisaged that the development of individual applications will be carried out by teams that are user-led, but in partnership with Management Services staff, ensuring that the systems meet as far as is possible the business interests of users.

It is worth perhaps ending by a word or two about some of the most important needs identified by users throughout the institution. The overarching need for accessible, flexible Management Information systems to enable units to plan ahead, monitor and evaluate performance and outcomes, and meet the new requirements of quality audit, was made clear to us in interview after interview. It was equally clear that users do not see this as possible without the strategic approach taken by the Study, enabling a comprehensiveness and consistency which has become lost as the University has expanded and diversified.

Much of this, as described earlier, will depend on whether the management of the University can rise to the challenge of some fundamental new policy requirements. In the long run, the real test of 'quality' for the CIRCE development will be the extent to which it can support and enable a University approach which is itself based on the maintenance and development of a 'quality' service to our customers, students and staff.

This paper draws on documents produced by the CIRCE Study Team, whose UKOU members are Peter Bristow (Study Manager), David Christmas, Kate Edwards, Judith Fage, Helen Niven, Jack Ryley and Roger Webb, assisted by David Bygrave and Joan Stewart.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES IN DEVELOPING ACADEMIC COURSES: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FIVE DISTANCE TEACHING UNIVERSITIES**

SARAH GURI-ROZENBLIT

The pursuit of quality is an important issue in higher education, worldwide. But quality is a relative term. Harvey and Green (1993) in trying to define what is quality in higher education have reached the conclusion that "it means different things to different people, indeed the same person may adopt different conceptualisations at different moments... There are a variety of 'stakeholders' in higher education, including students, employers, teaching and non-teaching staff, government and its funding agencies, accreditors, validators, auditors, and assessors...Each have a different perspective on quality. This is not a different perspective on the same thing, but different perspectives on different things with the same label" (Harvey and Green, 1993:10).

Distance teaching universities (DTU) were challenged to define special quality mechanisms for their operation, since some of the traditional concepts of quality in higher education contradicted the underlying philosophy of their *raison d'être*. Traditionally the concept of quality in higher education has been associated with elitism, with belonging to a higher class, to a small selected group of scholars. This kind of quality is not to be judged against a defined set of standards, but a quality unattainable for most people. Education at Oxbridge or at the Ivy League universities in the USA, for example, implies distinctiveness and exclusivity.

Most of the DTU were established on a very different philosophy - of opening up higher education to many strata of the society, that otherwise could not attend a higher education institution, of widening access to tertiary level education, of mass higher education. But at the same time, they had to prove that the education that they offer is valuable and on a high level and even more qualitative in some respects, as compared to some conventional universities, in order to establish their credibility and respectability in the higher education system, in which they operate.

Excellence is often used interchangeably with quality. Excellence sees quality in terms of high standards (Moodie, 1986; Reynolds, 1986). Hence, by excelling and establishing high standards in some aspects of providing distance higher education, the DTU could ensure themselves a unique and respectable position in the academic world.

Unquestionably, one of the most important areas which many DTU choose to excel in is the development of high-quality academic courses. Rumble (1986) states that course development is one of the most significant activities of any distance education system. The exposure of distance education materials to a public arena is a significant aspect of distance education (Shaw and Taylor, 1984). The availability of course materials allows the public, including other developers and content experts to judge their respectability and quality.

This paper compares quality assurance procedures in developing academic courses at five large and autonomous DTU, four of which were established in the early 70's, following the model of the British Open University (UKOU), which was established in 1969. The universities are: UKOU, Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (UNED -1972), The Open University of Israel (OUI- 1973), FernUniversität (FeU-1974), and Athabasca University in Canada (which was established in 1970 as a regular university and reconstituted in 1975 as a distance teaching university). Although these five universities resemble each other in several aspects, they also differ considerably in many others. The resemblance and differences between these five universities in assuring the quality of their academic courses, will be analysed according to five major factors : (1) the ethos of academic autonomy; (2) admission-exit requirements; (3) faculty size; (4) course approval procedures; (5) inter-university collaboration.

But before starting the discussion, it is important to distinguish between quality control and quality assurance procedures. Quality control refers to a set of operations which intend to check a product's fitness for purpose according to a set of required criteria. Quality control is primarily an action which adjusts operations to

predetermined criteria. Quality control in relation to academic teaching creates considerable conceptual and practical difficulties (Adelman and Alexander, 1982; Guri, 1987). It is especially difficult to define exact standards against which it is possible to evaluate the fitness of an academic course for its purpose. It is complicated to define whose purpose, and how fitness is to be assessed.

Quality assurance is not about specifying the standards or specifications against which to measure or control quality. "Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered... The assumption implicit in the development of quality assurance is that if mechanisms exist, quality can be assured" (Harvey and Green, 1993:19-20).

In the context of this paper, it is important to state that most of the procedures employed at DTU for monitoring the quality of the self-study courses are mainly quality assurance procedures, rather than quality control mechanisms that specify exact criteria against which the quality of the final product (learning units, textbooks, readers, etc.,) can be assessed.

1. The Ethos of Academic Autonomy

The ethos of academic autonomy is a crucially important factor that influences the nature of quality assurance procedures in DTU. The concepts of academic freedom and professional autonomy assume that what goes on in a particular higher education institution, course or classroom is the responsibility of the professional scholar concerned. This rests on a view of the academic, after given the *via legendi*, "as professionally competent over the full range of activities he undertakes, and this competence includes the necessary knowledge and skills to make or seek insightful and valid appraisals of his work and to act on these appraisals" (Adelman and Alexander, 1982:15-16).

In contrast to the conventional universities, many of the DTU employ quality assurance procedures at the stages of course approval, course development, and teaching (Guri, 1987; Holmberg, 1989; Rumble and Harry, 1982). UKOU was the first one that initiated the model of team working in preparing academic courses (Perry, 1976; Smith, 1980). A team is formed of highly specialised personnel, including subject-matter experts, educational technologists, audio-visual professionals, television and radio personnel, tutors and others as needed. A chairperson co-ordinates the work of a dozen or more specialists to create a course over a two or three year period. Scaled down versions of the course team approach have been used at other DTU, such as- OUI in Israel and AU in Canada.

In the framework of a team the writings of an expert academic are evaluated by both- other academics inside or outside the university, and by editors. It seems to me that in UK, with its external examiners system it was easier to introduce quality assurance procedures for evaluating the writing of an academic by other colleagues. The external examiners system attempts to ensure comparability across institutions. The external examiners system, by definition, puts limits to the ethos of academic freedom, by appointing external academics to evaluate and even change the content and structure of final exams, taught by academics with a *via legendi*.

In Germany and Spain, where the ethos of academic autonomy is most valued and sacred, and in the case of Spain even defined in the form of a law in the University Reform Act of 1983 (Garcia-Garrido, 1992), it was unthinkable to develop formal quality assurance mechanisms at UNED and at FeU, for evaluating learning materials written by professors. Both - UNED and FeU employ the author/editor model (Smith, 1980). In this model the materials written by a faculty member are edited by a professional editor. The work of the editor may be limited to proof reading and assisting with graphics and layout or involve substantial restructuring of the author's work. Smith (1980) found that the author/editor model is the most common for course development at most distance teaching institutions. It is important to

note that at UNED and FeU the editor's employment is not mandatory, but just available and recommended. The professors are free to decide whether to use materials published by them or by others elsewhere, or insist on publishing their writings as they are, without any editing.

OUI in Israel faced the most complicated situation. From the outset it defined very stringent quality control procedures for approving and developing courses. A learning unit, written either by an internal faculty member or an outside contracted professor, are sent for evaluation to three to five expert academics in the other universities. But the ethos of academic freedom is most guarded and valuable in Israel as in Germany and in Spain. The result has been that many academics feel reluctant to undergo such procedures of inspection and examination. Some even claim that it contradicts the basic concept of academic autonomy (Guri, 1986). Therefore, it is extremely difficult for the OUI to recruit outside contributors for writing its academic courses.

It might be concluded that, generally:

The more guarded and "sacred" the notion of academic autonomy in a given higher education system, the less likely it is that quality assurance procedures are employed for evaluating materials written by academics in a DTU operating within this system, and the more difficult it is to recruit external academics for writing courses.

2. Admission-Exit Requirements

All DTU reflect a concern with the need to widen access to university level education. It is possible to open access to higher education by enabling anyone to study, i.e., by not setting any admission requirements. But it is also possible to widen access to higher education by enabling working adults to study part-time, by reaching students at distance locations, but still require entry qualifications. In fact, very few DTU have adopted an open admission

policy. In the context of this paper- UKOU, OUI, and AU have an open admission policy, while UNED and FeU pose entry requirements as the regular universities do.

The DTU employing an open admission policy had to define special quality assurance procedures in the learning/teaching process and specify clearly their exit requirements, in order to secure their academic status. The result of the combination of an open admission policy with stringent exit requirements is usually a high drop-out rate in the course of the studies, especially in the first course (Perry, 1976; Guri-Rozenblit, 1993).

FeU and UNED that require entry qualifications as the conventional universities do, emphasize also that their exit requirements resemble the other universities. As mentioned above, the use of quality assurance procedures in these two universities in the process of developing the academic courses is minimal and optional. On the other hand, UKOU, OUI, and AU have developed special quality control measures for developing high-quality self-study materials, and the development of the materials constitutes also the major focus of their operation. These three universities also developed special quality assurance mechanisms for the learning/teaching process and for the final exams. UKOU joined from the very start the external examiners system.

The high-quality materials that were produced by UKOU, OUI, and AU have contributed significantly to the improvement of university-level textbooks. Not only the students of the DTU enjoy them, but students from conventional universities welcome them warmly and use them extensively. In fact, one of the most important contributions of DTU to higher education systems, at large- has been improving the quality of university-level texts (Guri-Rozenblit, 1990).

It might be concluded that, generally:

The more open the access to a DTU, the more quality assurance mechanisms it is likely to establish for developing academic courses, monitoring the learning/teaching processes and defining the standards of the exit requirements.

3. Faculty Size

The size of the academic faculty influences the nature of the quality assurance procedures at different DTU, and has an impact on the roles of the faculty members at each DTU. When the UKOU was initiated, both the Planning and Advisory Committees had recommended to base it on a small nucleus of internal faculty : "The Advisory Committee envisaged that the University would require a central professional staff of between forty to fifty. This total included not only the academic staff, but also the administrative and operational staff that would be required" (Perry, 1976:77). But the first Vice-Chancellor, Lord Walter Perry, made a great effort in mobilizing a substantially greater number of academics. He insisted that the academics developing a course will be full-time members of the institution: "I am quite sure that we were right to employ as our main course creators full-time academics of the OU, and eschew the original idea of the Advisory committee, and indeed of the Planning Committee, of using mainly consultants or people of secondment from other universities" (ibid:92). In 1992 UKOU had an academic staff of 810, with nearly 100,000 students (OU, 1992). FeU had in 1991 - 430 professors with around 53,000 students (EADTU-News, 1993). UNED had over 800 professors with nearly 100,000 (UNED, 1992). AU had in 1992 - 75 academics with over 11,000 students (AU,1992), and OUI had in 1992 only 28 full-time faculty with over 15,000 students (OUI, 1992).

Obviously, a DTU like OUI, that depends heavily on the employment of external academics from other universities faces very different problems, and has to establish totally different quality assurance procedures in developing its academic courses, as compared to a DTU that has a large internal staff, and its materials are developed

mainly by its internal faculty. External staff lack the institutional commitment of full time permanent staff. "Conflicting loyalties among part-time writers may result in the production of materials which are unsuitable for distance learners" (Carr, 1984:17).

It might be concluded that, generally:

The smaller the faculty size in a DTU, the more external academics and professionals are contracted to participate in developing its academic courses, and the more special quality assurance procedures are needed to be defined, in order assure the quality of its self-study courses.

4. Course Approval Procedures

In most conventional universities, course proposals are rarely subject to a thorough evaluation. In many cases the appraisal process is no more than a "rubber stamping formality at faculty or Senate level which ensures that outward forms of a proposal- title, syllabus and examination arrangements are consistent with prevailing practices" (Adelman and Alexander, 1982:9).

In DTU, mainly at those whose major activity is developing self-study materials, course approval is usually subject to more stringent quality assurance measures as compared to traditional universities. At the OUI, for example, external professors that submit a proposal for a new course, have to submit also sample materials in a length of approximately one learning unit (30 to 70 pages). The decision to request sample materials resulted from a series of previous failures, in which written learning materials did not meet the structure and format of an instructional self-study text. Even brilliant scholars with an outstanding reputation in the academic world can fail to transfer their knowledge and expertise into an instructional discourse, into a "guided conversation" (Holmberg,1989). Writing distance learning texts requires skills that are often quite different from those associated with lecturing in a conventional university.

Some external professors are shocked and surprised when they are presented with challenges to their assumptions about teaching and are forced to rethink how they should present their subject-matter (Guri, 1987).

In addition to the request to provide sample materials, each proposal is sent to three to five experts in a given field, in several Israeli universities, and sometimes even abroad. The sample materials are usually commented by internal staff of the OUI who are acquainted with its standards. Around 20% of the proposals discussed in the area committees at the OUI each year are rejected on the grounds of poor quality materials. Another 20% require redrafting.

Obviously the small size of OUI's faculty and the dependence on external authors have influenced the creation of such stringent course approval practices. But also in other DTU, course proposals are to be approved by the faculty in a given area, and the discussions and decisions at such meetings are significantly more than just a rubber stamping procedure.

It might be concluded that, generally:

The more dedicated a DTU is to developing high quality self-study academic courses, and the smaller its internal faculty, the more quality assurance processes it is likely to employ at the course approval stage.

5. Inter-University Collaboration

Inter-university collaboration constitutes a major challenge for academics and policy-makers in distance education (Daniel, 1989, 1990; Guri-Rozenblit, 1990, 1993). Successful cooperation bears the potential of expanding educational operation, enriching the curriculum in various institutions, and in the long run of being cost-efficient.

Collaboration is ultimately more effective than adoption or adaptation in ensuring that a course has the potential for international use. Collaboration in course development may resolve many of the problems associated with international and inter-cultural course development, while opening new doors of opportunity for distance education.

Obviously, collaboration with other institutions needs the definition of special quality assurance procedures. Coffey (1989) proposes five pointers for ensuring successful collaboration:

- to state clearly what is the joint venture;
- to keep it simple, since complex collaborations are fine on paper but difficult and expensive to set up and sustain;
- to define exactly what is the role of each partner;
- to be clear about money;
- to maintain review procedures of all aspects of collaboration.

Language constitutes a limitation for international cooperation, if a language is used only in a given country, such as Hebrew is in Israel, or German. The UKOU has the most extensive network of ties with institutions in Britain and all over the world. UNED has as well connections with all the Spanish speaking world. AU, the OUI and FeU collaborate as well with numerous institutions, especially within the national boundaries, but also have constituted international projects with institutions in other countries.

Generally, it seems that:

The more respectable the academic status of a DTU, the more contracts and agreements it has with other universities and institutions within the national boundaries, and abroad, and the greater impact it has on the quality of the learning materials and the quality of teaching at other higher education institutes.

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CAN QUALITY MANAGEMENT HELP US COPE WITH CHANGE?

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Can Quality Management Help Us Cope With Change?

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Much of recent management literature has placed emphasis on the notion of quality and this rhetoric is being found increasingly in education. What is meant by "Quality"? How might it affect the way we manage in distance education? What is the dark side of quality?

Coming to the end of the 20th century, we are increasingly aware that the changes in the next decade are more than numerical. The changes in society both geographic and political, the pace of technological innovations, the continuing gap between rich and poor, the tensions between workplace needs and increasing unemployment, and our inability to live in global peace are profound concerns. And we are likely to continue to find that change is a way of life in a world that is increasingly complex and even chaotic. The importance of education as the one sector where people, both children and adults, may learn to orient themselves to such a changing environment throughout their lives is obvious. However, because the potential value of education is now recognized in this way, it has come under closer scrutiny.

The calls for education to be recognized as a crucial partner in future economic and social development are matched by the demands of those who insist that given the present recessionary times education costs should be reduced and educational organizations made more accountable (Canadian Prosperity Secretariat, 1992). Economic concerns have helped fuel a recognition that our present educational systems are not easily adapted to meeting demands for either radical change or for greater regulation. Hence there have been two opposing movements: One has sought greater control and regulation through such initiatives as national curricula and assessment programs, at present only a focus of compulsory schooling but potentially also possible in post-secondary education through such euphemisms as restructuring, coordination, and rationalization of services. The other is based on the recognition that our present bureaucratic structures which do not recognize the individual talents of the workplace are unable to cope with the demands for change and that education, like industry and business in general, requires radical reorganization (Senge, 1990; Fullan, 1993). For all of these reasons, educational institutions have begun to adopt more of the rhetoric of industry, and one of the most pervasive movements has been that of total quality management. What does quality mean? What is its intent? How might it contribute to service? What is its dark side? These questions are addressed in the remainder of the paper.

What is the meaning of quality?

Perhaps it would be more accurate to ask, what are the meanings of quality? First, quality has always had a close connection with standards. The word itself was originally neutral: we spoke of "high" quality and "poor" quality and in an effort to ensure that all outputs were of a predefined standard of quality, measures of quality control were introduced. In education, our most frequent form was (and is?) the inspection, whether of test scores, number of graduates, drop-out rates, or faculty publications. Such a system is based on the presupposition that the actual practices are those most likely to achieve the desired outcomes, and all that is necessary to ensure the maintenance of the outcome is some form of quality control.

Over the last fifty years, industry has come to recognize that such procedures were insufficient to enable them to reduce error costs in order to compete in increasingly global markets. Deming (1986) and others proposed the development of standards which would be adhered to during the actual production process, thus eliminating variability in production standards and reducing the rejection rate from end-point quality control mechanisms. This reduction of inefficiencies was to be obtained through planned and systematic activities which monitored the level of congruence between expected and achieved outputs at every stage of the production process and did so within agreed upon cost margins. Hence, production and costs were tied tightly together. This was the basis for Deming's definition of quality as "conforming to specifications" (Soin, 1992, p. 8). However, in order to remain competitive, not only had costs to be kept to the minimum, but industry had to put more emphasis on finding out what customers wanted to purchase. Therefore, the notion of meeting customer demands, both in terms of the design of the initial product and also in terms of follow-up maintenance and service, became embedded in the notion of "quality" in what Juran (1979) termed "fitness for use." In contrast to the mechanisms of quality control, this system is referred to as quality assurance. Where an organization has put such a system of self-regulation, monitoring, and market assessment in place it can apply to the International Standards Organization for recognition and use of a Standards Number.

In many ways, these ideas do not seem to be extraordinary. In a milieu where profit and growth are the major objectives, such a system would seem eminently rational, at least on paper. The difficulty as in all human enterprise is in the action, the implementation of these ideas. How might such a system be managed? Oakland (1989) insisted that quality was too important to be left to expert quality controllers but instead had to become part of the ethics of everyone in the organization. For him, the alternatives to everyone accepting the

importance of self-monitoring their own performance were total surveillance and increased quality control, both very costly and inefficient options.

Many writers (Cuttance, 1993; Henderikx, 1992; Lindsay, 1992) have suggested that such systems have limited applicability for service industries or, in particular, for education where objectives are not clear, outcomes cannot be easily measured, and poor results may not be directly attributable to problems in the teaching process. Furthermore, the complexity of stakeholders' objectives, the need to work in cooperation with other social agencies, the diversity of client demands, and the inability to generate revenue all work against the direct application of total quality strategies in education. Nonetheless, particularly in post-secondary educational institutions where student numbers are directly related to levels of funding, many of the aspects of quality management are being considered as possible ways to enhance efficiencies within present cost levels and to enhance productivity and performance. At the same time, total quality management, as its major proponents (Deming, 1986; Juran 1979; Crosby, 1986) suggest, is more than the application of controls throughout an organization, the monitoring of customer service, and the reduction of costs in proportion to growth. It requires constant management in the continual seeking of improvements, whether through technological innovation, changing environmental conditions or improved marketing strategies. It is these aspects of total quality management, the possibilities for improvement and change, that have found their greatest resonance in education.

Sallis (1991) has identified four imperatives for introducing total quality management in education: the professional, the moral, the competitive and the survival. Simply put, as professionals could we be satisfied with providing less than the best education to our learners? Morally, is not the requirement to provide a high level of service and to help students learn? We and our students live in a competitive world, one where quality concerns are evident. As competitors, we should recognize this general environmental awareness of quality, provide it to our clients and require it of our suppliers. Survival concerns, and pressures for accountability provide other imperatives for adopting an orientation to total quality management. In effect, Sallis argues that quality is part of the values of the professional towards continual improvement, and that environmental demands require us to employ such an orientation. Similarly, Simpson (1993) states, "It is simply far better to work for an institution with a genuine commitment to quality and where high quality is evaluated, prized and rewarded" (p. 61).

What is Total Quality Management?

Although there is not complete agreement on the attributes of total quality management, West-Burnham (1992) has provided a succinct outline of the basic points, many of which already have been identified as aspects of quality assurance:

FOCUS	Internal and External Customers
DEFINITION	Meeting Customer Requirements
SCOPE	Every Aspect of the Organization
RESPONSIBILITY	Everyone
STANDARD	Right First Time--Fitness of Purpose
METHOD	Prevention not Detection
MEASUREMENT	Zero defects
CULTURE	Continuous Improvement

West-Burnham (1992, p. 8)

The focus of the management of quality is not only on the clients of the organization but on the people who are the organization. Quality has to mean as much to them as to their clients and has to include every aspect of their work where through trying to meet their own targets to improve their work they will continually create better alternatives for their clients. Quality then may be the initiative of management but it must be the equal responsibility of every employee. If quality processes are to be the responsibility of every employee, then the desire for quality has to be part of the beliefs of every person on the payroll. If decisions are to be monitored and alternatives considered, then people have to be prepared to work in teams or groups. If continuous improvement is to lead to prevention of errors, then creativity and risk-taking must be nurtured. If quality is to be tied to fiscal considerations, then loss of clients, and inability to meet their needs must be measured and assessed. If quality is to be the watchword of the organization, then it has to be defined by the client and meet their requirements and standards. This description may seem to highlight practices that are somewhat incongruent with the present situation in educational institutions, for West-Burnham goes on to note:

TQM organizations are about much more than responding to clients. They are as much about creativity, team-work, celebration, growth, recognition and excitement as creating effective processes. . . . TQM will not work if it is perceived as a series of mechanistic processes. Above all else, it is about the quality of personal relationships. . . . TQM provides an approach that is sufficiently pragmatic to meet the changing environment that

[educational institutions] are having to operate in whilst being centrally and fundamentally concerned with values and moral considerations. (p. 8)

It is this desire to cope and adapt to the changing environment whilst retaining those principles considered central to educational institutions that has encouraged educational institutions to consider the possibilities of the management of quality.

Although industry has placed most emphasis on the control aspect of quality assurance and have stressed the necessity of statistical processes to control non-compliance, management texts on total quality also stress the importance of a vision of quality, the need for transformational leadership and senior management commitment, the promotion of a quality culture and the development of semi-autonomous teams to replace formal hierarchies. Most of these are not unique to the management of quality but reflect present thinking on the most effective ways to manage organizations (Senge, 1990; Stacey, 1992).

This orientation to meeting client needs and doing so in a competitive environment where survival is a real concern and professional values are strong is not strange to those in many distance education units. Most often part of a dual-mode institution and housed or aligned with the continuing education or extension function of the organization, the unit is considered part of the enterprise rather than of the disciplines. As such, many distance education units are not unfamiliar or unreceptive to the principles of total quality management. However, an orientation towards quality may be based on the desire for survival in a global market, a depressed economy and with increased competition for increasingly perceptive clients. In such a situation, the tendency is to adopt the low road of quality assurance. It is considered enough to set in place systems to obtain better data about discrepancies between proposed and actual performances, to use budgets to encourage units to tighten up their procedures and reduce errors, or even to do market analyses and client satisfaction surveys, and although all will help to keep budgets in line and clients interested in the service, their motivational potential to encourage staff to sustain commitment to the process is limited. At its most encompassing, the alternative, total quality management, requires a reexamination of the basic assumptions people hold about ways of working in organizations. Fundamentally, it is about organizational change.

Murgatroyd (1992) has identified four related "territories" of organizational change in educational organizations. These are (1) "improving performance within existing beliefs," (2) "changing infrastructure assumptions and design," (3) "context design change," and (4) "promotion and development of personal mastery" (p. 187-188). The first territory relates closely to the quality assurance processes described earlier and to daily management practices which provide for frequent review of processes and decisions and tie actions to objectives. The second relates to the development of different authority relationships such

as autonomous work groups, short-term teams, top-to-bottom teams, and cross-functional teams. Team development involves instruction in problem finding and solving, and encouragement to be creative and risk-taking. The third relates to an examination of the culture of the organization, the language, symbols, myths, ikons, and beliefs, and a rededication to those values which are shared by all organizational members. The fourth territory, which Murgatroyd sees as the most crucial and least developed,

places emphasis on individual and team development in terms of personal mastery--emphasis is given to qualities such as thinking processes and reflectivity, creativity, self-awareness and development, compassion and respect, service to one another within the organization and to the emotional well-being of colleagues (p. 188).

Pasquale (1990), too, emphasised the importance of personal learning as a perennial quest: "Inquiry is the engine for vitality and self-renewal" (p. 14). Murgatroyd, however, stresses that organizations to be effective must work on all four territories at once and that the tasks of the leader are to focus energy and resources on the critical tasks, to model continuous improvement through learning, to sponsor new ideas, and to encourage all to work together towards becoming and providing their best.

Fullan (1993) also stresses the importance of reexamining our notions about how change in education occurs. He points out that:

No amount of sophistication in strategizing for particular innovations or policies will ever work. It is simply unrealistic to expect that introducing reforms one by one, even major ones, in a situation which is basically not organized to engage in change will do anything but give reform a bad name. You cannot have an educational environment in which change is constantly expected, alongside a conservative system and expect anything but constant aggravation. . . . The educational system [needs to become] a learning organization--expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work, not in relation to the latest policy, but as a way of life (pp. 3-4).

For Fullan, the focus of education is not to please the client but to make a difference in the lives of students regardless of class, gender, or ethnicity and to help them become productive citizens in increasingly complex societies. Education is involved in the continuous process of the transformation of learners, and teachers, Fullan contends, are perforce involved in continuous improvement to try to bring these goals to fruition. He supports the view that change is mandatory, only growth is optional and provides a set of paradoxes to help us think about change. These are:

- (1) You Can't Mandate What Matters (The more complex the change the less you can force it),
- (2) Change is a Journey not a Blueprint (Change is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse),
- (3) Problems are our Friends (Problems are inevitable and you can't learn without them),

- (4) Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later (Premature visions and planning blind),
- (5) Individualism and Collectivism Must have Equal Power (There are no one-sided solutions to isolation and groupthink),
- (6) Neither Centralization Nor Decentralization Works (Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary),
- (7) Connection with the Wider Environment is Critical for Success (The best organizations learn externally as well as internally),
- (8) Every Person is a Change Agent (Change is too important to leave to the experts, personal mind set and mastery is the ultimate protection) (pp. 21-22).

Points 1 and 8 stress that all change is individual change. Points 2, 3 and 4 highlight the evolutionary, exploratory, non-linear nature of change. Points 5, 6 and 7 speak to the need for balance between the individual and the collective, authority and autonomy, the group and the context. Fullan also stresses the importance of every person in the organization developing their inner and outer learning capacities. The first is the capacity to be both inner-directed and yet open to possibilities, our intrapersonal sense-making, the personal mastery referred to by Murgatroyd. Fullan emphasises the importance of encouraging people to think for themselves because "personal change is the most powerful route to system change (p. 140). Outer learning capacities emphasise connectedness, relating and collaborating with others, the importance of the relationship referred to by West-Burnham. Continuous learning is a core value for educators; the challenge is for us to model it in our own working lives, to foster it in others and, through specific cooperative strategies to focus on meeting and exceeding our learner's expectations.

Is there a dark side to quality management?

The critiques of quality management have been many. They range from those who would dispute that anything developed in the business world has application in education (Lindsay, 1992); those who contend that education has too many stakeholders to come to any clear definition of a single purpose which would be useful in making process decisions (Goddard & Leask 1992, p. 5); those who reject the use of the term customer (Lozier & Teeter, 1993); those who consider the process to be too mechanistic (Albrecht, 1990); and those who see it as the march of managerialism over professional autonomy (Everard and Morris, 1990). Even those who support the concept acknowledge that "it will take time to create a TQM strategy within an organization and longer for the sustainable, steep-slope benefits to be felt" (Murgatroyd, 1992, p. 198).

There is still profound skepticism that wholesale implementation of quality management practices can benefit educational organizations. While organizations may benefit from an analysis of their procedures and a realignment of their practices, such strategies of themselves may exacerbate the issues of power and control which underlie all relationships

in organizational life. Further, as Cuttance (1993) argues, quality strategies have to match the specific organization and we must be careful not to let the practices be applied where they are inappropriate.

Can total quality management work in distance education?

A number of writers have provided descriptions of quality management in relation to aspects of total quality management including: value-chain analysis (Murgatroyd & Woudstra, 1989, Woudstra & Powell, 1989); student support services (Simpson, 1993); learning materials production (Freeman, 1991); an MBA program (Viljoen, Holt, & Petzall, 1991); and the ASPESA Forum 91 papers (Atkinson, McBeath, & Meacham, 1991). Many of these deal with aspects of the processes. Simpson gives voice to students' concerns and so do Viljoen et al. and Murgatroyd and Woudstra. Regardless of the specific analyses conducted, their message is similar. Students expect to work with excellent students, knowledgeable personnel, receptive administrations, and clearly organized materials. It is a reminder that the core of our enterprise is teaching and learning; much as we might at times desire otherwise, it is working with the intangible, with desires, thoughts, dreams and commitment none of which are easily measured. What TQM forces us to consider is the working environment in which this takes place. Do we work in environments which support our learners? Do we act out our beliefs about lifelong learning? Do we encourage each other to be learners? We would do well to remember Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) admonition, "subjective experience is not just one of the dimensions of life, it is life itself" (p. 192).

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QUALITY ASSURANCE RATHER THAN CONTROL OF MATERIALS

JACK KOUMI

Quality Assurance, rather than Control, of open learning materials

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Introduction

The case I'd like to argue, regarding quality in distance education materials, is that resources should be concentrated on **materials creation** and that **developmental-testing of materials** should take second place. That is, quality **assurance** should take first priority, enabled by high-quality, trained, experienced teacher-producers, who are permitted sufficient thinking-time for drafting and refining materials. In contrast, quality **control** (often exercised in the form of developmental testing) should be carried out only for the occasional lesson.

I do believe in **some** developmental testing for every distance teaching course and even in testing every lesson for **some** courses, but I don't want the idea of developmental testing to distract attention from what I see as the central concern: striving for the highest pedagogic skills, experience and creativity of the authors of materials, and ensuring adequate time for them to exploit their expertise fully.

I'll argue my case for this order of priorities in a moment but let me first accept some of the opposing arguments concerning the risk of using untested materials.

The case for developmental testing

Every teacher-producer of distance education materials probably has some idiosyncratic misconceptions about how best to present the subject matter to the target students. Therefore, to ensure that the materials are not way off the mark, it might be argued that every "lesson" should be developmentally tested on a sample of the intended audience; if any learning difficulties are exposed, the material can be modified to obviate them (or the *study guidance* can be modified, or the *learning environment*).

The risk of materials being way off the mark is reduced significantly when they are produced by a **course team**, collaborating intimately on every lesson, rather by an individual, especially when the team knows the audience well. However, some risk does remain, because the team may still retain some **shared** misconceptions.

Some of my experiences at the UK Open University support the latter view. One subject area at the OU where shared course team misconceptions are **expected**, is Computing: whenever a course includes using a "Home PC" (students working individually on a personal computer at home), course teams have learned from experience that unpredictable user-difficulties are inevitable. In such subjects therefore, formative evaluation (developmental testing) is always carried out on all the materials; although often this testing is rather meagre, due to restricted availability of suitable test-subjects and of funds to pay them. (The subjects are usually surrogate students: people with similar experience to the intending students, but rarely the actual students).

The case for a higher priority for materials creation

In other OU subjects, such as mathematical subjects with no home-computing element, **no developmental testing is carried out**, on most courses. One reason for this omission is the scarcity of developmental test-subjects and of funds. But an extenuating reason is **confidence**, based on past experience of **summative** evaluations of similar courses, that the highly experienced course team can "second guess" the students. The team sometimes seeks help in this from *critical readers*, who are part-time tutors rather than students.

Here's where I start presenting arguments that measures for ensuring top quality **materials creation** should take priority over **developmental testing**.

The above example of a course team's self-confidence in its consensus views is relevant here. I contend that when such self-confidence resides in a trained, high-quality team of experienced teachers, then it is rarely misplaced. For such a team, permitted sufficient thinking-time, the ensuing conception of the learning materials is based upon several lifetimes of teaching experience and mature intellectual development.

I would personally place far more trust in their **untested** materials than on those produced, and modified after pre-testing on inexperienced students, by an inexperienced, perplexed team. Test-students can identify material that doesn't work but they can rarely come to a constructive consensus on how to improve it - that needs an experienced teacher, with good judgement, or better still, a team of them.

The level of thinking which can be achieved by consensus peer-group appraisal (course team debate) is far more acute and powerful than the results of many typical "objective" studies. A discussion between peers can be so wide-ranging, building creative momentum as a result of interactivity: the interactivity stimulates a virtuous circle in which the critical analysis becomes deeper and deeper.

Moreover, if the team is long established, this analysis will be **theory-led**: the team will have developed a consensus design model, even if it's rather vague and intuitive. (Hopefully, such unspoken design theories will be gradually refined and made more explicit during discussions of materials). In any event, the team will be working to some form of causal theory of why it believes its materials will work for its particular target audience. In the absence of such a theory (or set of design principles), then even if the material works, the team won't know why it works: so it can't guarantee success next time.

You might say, why not have the best of both worlds: a high-quality, trained, experienced, materials-creation team, which has developed explicit student-centred design principles and which is permitted plenty of thinking-time ... **plus** ... developmental testing of the materials. I would say, yes **sometimes**: but when the team and the conditions are really good, I contend that the risk of substantially poor materials is so reduced that pre-testing need not be universally applied. Instead it can be focussed on those (few) materials where the course team failed to reach a consensus, despite prolonged debate, or on notorious subjects like Computing.

(Also, it would be prudent to test the **occasional** random sample lesson. If the material was found wanting, the team's design model could be reappraised).

The case against universal developmental testing

The above arguments are **comparative**: that developmental testing should get lower priority in comparison to materials creation. There are also **absolute** arguments (below) : that universal developmental testing **per se** has some inherent disadvantages.

Spreading resources thinly, jeopardises evaluators' reputations

Another argument for restricting the breadth of developmental testing is to avoid spreading resources too thinly. A successful design for the interrogation of learners (or surrogate learners) and the interpretation of results, is necessarily a complicated time-consuming endeavour, if it is to produce really practicable recommendations for improving the

materials. (This would be true in the simplest of situations, but it's doubly true for multiple-media packages and those frequent media lessons whose learning objectives are difficult to evaluate: eg long-term objectives, non-specific objectives, each medium contributing towards an objective).

Most institutions do not have even one tenth of the evaluation staff that would be required for such in-depth developmental investigation of every lesson. And if evaluations are done badly because of understaffing, the evaluators lose the confidence of the teachers.

Why "objective" developmental testing of UK OU Television is rare

Returning to my experiences at the OU, there is one medium, TV, for which little or no "objective" developmental testing is carried, ie the TV programmes are hardly ever pre-tested on students (or even surrogate students). A major reason for this is that a completed programme would be too expensive to modify (if the test results recommended any modification). On the other hand, a half-developed programme is not considered adequate for developmental testing: it is believed that if students are subjected to a "rough draft" of a TV lesson, the deleterious effect on their information processing is critical - far more so for TV than for print. (This conviction derives from TV producers' occasional painful experiences of showing "rough-cut" programmes to course teams who are not yet experienced).

Yet few OU programmes are generally judged to be unsuccessful (although there do exist minority negative views). I suggest that the general success is due to the **prodigious endeavour** that goes into their production. Successful educational TV screenwriting requires prolonged, deep, student-sympathetic deliberation and re-deliberation. Hence, the process of production involves **self-appraisal** by the producer/teacher scriptwriting team: essentially, formative evaluation of their own draft scripts. The same degree of self- and peer-appraisal is carried out in the production of **print, audio** and **computer** materials.

Incidentally, many OU TV lessons do undergo **summative** evaluations, which have resulted in some global recommendations for future lesson designs (Salomon, 1983; Bates, 1987; Laurillard, 1991).

Foreknowledge of developmental testing encourages laziness

Let me go out on a limb with the following suggestion: foreknowledge that the TV lesson will be objectively evaluated could encourage screenwriters to **abort** the above painful mental perseverance at an embryonic stage. (The same would apply to other media).

This may sound unlikely, but it certainly happens. I have occasionally been present at a discussion (or been a party to one) which ends by one protagonist declaring "well, we can't agree, let's choose one solution and see what the students think". There's nothing wrong with the statement itself, but its timing is usually too early in the discussion. That is, the scriptwriting team cannot agree on a certain point and, instead of persevering with its analysis and reaching a consensus, it abdicates this responsibility to the evaluation.

The danger here is that if there are two proposed solutions to the disputed section and two members strongly disagree about which one should be used, it is quite likely that both are imperfect. However, the subsequent evaluation would only test one of the solutions (the one that was adopted in the final media lesson). In contrast, further script discussion in depth (ie "thought experiments" conducted by the scriptwriting team) could have resulted in a third, agreed solution which was superior.

(The above scenario is the "word-processor syndrome": because it's so easy to modify your typing on a word-processor, you take less care with your first attempt).

In the same vein, I have often been asked the question by new ETV production students (perhaps as many as twenty times): " how do I know if my programme will be effective ? " One answer is: you need to work extremely hard, **evaluating the material in your mind** as you design and redesign it, until you are **almost certain** it's effective. If you have no opinions as to whether the programme is likely to succeed, you are not qualified to produce the programme: to qualify, you need to practise critical **self-appraisal**.

This is not to say that self-appraisal is always sufficient, merely that it is necessary. But if the producer and scriptwriting team are really good, it's often sufficient. The same applies to all media.

**All of the above is in the Total Quality Management spirit of:
*building good quality in, rather than inspecting bad quality out.***

Conclusion

In order to **assure quality** of distance teaching materials, this paper has recommended that the following circumstances be worked towards:

- * recruit high quality staff for materials creation
- * train the staff
- * strive to retain staff so that they become experienced
- * working in well-established teams
- * teams working to a student-centred set of design principles (which are frequently reappraised).
- * teams permitted plenty of thinking-time to re-draft and refine materials.

Given the above conditions, it has been argued that the "back-stop" practice of developmentally testing materials is rarely worthwhile. Such **control** should be restricted to the few materials where the creation team fails to reach a consensus, or to notoriously unpredictable topics, such as Computing. (And to an occasional random sample of lessons).

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ENSURING THE QUALITY OF TUTORING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

VICTOR LEE AND K.S. YUEN

Introduction

The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (OLI) is a tertiary institution which has opted to deliver its courses through distance education. This paper attempts to explain how the OLI ensures that quality distance teaching is provided through tutors to learners who find distance learning a relatively new concept in their learning experience.

The *OLI Tutor Orientation and Training* course is described which aims to train OLI's part-time tutors in a systematic manner. The management of part-time tutors by course coordinators is then illustrated. Finally, the monitoring of tutors' performances in assignment marking, conducting of tutorials and other functions are discussed. A brief evaluation of the tutoring is provided at the end of the paper.

The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong

The Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong, a tertiary institution established by the Hong Kong Government in 1989, provides first degree distance learning courses to local residents over the age of 18. Currently, there are some 15,000 students enrolled in over 60 courses. The OLI plans to offer 19 degree programmes and approximately 120 courses in the next four years through its four Schools (Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Administration, Education, and Science and Technology) and a Centre for Continuing and Community Education. The Institute delivers courses by distance education and adopts an open entry policy: students do not require formal academic qualifications. However, the Institute exercises tight control over exit performance to ensure its degrees are of the same standard as local and international institutions (OLI, 1992).

Tutor as an important interface between the institute and students

Hong Kong distance learners, like all distance learners over the world, face problems of a) isolation; b) lack of confidence; c) delayed feedback in learning; and d) lack of relevant study skills. Distance learners need immediate feedback of queries in study and face-to-face motivation to study a topic from the education provider. Face-to-face sessions and other personal contact between tutor and students are therefore necessary.

The importance of tutors in the distance learning process is expressed by Thorpe (1986): 'distance learning courses are mediated and interpreted by tutors, who perceive the requirements of both course teams and students.' It is often said that tutors represent the human face of students' experience of studying with distance education institution. Students regarded that having a good tutor for a course is of vital importance in 'getting the most out of the course' (Thorpe, 1986).

Therefore in addition to developing and delivering course materials, the OLI provides a support and administrative system to assist students in

their study. This support includes: (1) allocation of tutors to students; (2) arrangement of face-to-face tutorial sessions; (3) day schools and surgeries for discussion and problem solving; (4) provision of tutors' feedback to individual students on their performance on assignments ('tutor-marked assignments'); and (5) academic counselling by telephone. In order to achieve cost effectiveness, the OLI provides the support using part-time tutors. Ensuring the quality of tutors is a major concern of the Institute and the OLI has therefore invested major efforts in training, developing and monitoring its tutors to perform.

OLI tutors' responsibilities

Very briefly, an OLI tutor's role is to complement the learning materials and to assist students in solving problems they encounter during their study. He/She is the student's link between the institute and the course material: the tutor is required to a) mark and grade assignments, b) by means of telephone and/or the mail answer questions on the subject matter of the course, c) initiate and take part in discussion in tutorials, d) suggest other lines of inquiry, and so on.

Tutors' contact with students comes mainly in three forms: regular face-to-face meetings, helping out assignments, and telephone tutoring. In addition, they are usually required to carry out administrative duties such as record keeping.

Problems not directly related to a subject, such as personal or career planning, course selection, are usually dealt with by counsellors or advisors in other distance learning institutions. An advisor/counsellor is responsible for providing advice on matters relating to such things as course selection, study programme planning, information on transfer credit, financial aid and various non-course related matters, as well as being available to give support and encouragement to students in their study. The advisor/counsellor also provides continuity of contact between the institute and the student, because all students are assigned an advisor/counsellor permanently when they first register. OLI tutors are not required to act as advisor or counsellor.

Training of tutors

To ensure that all the tasks listed above are carried out by part-time tutors, there is a need for tutor training. At the outset the OLI is faced with the task of recruiting more than two hundred tutors every semester (half yearly). Up to April 1991, tutor training in the OLI took the form of a series of three to four workshop sessions with three hours each. Printed materials used in the workshops included a booklet *The OLI Tutor's Guide* and four other booklets on general tutoring skills which were tutor training materials from overseas institutions. Hong Kong-related examples and cases on tutoring skills are only covered in the face-to-face workshop sessions.

The need for a tutors' course

It was felt that in order to train and orientate four hundred new tutors every year, it is more cost effective to run a distance learning course based on a complete set of self-study multi-media course materials, with face-to-face meetings for more fruitful interaction and experience sharing among OLI staff and new tutors and for addressing tutor's concerns.

There is another reason for developing the course so that it can be studied by distance learning. All courses offered by the OLI are run in the distance learning mode. Since the concept of distance learning is new to Hong Kong, new tutors of the Institute may not have experience of tutoring in a distance education environment. In developing an induction course for tutors we think it is a good idea to practise what we preach in the course and to offer the course in a way which replicates the learning processes of OLI students. The course will provide the new tutors with experience of studying in this method.

The course was designed in such a way that it contains compartmentalized and digitized printed segments and generic audio and video segments so that it can cater for the collaborative use of some or all of the materials by interested institutions including those from the private sector.

Course aims

The course *OLI Tutor Orientation and Training* was hence developed to assist new tutors to carry out their duties. It aimed to introduce to them OLI's aims, objectives, and operations, and teach them tutoring skills and administrative details required to tutor the course.

Course outline

The Course Guide, like all OLI course guides, prepares tutors for studying the course. The course consists of seven study unit. Unit 1 is an introductory unit which describes the background of distance education, events leading to the establishment of the OLI, and the role of the Institute. Unit 2 describes how the OLI delivers its courses. The rationale and characteristics of distance education course materials are also discussed. Unit 3 profiles OLI learners and the problems they face. Units 4 to 6 cover the skills part-time tutors need in their tutoring, i.e. skills in running face-to-face sessions, conducting telephone tutoring, and marking and comment on students' assignments. Unit 7 describes tutors' administrative tasks and offers advice on how to complete them.

Sound instructional design elements such as a personal and friendly tone throughout, learning objectives at the start of a study unit, in-text questions with feedback, activities, and summaries at the end of a unit are all present in the study units. In addition, a book of supplementary readings containing useful articles about distance education and about tutoring in distance learning institutions is provided to supplement the units.

A computer marked assignment is also provided to evaluate tutors learning. A certificate of satisfactory completion will be awarded to those tutors who study the course and pass the computer-marked assignment.

Course tutors

Learners in distance learning institutions are assigned a tutor for the course they study. Likewise, participants of this course are assigned a course tutor for this course. This course tutor provides the same study support as other OLI tutors, i.e. tutorial and telephone tutoring service.

Face-to-face meetings

To replicate the delivery of OLI courses and for practical needs, three face-to-face sessions are arranged for participants of the training course. These meetings serve the purposes of welcoming the tutors to the Institute, providing them orientation on the course and the Institute, helping them with problems they have in the course or about their tutoring job, providing them with course-specific information and practices on how to mark assignments and conduct tutorials.

Organisation of the course

The Human Resources Unit of the OLI is responsible for the organisation of the course. The course usually starts one month before the OLI semester begins. The expected self study time of the course is 15 hours, plus three face-to-face meetings each of three hours. Local distance education experts, course coordinators and other senior staff of the OLI assist in presenting the course.

Feedback about the course obtained from questionnaires shows that the course is viewed by tutors as very efficient and well organised (see internal evaluation report on the *OLI Tutor Orientation and Training* course, 1991).

Management of tutors

OLI's tutors can be regarded as front-end operators in an organization like a bank that has extensive customer services on a day-to-day basis. Like tellers in the bank, OLI's tutors have full support from their managers in the back office. These managers are the course coordinators in the context of OLI who assume the responsibilities of preparing or overseeing the preparation the course materials, recruiting qualified tutors, planning the study schedule of the course, monitoring tutors' performance, providing back-up support to tutors while they have problems with students or with the course materials and many other tasks such as even directly interacting with students when the tutor is not available.

The majority of the tasks undertaken by OLI's courses coordinators relate to the management of tutors. This is why course coordinators have a

major role to play in ensuring the quality of the tutoring services that are delivered by tutors. Below we attempt to elaborate further the ways we ensure the quality of our tutor's services from the perspective of course coordinators.

Tutor recruitment

About four months before each semester starts, course coordinators and their senior colleagues (the Dean or the Programme Leader) recruit part-time tutors for their respective courses. Experience in distance education is not mandatory, but apart from required academic qualification, we expect the right kind of personality such as care for learners, sympathy for the difficulties of adult students, and maturity to handle adult problems.

Briefing sessions

After the recruitment process is completed, all new tutors are required to undertake a series of tutor training programmes, as elaborated earlier in this paper. Then the course coordinator concerned who begin a number of briefing sessions with all tutors, be they new or experienced. Usually different sessions are held for new and reappointed tutors separately. The primary objective of the briefing sessions is to introduce and explain to them the nature of the course, the difficulty they may encounter in tutoring students, and most importantly the expectation of the course coordinator in terms of marking the assignments, conducting tutorials, providing ways for students to keep in touch and so on. The session usually lasts three hours.

From time to time during the semester, briefing sessions with all tutors for the course are also held for tutors to share their experience with each other and the course coordinator uses this opportunity to obtain feedback from and provide instructions to the tutors on issues that have not been foreseen and can be rectified immediately.

Debriefing session

After the final examination of the course has been undertaken by students and before the tutors have completely fulfilled their duties as laid down in their contracts, a debriefing session with the tutors are also usefully held to conclude the course presentation by exchanging tutors' experience and comments on tutoring their students. It is expected that the course coordinator can learn a great deal of the strengths and weaknesses of the course and how effective of the assessment strategies defined by him/her through this kind of debriefing session.

Assessment meetings

Assessment forms a large part of tutor's work at the OLI as all the assignments given to students must be marked by their respective tutors. Normally, a tutor is assigned with a tutor group of about 30 to 35. If there are five assignments during the course of study, then the tutor will have to mark about at least 150 assignments. Though tutors are given marking

schemes and guidelines on each assignment, it is still not uncommon that there are discrepancies between tutors in proceeding their markings, and awarding marks. Thus it is necessary to standardize the markings across all tutors in order to minimize the differences. Thus an assessment meeting for assignment marking may be needed but is subject to individual course coordinator's discretion.

For the final examination, it is the Institute's quality assurance policy to have three sessions of such meetings shortly after the examination for each course. First, a coordination meeting will be held by the course coordinator to discuss with appointed script markers on marking a sample of scripts and synchronize their marking approach. Soon after the actual markings are completed, a standardization meeting will be held and chaired by a senior academic (usually the Dean) and attended by both the internal and external examiners of the course to standardize the markings across all script markers. Finally, an award meeting will take place to determine the final grade to each student of the course.

Tutor monitoring system

As mentioned earlier, OLI's tutors are the direct interface between the Institute and the students. In order to ensure the the quality of our delivery system, the performance of the tutors will need to be closely monitored. At the OLI, the monitoring role rests with the the individual course coordinators who follow the Institute's guidelines. There are various ways to measure the performance of the tutors and these can be briefly described as follows (Tong, 1992):

- The turnaround time of tutor marking, the quality of marking and the comments on the written assignments will certainly reflect the integrity of the tutors.
- The numbers attending tutorials may reflect how well the tutors have been accepted by the learners. The course coordinator should visit tutorials on a regular basis in order to obtain feedback from the learners on the tutors and, whenever possible, to personally feel the quality of the tutorials.
- The number of assignments submitted and the examination results may also serve as an indicator on the progress of the learners and the amount of assistance given to them by the tutors.
- The learners dropout rates of certain tutors can also explain the extent of encouragement given to the learners by the tutors. If tutors are in constant touch with the learners, the dropout rates perhaps can be minimized.

Thorpe (1988) indicated that the purpose of monitoring was not only a quality control mechanism, but it also served to expedite immediate and

remedial action to areas or problems, as required. The purpose of monitoring is thus seen as a process of standardization and feedback on the performance of the tutors.

Institute's rules on the level of monitoring

The Academic Board of the OLI has set guidelines about the level of monitoring assignment marking. For the first assignment, three scripts will be sampled from each tutor for the course coordinator to monitor and to indicate the quality level of the marking. Level 1 means one script to be monitored on the next assignment; levels 2 and 3 for two and three scripts respectively; and level 4 requires the course coordinator to determine the number of scripts to be monitored next time. Tutors' performance is indicated by different levels of monitoring during the course of study. Meanwhile, the course coordinator needs to take immediate action to improve those who receive the low level of quality signal.

Monitoring process

By monitoring assignments and checking computer records, course coordinators can ensure that all students are receiving sufficient amount of tutor feedback. If tutors are found to be giving significantly less feedback, they are advised accordingly. Also course coordinators can pick up severe or lenient markers from monitoring the assignment marking. Another method of ensuring the students receive fair marks is to look at the computer printout distribution of marks for each tutor. This printout shows if any tutor is giving particularly high or low marks, or if the distribution of marks is uneven.

Classroom visits

As part of their job, course coordinators visit tutorial classes conducted by his/her tutors from time to time in order to have first hand experience and feeling about the conduct of the tutors and reactions from students. However it is argued that visits to tutorials should not be considered as a top priority in monitoring the performance of tutors. It is preferred to adopt a relatively informal approach if visits to tutorials have to be carried out (Tong, 1992).

Evaluation of tutors

For full-time academic staff at the OLI, we have a formal performance appraisal system in place as the number of such staff is quite limited. On the other hand, as the number of part-time tutors is massive, the question of having a formal performance appraisal system for the tutors must be carefully examined because it may be costly and time-consuming to implement such a system. The emphasis of performance appraisal should be on staff development and subjective judgement should be minimized. The main purpose of performance appraisal system is to produce positive outcomes.

Comments from tutors

As no formal performance appraisal system for tutors is in place, what the course coordinator can do is to have face-to-face interview with the tutor, which can give some clues about the tutor's ability to handle students, his/her attitude toward the way the education was delivered at a distance and his/her maturity in dealing with adult students. Again, as suggested earlier, this informal appraisal meeting is primarily to help identify the problems and difficulties the tutor has had and for the course coordinator to give advice and encourage the tutor to be committed in the future appointment.

Students' comments about tutors

Feedback from students, by means of questionnaires and informal discussions, is an effective way to monitor the performance of tutors. Some OLI course coordinators design their own questionnaires for students to give their feedback about their tutors as well as their experience with the course as a whole, the delivery, and the support they receive from the Institute.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have looked into the quality assurance issues in tutoring in the context of distance education. As tutors play an important role in the teaching and have direct interface between the Institute and students, it is vital for us to have good quality assurance in tutors and their work, namely, tutoring. We started to look into the training of tutors with a formal and rigorous training programme, developed in house to meet our requirements. Then we discussed some of the mechanisms of managing and monitoring tutors' work and performance. Finally, we also suggested some ways to evaluate tutors from staff development point of view rather than for reappointment decision.

One of the essential elements to ensure good quality of tutoring is to keep close contacts between three parties: the course coordinator, the tutors, and the students. If any improvement can be made in terms of communication between them, the quality of our tutors and their work - tutoring should be levelled up even higher. To this effect, the Institute has recently launched a project on developing a Student Electronic Bulletin Board (EBB). The infrastructure of the EBB has been completed and is now being tested for six months with a group of 30 volunteer students. Initial feedback is positive. By the end of September we shall be able to draw a conclusion whether the EBB can enhance the quality of tutoring.

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**NEATS AND SCRUFFIES: APPROACHES TO QUALITY IN OPEN LEARNING AND
DISTANCE EDUCATION**

HELEN LENTELL AND DAVID MURPHY

Neats and Scruffies: Approaches to Quality in Open Learning and Distance Education

Helen Lentell
David Murphy

Quality and Distance/Open Learning

'Quality' is the mantra of the 1990s. Although different issues are emphasised in debates about quality at different times, the recurrent themes are concerned with satisfactory—or better—performance, in the management and delivery of products. The 'quality movement' in education followed from a quality drive in production and service industries. The arguments for a 'quality drive' revolve around the increasingly competitive global economy, in which survival is believed to depend upon producing and/or supplying 'quality' products in accordance with customer requirements. Lack of attention to quality is seen as a major source of direct and indirect costs. It is also argued that at a time of reduced public expenditure 'analysis of quality provides a means to decide priorities (either at a system or institutional level) or a justification for the differential allocation of funds Analysis of costs, as in the private sector, also provides a means of reducing public expenditure through value for money efficiency gains.'¹

Distance/open education has found it relatively easy to move into the 'quality' scene, given the dominating paradigm of scientific-technicism, or as we have called it, borrowing from Sergiovanni², the hegemony of the Neats (explained in the next section). This paradigm has defined distance education by the means and processes of production and delivery of educational materials. That is, it has been seen as both an 'industrial' and 'service' activity. In this paper we wish to argue that this definition of distance education is inadequate; it does not work in the manner described by the Neat theorists. As a consequence, not only are we given a mistaken view of quality in distance education, we are also given an impoverished view of education itself.

In making this argument we do not wish to fall into the opposing camp—perhaps the 'mystics' of Sergiovanni's original categorisation—who maintain that it is inappropriate to scrutinise practice in the search for quality, since this is in the very essence of 'academia'. However, we do recognise that education and, as a consequence, quality in education, are contestable concepts. In disguising this, the quality movement in education seeks to obscure that 'it is the kind of higher education provided that is becoming the real matter of dispute, between the constituencies of government, business and the professionals'.³

The Neat and Scruffy Positions

The debate between the Neats, who allow theory to prescribe practice, and the Scruffies, who believe that theory should do no more than inform practice, was raised at a previous World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), and subsequently continued in a number of issues of *Research in Distance Education*. Essentially, the relative positions taken by Neats and Scruffies, can be summarised in the following table.

The Neat Position	The Scruffy Position
Theoretical knowledge is superordinate to practice.	Theoretical knowledge is subordinate to practice.
The conditions of practice are reliability, predictability and stability.	The conditions of practice are uncertainty, instability, complexity and value conflicts.
Theory and research are directly and linearly linked to professional practice—the former drives the latter and thus knowledge is superordinate to the professional and designed to prescribe practice.	Professional practice is characterised by reflection, action and reflection episodes— theory and research comprise only one source of knowledge that is to inform but not to prescribe practice.
Professionals bring to their practice a set of standardised skills linked to a series of scientifically verified standard practice treatments. The professional then searches the context in which he or she works, carefully diagnosing and characterising contingencies and situations according to predetermined and standardised protocols.	Professionals seek to maximise certain (often competing) values within a highly dynamic context, with costs and benefits of pattern emphases changing from moment to moment.
Scientific truth and scientific theory can be applied directly to problems of professional practice—the aim is to establish the one best analysis of a problem, the one best way to practise, given existing scientific knowledge.	The task is not to pigeon-hole discrete outcomes and apply standard practice treatments, but to 'ride the wave' of the pattern as it unfolds—theoretical knowledge is not used to prescribe but to inform intuition and to enhance professional judgement.

Clearly, the position one takes with respect to professional practice will significantly affect one's approach to many issues, including quality. It is our contention that the quality issue has, to date, been dominated by Neat approaches, to the exclusion of the 'scruffiness' that is the mark of much of professional practice.

The Hegemony of The Neats

The Conceptualisation of Distance Education

The dominant (Neat) paradigm in distance education is scientific technicism; the technical application of theory and knowledge to 'producing' and 'delivering' distance education. There is, therefore, a marked absence of a dialogue about the very nature of education and the values reproduced in distance education as it is defined and practiced. Normative assumptions underlying why distance education is defined so narrowly are not problematised and are thereby ignored, as are wider relationships between distance education and social, economic and political interests. In addition, since the focus is firmly rooted in the production and delivery of courses, there is no analysis of the theories of learning embedded in the writings of distance education experts, and indeed in many of the study materials produced for distance education. Learning in distance education is woefully under theorised, and much that passes for theory is merely description of systems and models.

Fragmentation

Distance education has become defined by the means and processes of production and delivery. These two 'industrial' processes bring with them a complex division of labour, which with the applied science approach encourages fragmentation of knowledge—i.e. does not encourage the understanding of the 'wholeness' of the enterprise and experience. Distance education has thus become a set of discreet non-articulating specialisms—mini-systems operating within a disjointed whole. Despite

calls to 'total quality management', the outcome looks like embedding this fragmentation and specialisation further. Quality in distance education is being measured in terms of, for example, particular developments in new technology, the sophistication of the print materials, improved design and assignment turn round, increased enrolments, decreased drop-outs and so on, or action guides for supposedly ensuring 'quality' within the particular functional specialisms of distance education⁴.

What 'quality' represents beyond these 'objectively' measured items or processes cannot be discussed within the terms of the scientific-technical paradigm. These items become the definition of quality in distance education upon which performance is measured; and this is the case whichever definition of quality the scientific-technicians are using: quality control (defined standard product), quality assurance (right first time), or quality assessment (performance and outcome). Thus the 'quality' movement is mapping onto the fragmentation of distance education its quality measures and mechanisms which will not encourage breaking out of straight jackets, rethinking and innovation, which we maintain are the heart of good learning. We recognise that many proponents of the 'quality' movement would disagree with this assessment, but we have seen how many of the new managerialists' innovations in HE have unintended consequences which on the ground have led in the opposite direction to their professed way forward (eg. performance appraisal schemes⁵).

We will return to wider considerations later in this paper. For the moment we want to look in greater detail at two aspects of distance education specialisms with which we are familiar—course design and tutoring. (We are aware that we could be making similar points from within other specialisms in distance education, such as administration, counselling and guidance, and management.)

Course Design in Open Learning

Course design and development has long been dominated by 'neat' prescriptions. This is not surprising, considering the origins of most developmental models in traditional instructional design and educational technology approaches. A typical definition of instructional design claims that it is:

'the science of creating detailed specifications for the development, evaluation and maintenance of situations which facilitate the learning of both large and small units of subject matter.' ⁶

The original stimulus for instructional design theory, behaviourism, could certainly be described as neat. In the past, it led to some of the 'neatest' learning materials ever produced, in the form of programmed instruction, now long defunct and discredited (Or has it re-emerged under the guise of some forms of computer instruction?). One wonders how programmed instruction would line up against today's checklists for 'quality' course materials. There is a sneaking suspicion that it could, unfortunately, score quite well. It was a fearfully efficient approach to teaching and learning, wholly rational, within which students were forced to follow tightly defined paths of learning. Naturally it withered and died, probably for the simple truth that it made learning boring.

Another neat approach that has survived longer than programmed instruction is systems theory. Its grand appeal and popularity gave rise to the notion that 'instructional design should be conducted by means of a systems approach'⁷. The influence of systems theory can be seen in most traditional instructional design texts, which provide charts and illustrations with boxes and arrows, purporting to show neat linear arrangements in the process of course development. It has been advocated in open learning for some years⁸, despite the long recognition by administrative theorists that the early hopes held by its advocates in the 1960s have not been realised⁹.

Instructional design theory has moved some way from its behaviourist origins, being currently led by cognitive approaches, with a small but growing influence of constructivism¹⁰. However, theoretical prescription is certainly dominant¹¹, despite a niggling notion that all is not well¹² and the emergence of empirical research that shows that the practice of instructional design is removed from the theoretical models¹³. Rowland, for example, claims that his work 'provides a view which is not entirely congruent with the literature on instructional design ... it does appear that what instructional designers do is different in important ways from descriptions and prescriptions in the literature'¹⁴.

This observation shouldn't be surprising, considering the ongoing failure of 'grand theories' of instructional design. A bold attempt was made by Reigeluth¹⁵ in 1983, when he edited *Instructional design theories and models: an overview of their current status*, a collection of the works of major theorists in the field. The eagerly awaited sequel¹⁶, designed to provide applications of each of the theories was something of a disappointment, the four years it took to publish being perhaps indicative of the difficulties of rigidly using such prescriptive models. Nevertheless, the search for a grand theory goes on, especially with the added impetus of computer based learning. One of the front runners is Merrill, whose proposed Second Generation Instructional Design will:

'be capable of producing pedagogic prescriptions for the selection of interactive instructional strategies and the selection and sequencing of instructional transaction sets;

and will include

'an on-line intelligent advisor program that dynamically customizes the instruction during delivery, based on a mixed-initiative dialog with the student'¹⁷,

whatever that may mean!

There is, of course, more to course development than a narrowly-defined model of instructional design. Curriculum development also plays a role and again, traditionally, it has been dominated by neat approaches. This field has, however, progressed somewhat further than instructional design, with a realisation of the limitations of linear prescriptions. This is found, for example, in the work of Doll¹⁸, who relates post-modernism to the ideas of educators such as Piaget, Bruner and Schön. His description of a post-modern curriculum seems to align itself much more closely with a Scruffy than a Neat position:

'... there must be, as Dewey realised, a sense of indecision and indeterminacy to curriculum planning. The ends perceived are not so much ends as beginnings; they represent ends-in-view, or beacons, which act as guides before the curriculum implementation process begins. But once the course develops its own ethos, these ends are themselves part of the transformation; they, too, along with the students, the teacher, the course material, undergo transformation. ... Here curriculum becomes a process of development rather than a body of knowledge to be covered or learned, ends become beacons guiding this process, and the course itself transforms the indeterminate into the determinate'.¹⁹

Tutoring in Distance/Open Learning.

In the early days of distance education, tutoring— active support of learning through the mediation of course materials—was not considered a significant role. If the production process was working to theory 'the independent' learner, supplied with programmed study materials did not require a tutor. Tutors were only required to mark assignments from afar and as 'back stops'—to help the remedial students. There was seen to be a fairly significant role for educational 'counselling' to ensure all students were able to negotiate the system of distance education. Thus in the early period of study the services of a tutor and/or counsellor might be required to assist the student become autonomous²⁰. Most students, unfamiliar with the methods of distance/open education, and having been weaned in the school of dependency of traditional schooling, would need help to rediscover appropriate study skills. Whilst some argued that most students needed ongoing support²¹, the support was still conceptualised as something separate to and different from tutoring, rather than the emergence of a different view of tutoring—ie. tutoring was about the course content and things academic, whilst counselling was about skills to enable study. There was no theory of learning that encouraged one to conceive tutoring and counselling as part of the same process, and anyway it was inappropriate in a distance education system to be reliant upon tutors and/or counsellors.

The learning theory dominating at this time was behaviourism—one measured the success of 'learning' by how much had been learned—the outputs. The beauty of distance education was that it was deemed to have obviated the need for the tutor to be both the definer of the curriculum and the purveyor of the curriculum, and with programmed texts made the purveyor of the curriculum redundant. (Tutor Practitioners might well have disputed the passive, minimalist role ascribed them, had the debates concerning the system of distance education been conducted 'in the field'—and this failure to consult, let alone involve, practitioners by writers in the distance education world we will take up later.) In the beginning quality resided, were it an issue, with the text.

It has only been with the emergence of the 'quality movement' and a focus on service, 'customer' and customer satisfaction that managers and writers in distance education have begun to look at 'delivery'. Delivery is now seen as more than the processes of dispatching and receiving the package. Nothing in the field has changed; just the way we choose to look at it and what we give emphasis and importance to. Clearly out in the market place a dissatisfied customer would be costly to distance education/open learning 'Incorporated'. The role of people who meet with students and potential customers suddenly becomes very important. Lists of what tutors should be able to do are furiously being prepared, and might even be recognised by NCVQ certification of competence²². Essentially the lists are about things tutors should be able to do to assist learners: the performance of these competencies can then be assessed, and the public can then be assured that when they buy into an open learning package—one that has been so kite marked—they will receive competent tutoring.

One cannot take exception to the competencies as stated (eg. giving sensitive feedback, returning assignments quickly, etc.) but what is frightening is that these competencies are offered as though they were the totality of teaching and learning, rather than merely the externalities of teaching. For example, feedback to students; it must be sensitive, constructive, fair, positive, and motivating²³. Of course. But how does a tutor engage with student learning? How does a tutor assist learning? An accomplished tutor seeks to understand the subtle nuances of how students put meaning together, both emotionally and intellectually, and is sensitive to their struggles to understand. A good tutor tries to 'get into the head' of their students. Or as Cowan expressed it:

'As a learner, I first need to feel that the commentators have got inside my skin sufficiently to be able to "jump around" as I would do, ... Their questions will then be valid ones; the discrepancies which they point out will be real discrepancies, for them at least and hence often for me, too; the implications which they wish to follow up will be important for them, as they identify with my position, even if they may not (yet) be important for me. But if they don't identify with me in this way, there is no prospect they will ring a bell in my subconscious, and prompt me to reflect on an aspect of my learning which would not otherwise have received my attention.'²⁴

How do we learn to jump around in our students' skin? And do we understand why we might wish to, and if so when? What are the competent characteristics and behaviours tutors will need to display and how will these be assessed? How will performance be rated when each learning interaction is unique and requires careful, ongoing observation and interpretation? To do this requires practice, and thinking about practice—ie. the exercise of professional judgement. Would the time, effort, and resources spent in constructing the lists of competencies and the tools for assessing competence have been more effectively spent in some other activity, like supporting student learning?

We believe that whilst the quality drive has been highly beneficial in forcing distance education providers to look at tutoring, (and the whole 'front end'), the embrace of the laundry lists of 'competencies' for tutors is of limited value in searching for quality tuition in distance education. For it is overly concerned with teaching behaviours at the expense of student learning:

'The very notion that competent performance can be fully apprehended and sliced up into excessively reductionistic behavioural statements reinforces an inclination to avoid critical thinking so necessary for the reception of knowledge and sensible decision-making.....The challenge for adult educators is to acquire an aptitude for engaging themselves and their learners in the actual planning and implementation of educational programmes that arise relevantly.'²⁵

For us, understanding learning from the students' perspective is the starting point for effective tutoring, and the ongoing professional interrogation of the impact of our own teaching upon our students learning is the basis for quality in all its guises.²⁶ That is, reflection in action is the basis of professional tutoring for learning in distance education—we will return to this later in our paper.

In looking at course design and tutoring we wanted to look at the practice of two specialisms within distance education to see how 'quality' was being addressed. We will now look at more general concerns we have about quality and Neat approaches in distance/open education.

Applied Science and the Dominance of Prescription.

Practitioners' experience is not sought or valued and is seen, if it is seen at all, as inferior, non-academic, etc. On the other hand the writings of 'the experts' in the field are seen as irrelevant to the practitioners. This division tends to mirror differences in institutional power (eg. job category, full time/part time, tenured/non-tenured, male/female).

The crucial contribution of certain skilled staff is often undervalued (word processors and graphic artists are examples), and it is rare for them to be asked for their input in

discussions of processes or the quest for quality. Thus in the Open University tutors and tutor counsellors who are part time do not participate in the professional discussions about 'course presentation'²⁷. In Australia, there is ongoing confusion about the role and status of educational developers, what contribution they can make and, consequently, whether or not they are academic²⁸.

The Neats rarely examine the development in related fields (eg. work in adult education, curriculum studies, management studies, etc.), let alone a critical examination of the practices in their own institutions. For, like other disciplines, the world of distance education is a bounded one. Moreover, the current challenge to the scientific paradigm being mounted in a number of disciplines is in distance education largely ignored or disregarded. In numerous disciplines the 'wholeness' and 'interconnectedness' of the natural and human world is being grappled with and theorists are seeking to integrate what we have learned to see as discrete and separate.

'Parts of Nature and other systems are seen to act synergistically so that the behavior and properties of a system as a whole cannot be predicted on the basis of what is known about its individual components. Thus, while science yields powerful insights into isolated fragments of the world, the sum total of these insights is a disconnected, inadequate description of the whole. Ironically, scientists today are faced with the devastating possibility that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'²⁹

This was written in the context of the rapid and catastrophic degradation of the planetary bio-sphere, which has necessitated a radical reassessment of the power and limits of scientific insight and application. In distance education we find the Neats disaggregating, analysing, predicting, prescribing and controlling components and variables, with the aim of establishing a comprehensive and rational set of quality controls or quality assurance processes. They do not seem to recognise that the functioning of the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and that the whole is not predictable from an examination of the sum of the individual parts. Thus, for example, Lewis writes about his work in competency in the development and delivery of flexible and open learning—a modularised training programme which enshrines these divisions. What is missing is recognition of the need for practitioners that have a wider, more holistic view. The Neats do not think holistically. *For Scruffies, quality in DE will be about the interconnectedness of the parts and the concept of wholeness.*

We have both taken exception to Neat prescriptions because they do not correspond to what we as educational professionals know takes place. 'Professionals operate in a clinical rather than a theoretical mode'³⁰—more as reflective practitioners than as applied scientists. Educational professionals aim at action (tutoring, course creation) and not abstract knowledge of these activities. Educationalists therefore engage in a process of understanding rather than truth seeking. 'Useful knowledge and increased understanding are prized because they support action'³¹. There is no one absolute truth about practice, one right answer—the basis of science. Laying down standard treatments and 'one best routines' (applied science) does not work, and certainly cannot be defined as 'quality'. This is because the real world is characterised by variability, situational uniqueness, complexity, conflict, instability and uncertainty. Professionals have to make sense of the problems they face and to create 'knowledge in use'.

Quality audit will insist that correct systems are in place to ensure quality control in educational services. These systems will following Neat prescriptions, establish protocols and procedures, systems and routines—the application of standard techniques. Standard practice routines, prescribe behaviours, reduce judgement and control, and hence de-skill professionals. Implicit in this process is the result that professionals become technicians—managers of processes, primarily concerned with

the application of rules and procedures to effect desired, pre-established outcomes. Rewards and punishments can be linked to performance, an outcome which is made possible by an emphasis on output and which further encourages the quantification, measurability and standardisation of output if it is to operate satisfactorily.

This emphasis on performance and outcome limits the necessity for reflective thought; moreover it profoundly demoralises professionals because professionals (indeed everyone) need to believe that what they are doing counts. 'The world of practice is characterised by close attachment and a commitment to one's course of action. Applied science, by contrast, encourages detachment and healthy skepticism.'³² The clarion call of 'empowerment', so beloved in the rhetoric of the new leader managers of HE (higher education), is meaningless when one looks at the context within which this power is to be exercised.

Professionals trust their own experience and the experience of other professionals who practice in similar settings. And together they seek to understand their experience by reflection and dialogue. In this way professionals are engaged in continuous learning and can accept indeterminacy rather than regularity.

Values

Quality is value informed even though the Neats deny this claiming 'objective' processes and measures. But 'quality' implies a value judgement. What is it? How well? How worthwhile? These must be value judgements. Who makes these judgements, on what basis, for whom and in whose interests? Judgements about quality are closely tied to the aims and interests of particular consistencies.³³

Reading the plethora of documents on quality one would conclude that the implementation of quality policies and practices takes place in an anodyne conflict free environment. The real world of distance education, and indeed all professional practice in all human services, is one of conflict over goals, purposes and practice. Failure to recognise this in the headlong rush to construct quality criteria does not mean one is 'above' such disputes, but rather one has taken a position that does not question the economic rationalism embedded in the move to adopt these criteria.

It is not surprising that many seemingly progressive developments in education have been heavily resisted by affected staff given the context of restructuring in which the zealots for these developments have practiced. Staff development is a good illustration of this—on the one hand the means whereby staff can enhance their understanding and control over their working lives, or on the other the means whereby the 'visionary' new managers of HE can 'train up' and reskill their deficient staff for the new 'quality/service' mission.

Learning, development and quality

The implication of what we have argued thus far is that Neat solutions will not lead to higher quality distance and open education, if we understand by that student, staff and organisational learning and development. Apart from time and budget constraints—which are very real—we think it is a delusion to imagine that one can hope to capture quality in all but the most superficial way by use of these measures and systems. (It is another argument, and one we can't pursue here, that building an edifice of procedures and performance indicators may well be a diversion from the main activity of learning, and may be counter effective.) We cannot assume that performance, systems and output measures can capture quality in distance/open learning, because the educational process does not work in the manner assumed by the Neats and upon which the quality measures are built.

The quality management tools extolled by the Neats are extrinsic; imposed as a system that purports to bring adherents up to an accepted quality standard of practice. For the Scruffies, there is no standard, no magic point at which quality is achieved, for understanding and 'knowledge in use' are constantly changing and developing. And thus practice always develops. This should not be confused with sloppiness. The Scruffy is engaged in a process of constant and ongoing rethinking, with the intent of increasing understanding and thereby the quest for improvement is never over. By reflecting and refining, using a 'craft' rather than an applied science approach, the Scruffy 'rides the wave' of development with an eye to values, the setting of goal patterns and recognition of the uncertainty and complexity of the environment.

The Scruffy approach does not offer the vision of a perfect system, but the pre-eminence of the craftperson's notions of dedication, experience, personal knowledge and mastery, sense of harmony, integration, intimate understanding and wisdom³⁴. The Scruffy is thus influenced by intrinsic motivations. Theory plays a role, but is tempered by intuition and professional judgement, and allows room for creativity and innovation.

At the heart of the Scruffy approach is concern for the quality of learning. Like most concerned educators, they struggle with the problems of what makes a successful teaching/learning relationship, emphasising the questions rather than the answers. 'People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never "arrive"'.³⁵ It is interesting to note that questions about the quality of learning were the principal concern of a paper from the Engineering Professors' Conference³⁶:

- Should we try to match our educational methods to the differing kinds of learning we expect of students?
- Can the results of recent research into how students learn be brought to bear on the educational strategies that universities adopt?
- In order to teach the latest advances in engineering do we so overload the curriculum that students are forced simply to absorb knowledge as best they can without the time to digest and understand new concepts?
- Do we concentrate too much on the topics covered by the curriculum ... and pay too little attention to processes?

Included in the discussion are considerations of the differences between science and engineering, a teaching/learning analysis of engineering education and notes on methods of encouraging deep or conceptual learning.

Clearly, the focus is on efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning, rather than on creating efficient systems. At the same time, discussion of 'quality assurance', as used in industrial settings, is given attention³⁷, but is certainly not the central issue faced.

What theories, though, do inform the Scruffy? As has so far been implicit in this paper, the notion of the reflective practitioner³⁸ looms large. Schön has argued persuasively that a core of artistry exists in professional practice; this core must surely be closely linked to instinctive beliefs about quality. His concept of reflection-in-action, a challenge to the model of technical rationality, can usefully inform those searching for quality in open learning.

In almost complementary style to Schön's 'education for artistry', Eisner has introduced the notion of educational connoisseurship. The idea of, for example, a course designer and/or tutor as a connoisseur has some intrinsic appeal.

Connoisseurship is described as 'the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities'³⁹.

Eisner argues, though, that connoisseurship on its own is not enough. It needs to be allied to criticism, which is the ability 'to transform the qualities of a(n) ... act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced'. Further, 'one can be a great connoisseur without being a critic, but one cannot be a critic of any kind without some level of connoisseurship'⁴⁰. Again, the notion of the course developer and/or tutor as a 'critical connoisseur' has some merit, and sits quite squarely with our conception of where the quality debate should be heading.

An example of what we interpret as a Scruffy approach is found in a project at the University of Technology, Sydney⁴¹. The principal aim was to 'enhance the quality of teaching in the University by involving a group of experienced and exemplary teachers in educational development activities'. Part of the design was to:

- give exemplary teachers an opportunity to share their expertise with their colleagues; and
- create a culture within the university and its academic units where good teaching has a high profile, where teaching and assessment practices are regularly reviewed and revised, and where teaching is regarded as a professional activity which needs scholarly and reflective attention.

One of the outcomes of the project was the publication of a report, made up of articles describing the teachers' practices. Its role was to give staff 'an opportunity to consider a variety of teaching aims, approaches and assessment methods which are being used by their colleagues and which are appreciated by students. Evident in all articles are the authors' commitment to student learning, an enjoyment of teaching and contact with students, a lot of thought and hard work, and a sense of achievement'⁴²

Such a project can take place within an organisation which fosters and encourages quality. The role of management in such an organisation is not to put in place prescriptive systems which stifle creativity and innovation, but to create organisations which are managerially loose and culturally tight⁴³—learning organisations. Quality is not achieved by decree, but by organisations made up of committed practitioners (at *all* levels), who constantly seek to improve their craft, within an organisational climate that both applauds success and tolerates failure. The 'hero-managers' of today's HE might care to ponder:

The best ruler, people do not know he exists,
The next best, they love and praise,
The next, they fear,
The next, they revile,
But of the best ruler, when his task is
accomplished and his work done, the people
all remark 'we have done it ourselves'.

Lao-Tzu 6th century BC.⁴⁴

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ISO 9000:USING A SYSTEMS BASED APPROACH TO DRIVE AND DEVELOP TQM

JANE MASSY

Background

Plassey Management and Technology Centre is a campus based company at the University of Limerick. It is registered as a private company with charitable status and has a Board of Directors and a Board of Studies.

The former has the usual functions and responsibilities of a Board of Directors. The latter is comprised of representatives from all Colleges, the Registrar's office and other University personnel. There are also representatives from outside the University, from private industry, from the national training agency FAS and from the Regional economic development agency, Shannon Development.

The Centre which has been in operation since 1977, provided post experience education, training and development programmes to over 3000 students in the year 1992/3. Students of the student are based through Ireland, and a small number overseas. The Centre intends to expand its overseas student numbers in 1993/4. The largest number of the Centre's students are distance learning students who are registered with the Open Business school, which is responsible for all open and distance learning programme development and delivery, and which has been in operation since 1984.

The Centre's programmes are primarily directed towards those in full time paid employment. Most students are funded through the programmes by their employers. A significant proportion of the open and distance learning students are part of groups supported through the programme by their companies, and in some cases, provided with additional internal tutor/mentor support.

There were, as of the 25th May 1990, 20 people employed full time at the Centre. These staff are engaged in the development and delivery of education and training programmes. The Centre does not employ any full time academic staff, but contracts in expertise from UL, other academic institutions, industry and other sources as required, from Ireland and overseas. These experts are employed for specified periods to develop or tutor individual programmes. The Centre's unique capability is based on an approach that seeks to respond very rapidly to customer demand. Not only does this apply to identifying and accessing the appropriate expertise but it also applies to mediating that expertise through the most effective and appropriate channels for the customer needs. Inevitably, we cannot be all things to all people. We therefore find that our main concentrations of products are in the field of quality management, management development, supervisory management and training and development. We believe our future lies in improving even more our ability to respond very rapidly and flexibly to customer needs, adapting, developing and updating the very best of education and training programmes and providing those programmes through a range of media, from conventional day programmes through to multi media.

ISO 9000

History to date (May 1993)

Ireland, which is more heavily dependent on export markets than any other European country, has responded very enthusiastically to ISO 9000 and the need to implement quality systems that carry an internationally recognised standard. Approval for ISO 9000 in Ireland is very strictly regulated with only one body, The National Standards Authority of Ireland, allowed to approve organisations applying for the standard. Although many companies approach the acquisition of ISO 9000 approval as a marketing exercise, it is fair to say that the strict regulation, very regular unannounced audits and a significant awareness of the necessity of high quality standards has resulted in a high level of support in Ireland for the standard and its value. This is not to say that it is not recognised for what it is, a system which conforms to specific standards.

From late 1991, discussions arose at the weekly management meetings about whether we should consider applying for approval for either the Quality Mark awarded by the Irish Quality Association or ISO 9000. We mentioned it to our customers and in general received a very enthusiastic response. One member of the management team, our Head of Corporate Affairs, was assigned the task of investigating both standards. We began more serious discussion into 1992, and considered as a management team what it was we were looking to do.

I have to say that as the person with responsibility for marketing the Centre and its programmes, I have and continue to be a strong supporter of the decision to implement a quality standard. I believe that our customers, particularly the large multi-nationals in Ireland for which we provide significant training and development programmes, are increasingly demanding verifiable quality standards in training and development programmes as with all other suppliers. And, with an eye to the future, I believe that there was only one choice - ISO. Much of our future as an organisation lies in our ability to develop new markets into Europe and beyond. Having said that, I have to pay a huge complement to the Irish Quality Association for the truly remarkable job they have done in the last ten years in raising awareness of the importance and value of quality in business and industry.

Heather Sheane, our Head of Corporate Affairs spent much of the early part of 1992 on the first stages of the learning curve. One major problem we faced was that we could find no-one, certainly in Ireland, in our business who had the experience of going through ISO approval. And, as many of you will know, the standard is very biased towards the manufacturing sector, even though there are variants for organisations in the service industry. Research did turn up some papers on organisations in the education and training field in other countries and these were read and circulated to enable all of us to get a better feel for what it might entail.

On May 1 1992, we took the formal decision at our weekly management meeting (such a momentous occasion, in retrospect should probably have had a special event to mark the occasion!) to adopt the action -plan put forward by Heather. We set our first target dates, many times revised since! We considered the first draft of a new mission statement and discussed the preparation of a policy statement. Most importantly we agreed to schedule a staff briefing for 14 may, which would be immediately followed by workshops to discuss what it might mean to all of us and to begin the process of complete involvement of all staff.

While there had been some discussion prior to this meeting as to the process of implementation, it had never been seriously entertained that this would be done other than internally and involve all our staff. We did not give more than a passing consideration to bringing in an "expert" to implement the system. However, we do have a quality systems specialist who visits us by arrangement to provide advice and feedback.

That staff meeting of May 14 was probably the most significant occasion in the process of implementation. We knew from listening and reading the literature (and from developing and delivering courses on the subject) that any real success in introducing quality improvements could not be done without the total commitment of all staff. It was to be both a Human Resource development initiative and a strategy dependent on a Human resource investment for its successful outcome. Most importantly, we knew that if we as a management team wavered, even once in our commitment, then we would not achieve our objectives.

Let's listen to the staff. These are extracts of comments presented by the staff from their workshop findings of 14 May last year.

Reasons for getting started

- "Competitive tool"
- "Secure business, enhance our reputation"
- "Lead to continuous organisational growth"
- "Increase job satisfaction"
- "Standardising procedures should make us more efficient"
- "Team work would be improved"

As to the difficulties ahead, we saw the

- "Time and follow through"
- "Cost in HR and Financial resources"
- "Staff commitment"
- "Managing/coping with change"
- "Information Technology would need upgrading"
- "Time to implement the change"

At this meeting we also looked afresh at who were our customers and what were we providing and what effect an improved quality system would have on the customer.

ISO 9000 we felt would result in

- "More confidence"
- "Allow us to select our customers better"
- "Increase repeat business"
- "Improve handling of customer complaints"

We examined how we might go about implementation - in the sense of where to start - by department, function or product? We agreed to examine some sample areas - which in effect became the place we started! It was recognised at this point that significant training would be required and that in some cases, training would be confined to particular staff with particular tasks to undertake during the implementation phase but that it was important to provide as much training as possible on a company wide basis.

We finished by agreeing the following

How do we achieve quality?

By establishing a quality system
Develop a quality culture.

Quality Assurance is about measuring/quantifying

If we don't measure, we can't do better
Set benchmarks of achievement and performance
We are not used to quantifying success or failure
We must not concern ourselves with the individual but with the system in terms of allocation of blame
We must be customer oriented in all things

What do we mean by TOM

Zero defects in service to customers
Continuously meeting customer requirements at the lowest cost by releasing the potential of all employees
A way of managing to improve the effectiveness and competitiveness of the business as a whole.

Looking back what we did without knowing it was begin the process of developing a true quality culture.

We selected a number of areas to examine. Although at that point, as a whole we had yet to realise to understand the question - in the light of what? We needed first to understand that everything we do is a process and part of a process. Some of those parts performed well, others not so well. Some were done one way in one department and another way in another. This may have had a historic reason or it may have had a very real customer service cause. It took us a while to find our way out of the haze, so incomprehensible did the standards appear to us. We needed to translate the standards into our own language and put it into our territory before we could begin to understand it, let alone transcribe our processes into ISO procedures. Given the lack of similar experience elsewhere and the complexity of this particular exercise, Heather Sheane undertook the task herself and provided us with the translated document that first explained what each standard meant in our business.

Team building began early, with teams crossing all departments and levels. The quality team from the start has been comprised of members of staff from all departments. These staff members are at every level from assistant secretary to administrator. This team is led by the Head of Corporate Affairs, Heather Sheane who throughout has been the manager responsible for driving and co-ordinating the change and the implementation of the system. This team have met every week since May 1 1992 and will continue to do so until long after approval has been gained - if not forever.

The management team have a monthly meeting dedicated to Quality, in addition to Quality being a permanent item on the agenda for reportage at every weekly management meeting.

All staff meet at a meeting once every two months to share and exchange information and discuss issues of concern. The members of the quality team report to this meeting. Some staff quality meetings have in fact ,also included a significant workshop element where aspects of processes or procedures need to be ironed out and agreed.

In addition, every staff member participates on an on going basis on at least one standard's committee. In fact, each standard is tackled only when staff working on other standards have completed that standard and can move onto the next. Standards Committees are comprised of about 4/5 members and every one includes a management representative.

What have we achieved so far?

In translation, we will have 39 procedures in total on completion.

As of May 1993, the following were implemented

4.5 Document Control

4.9 Pre-course Planning

4.18 Residential Weekends

and the following were completed and due for implementation

- 4.15 Storage of Materials
- 4.15 Controlling Facilities
- 4.6 Approved Supplier List - Goods and Services
- 4.6 Approved Supplier List - Tutors
- 4.9 Processing of Tutor Payments
- 4.6 Purchase Order
- 4.3 Contract Review
- 4.14 Corrective Action
- 4.9 Student Evaluation
- 4.10 Exam Procedure

Also in preparation were

- 4.3 Contract Review Procedure 2
- 4.14 Corrective Action Procedure 2
- 4.9 Course Specification
- 4.16 Quality Records.

The standards committees meet each week for about 45 minutes, agree the next step and allocate tasks for implementation. Each meeting of all groups/ committees is minuted, following a straight document control procedure and minutes are taken in rotation by everyone.

The timetable.

Even though we knew from experience that it would take a long time, we thought we would do it quicker (doesn't everyone?). Our original target was to apply for an external audit for October 1993. We have now revised this to May 1994.

Our advice to other organisations, "you think you can do it in 18 months but it will take you two years" will probably be the case for ourselves too. This is not because of reasons of delay, or missing meetings, but more because it takes that long to work through all aspects of the standards and examine your own procedures, improve them, measure whether they're working and then transcribe them into ISO formula, checking to ensure they work and are effective.

What are the major issues that have arisen for us as an organisation?

Firstly, the resource implications.

In the Open Business school, I reckon about 15% of the time of my staff at work has been devoted to quality issues since we began. This has enormous implications for operations. I have, I admit, once said to a member of staff, "Could you skip that quality meeting, we cannot leave this other issue?" And more embarrassed to say that I as their manager, have missed a number of meetings, but rarely for a reason other than actual absence off site. Planning for this is important, which means that meetings need to be scheduled at regular times and kept to a very efficient short time. No waffle is tolerated, we get on with the business in hand.

Training and the resources required for training have been significant. However, if we as an education and training organisation are not prepared to put our very *raison d'être* into practice, we don't deserve to be in business. Training to date has included specialist training for Heather Sheane, now fully qualified as an auditor and therefore not only in a position to provide guidance internally but also certified to audit other firms on request from NSAI. Training has included brainstorming, procedures writing, presentation skills, and team leading/facilitating. In addition, as part of the learning process, staff have made a number of visits to other organisations who have gained ISO approval for discussion and inspection of their systems.

Secondly, there has been an impact on other issues and practices in the organisation which are not addressed in the ISO standard. The most significant of these has been in the area of job evaluation and reward. The area is an extremely sensitive one and our approach has been to try and be as transparent as possible in the process of agreeing any change to be made and to have as much participation as possible in the decision making.

The staff requested that jobs be reviewed and re-evaluated, because as happens with many other organisations, rapid growth in business and the changing nature of customer service had led to jobs developing in an ad hoc fashion. While we wanted to ensure with this as with all aspects of the new systems that we weren't going to become rigid in adherence to a procedure, it was agreed that better frameworks for job evaluation could be developed.

At the time of writing, the job evaluation team, established in the same way as other teams, has circulated a structure for all staff within which they have been requested, following consultation with their manager, to prepare their own new job evaluation.

These will then be reviewed by the team and grouped under appropriate headings; of responsibilities, education, experience, types of skills etc. Scales for remuneration will then be put forward for approval by the management team. (We do not anticipate any division of opinion between the remuneration team and the management team as the former is comprised of staff from all levels/departments and has a management representative who is the Financial Controller!)

Finally, and perhaps the most delicate area of all and at the time of writing, to early to evaluate fully, will be the impact on tutors. Up until now, Open Business School tutors have been recruited by a variety of methods; selection panels following advertising, one off "interviews" following request to tutor, one-off interviews following recommendation. Records have been mixed, some CV's, some on application form. In fact, I believe that the calibre of tutors has been very high and does not reflect perhaps the unsystemised methods of recruitment.

However, the introduction of the ISO standard has meant a change in our approach, and one which it remains to be evaluated for impact on the quality of the tutors, but will ease allocation of tutors to student groups and provide for greater access to information across departments. So, if someone receives a request to provide a workshop say on "Managing Change", or "Health and Safety Legislation", the new system will allow access to a central bank of information on tutors and their subject specialisms. This data bank, which will have restricted access, will also have more detailed records regarding tutor performance. Tutor selection will follow specific procedures the concern of which will be to ensure the highest quality and relevance to the course and its delivery media. In addition, greater care will be taken to ensure the students who attend courses are absolutely clear in their understanding of the course objectives and the proposed outcomes (to ensure the tutor is not faced with students who have a different understanding of what to expect from the course). Pass/fail and drop out rates will be set in advance and reviewed at the conclusion of each course.

Tutors in the Open Business school are evaluated by drawing on three different sources of information.

Firstly, they are evaluated by the students. This has traditionally taken place at the end of modules and at the end of residential schools. The students give the School feedback through evaluation sheets on the tutor, course materials, administration, locations etc. These have not been computerised in the past but have been read by the course administrator, by me and the Course Director and tutors. Their purpose has been primarily to see what lessons can we learn, and to alert us to any significant complaints. Of course, what is obvious is that if there is something wrong, the timing of these evaluations has been too late - no point in knowing about something 2-6 months after it has occurred.

So, one change will be the introduction of mid course evaluations by students. These are set at a stage in course hours, so that there is uniformity in when these evaluations take place across all courses. The next change has been to develop new evaluation documents that provides for the data to be simply fed into the computer system. This has meant asking students to rate tutors and staff as well as facilities on a scale. In doing so, in the case of tutors, we have sought to identify the key skills and competencies of the tutor. The attached evaluation sheet which is very simple, lists these. Of course, it has been important to allow for free text for additional information and all sheets will be scanned for these free text comments before inputting by the course administrator and in the case of the OBS, by me. I am the first to recognise that student evaluations must not be read in isolation and can be misleading. However, what they show us are trends or biases in certain areas, so if a tutor consistently rates high on knowledge but low on rapport, I need that feedback in order to take a decision as to what to do about it. Perhaps, it is a question of a one to one discussion. Maybe, it highlights the need for training in that area. Perhaps, the tutor and subject match well but not the delivery mechanism, mediating the subject matter in a different way might overcome the problem of rapport.

The second source of information on a tutor's performance are monitor's or extern's reports. Again, the difficulty here is that these usually become available at the end of a course, or module at which point any serious issue is addressed too late for the students of that tutor. Ensuring that samples of marked assignments or assessed project work is submitted to the monitor or extern , even if they are not part of the student's actual assessment can help to avoid this. Recognising that this feedback, direct to the tutor but reviewed by the course administrator and the head of department , is also of value in assessing tutor performance, the new system allows for free text space on the tutor's record for the administrator to record any consistent non conformity to standards required by the extern or monitor.

Thirdly, the tutor's efficiency in supporting the students, and awareness of the status of the students and concern for their performance is recorded by the administrator. The taking of class lists for tutorials, not for disciplinary purposes but to record who was not in attendance thus alerting tutor and administrator to a potential fall out has now become a requirement of all tutors. Particularly for distance learning students, where they are not availing of localised support we must know why and establish whether the issue is one of quality of service and something over which we have control or whether it is outside our control but nevertheless, something that tells us more about our customers. Submission of marked assignments and exams at due dates is part of the tutor's contract - non-conformance may result in delayed feedback to students. So records are kept of non -conformance's such as these and other issues such as late arrival for workshop's, residential schools and tutor training sessions.

The administrator records non conformances only and at the end of the contracted period, the sum of these reports, together with the students results are reviewed by the administrator and head of department and then discussed with the tutor. The composite results of tutor evaluations and subsequent discussions assist in providing feedback to me as to whether we can improve or assist the tutor in their work and also provides subject matter for learning and training at tutor development and training sessions.

In the case of subject experts working in an authoring or reading or editing capacity in material development, no evaluation systems have yet been developed. However, while there are no fixed systems, the approach is similar. The contracts for development projects have tended to be very specific in the past and small in number. However, I do envisage a time when we may need to establish similar systems for the management of development teams.

There are many sceptics around who attach little faith or value to ISO 9000. There are few disciples in the field of education and training. I, if you will forgive the metaphor, am an evangelist as I am sure is obvious by now, who strongly supports the adoption and adaptation of this international quality system in the field of training and education. However, I have seen many fall by the wayside in their attempts to gain approval. Similarly, many will gain approval because they have developed and implemented ISO systems but they have imposed the systems through the use of either internal or external quality experts without involving the people that are going to make a real quality change take place - the staff of the organisation.

There are the dangers of allowing systems to run an organisation, rigidly fixing a state which can soon be either petrifying or more likely abandoned, thus creating disillusionment and cynicism. There are difficulties in the field of education and training but I don't believe those difficulties are any more or less than in every other sector. Every organisation and customer I meet tells me that their organisation, their culture is unique! The field of education and training should be the first to embrace the idea of continuous improvement. Greater quality improvement is about personal as well as collaborative achievement - it is only attitude that makes it difficult.

Although only a tiny fraction of the way there, I believe the approach that we have taken is the correct one. I can see the tremendous change that has taken place, primarily within myself and my staff and the growth in our personal development and commitment to what, after all, we spend a great portion of their lives doing - working. I believe it has improved our customer service significantly, because everything we do now, we do on the basis of how can we improve our service to the customer. And I hope, though it is too early to tell, that the new systems combined with a new data base and management information system should reduce the level of time and resources spent inefficiently and free up staff to spend even more time, concentrating on providing a quality service to the customer and developing new and innovative high quality products.

EDEN/con/qual/JM

**THEORISING QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE
LEARNING**

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Theorising Quality and Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning

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Introduction

Quality in teaching and learning, staff development and the assessment of teaching excellence dominate much of the current debate in higher education, in the the UK and also at the international level. In fact quality is likely to be scrutinised by Government and funding agencies, whether we like it or not. If we choose to ignore the debates around 'quality', we are likely to be left 'struggling against the tide'. So it is vitally important that academic staff are involved in the articulation of what constitutes 'quality' and what procedures and practices are likely to foster quality assurance.

A recent editorial in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*¹ in the UK, which focussed on staff development, the training of university teachers and quality in learning summarised the issues as follows:

'The message from all this [quality in teaching and learning] is that expansion of staff training and development in universities and colleges is urgently needed to meet the legitimate demands from students. But secondly, that such training needs to be underpinned by a strong research and evaluation programme. Too little is known about what sort of teaching makes for effective long-term learning. For a multi-billion pound industry, higher education seems to have remarkably little interest in its own workings as an area for intellectual investigation.'¹

Although this comment is directed primarily at teachers in conventional universities, many of the issues regarding quality and quality assurance are equally applicable to open and distance learning. With the increase in use of various forms of self-instructional material in conventional settings, there is a blurring of the boundaries and a degree of 'coalescence' between conventional settings and open and distance learning. The key issues highlighted by the THES editorial are relevant to the concerns of this paper. Firstly, the legitimate demands of students as 'consumers' or stakeholders in education are recognised, and secondly, to improve quality in teaching and learning, research and evaluation is required so as to provide a theoretical underpinning to inform practice. Also implicit in discussions of staff development is how professionals (university teachers) operate in practice and how they can change and improve their practice.

Research, Evaluation and Improving Learning

Quality is all pervasive in education, but at the same time it is an elusive term. In the current work on quality in the 1990's, it is important that we look carefully at various meanings of quality and are aware of the various stakeholders involved in the quality debate. It is also crucially important the meanings of quality are developed by academic staff, teachers, course designers and educational technologist, so that issues concerned with values and the aims of education are placed in the foreground of the quality debate. In Institute of Educational Technology (IET) in the Open University (OU), 'quality' has been with us for many years and is actually embodied in the aims of IET namely: 'To improve the quality of student learning'. Although this broad statement has been sufficient to drive the consciousness of the Institute, only rarely has there been detailed debate about what actually constitutes 'quality in student learning.' Throughout the debates on quality, it is clear that it is a highly contested term, which brings all the implicit assumptions about pedagogy and practice, and the aims of education to the 'centre stage' for debate.

Much of the discussion of quality has been incorporated into the IET activities of course design, assessment and evaluation. These areas of IET's work have clear but often implicit assumptions about the concept of quality and quality in teaching and learning. I want to explore the quality debate within the context of educational technology and the changes occurring in this field.

One of the basic tenets of educational technology is the use of feedback data for course improvement. Many of the writers in this area (see for example, Rowntree,²) suggest that change in educational practice and organisational change can be understood in term of rational systems approach and engineering models of feedback, and there is debate about 'closing the feedback loop', Laurillard³. Although this rational systems model for understanding change is an important starting point, this model provides only a partial explanation of change in practice. There is a lack of congruence between between much of the writing on course development and the improvement process in distance education, and the process in practice. To use the language of Schon,⁴ there is a mis-match between 'espoused-theory' and 'theory-in-use'. He contrast what he calls a 'technical rationality' with 'reflection-in-action' as a more realistic model of how professionals operate in practice. So for example, student feedback does not necessarily inform and influence change in the way assumed in rational models of organisational change. Other complex factors concerned with the history, culture and politics of the organisation are likely to be of equal if not greater importance.

Pettigrew⁵ explains the way organisational change occurs as follows:

[The] political and cultural view of the process [organisational change] gives a central place to the process through which strategies

and changes are legitimised and delegitimised. The content of strategic change is thus ultimately a product of the legitimisation process shaped by political/cultural considerations, though often expressed in rational/analytical terms. This recognition that intervening in an organization to create strategic change is likely to be a challenge to the dominant ideology, culture, and systems of meaning and interpretation, as well as the structures, priorities and power relationships of the organization makes it clearer why and how the processes of sensing, justifying, creating and stabilising strategic change can be tortuous and long. ⁵

This major study of organizational change identified cultural/political issues as the key factors as the engine of change. This work of Pettigrew seems very relevant for understanding for change educational institutions. Although the scale of organisational change may not be as great as that studies by Pettigrew, his work provides an important perspective not encapsulated by 'traditional' educational technology.

In a recent book on improving student learning ⁶, I suggested that a 'new educational technology' can be conceived of which encompasses a much broader view of education, change in educational practice and change in society, as follows:

'traditional educational technology' and the way that feedback and change in teaching and learning are conceived of are no longer adequate for understanding the realities of how teachers, trainers and course designers operate as practitioners. The rational models of organizational change are being replaced or modified by an understanding of the process in terms of cultural and political views, which acknowledge the existence of contestation and the micro-politics and sub-cultures within organizations, (Pettigrew, 1985). In educational technology, I detect that there is an emerging pattern within the field, which recognises the reflectivity in educational technology, beyond the boundaries of the rationalist model, which is concerned with a much broader level of *change* in education and *change* in society. I am suggesting that a 'new educational technology' can be considered as focussing on three crucial levels of *change*.

- Change from the learners' perspective, looking at outcomes of learning, students' development and the interactions of learning with people's lives.
- Organisational change, concerned with our teaching, learning and assessment practice and our pedagogy; who we teach, and a concern for issues of access and equal opportunity.
- Change in education and training within the overall social and economic climate, and change in open and distance learning, in a rapidly changing international context.⁶

These three levels of change are closely interrelated, but they provide a much broader understanding of educational technology, than it is conventionally conceived of, within its origins in programmed learning and instructional technology.

In looking at trends in educational technology, evaluation is one area where there have been important changes. Malcolm Parlett has been influential in placing illuminative evaluation on the agenda,⁷ as an approach to evaluation which goes beyond the physical science models for attempting to understand the complexities of educational programmes. Illuminative evaluation is concerned with description and documentation, to find out 'what is really going on' in a complex setting, in contrast to attempting to adopt precise techniques for measurement. Parlett,⁸ stresses the crucial importance of holistic approaches for understanding complex phenomena, as follows:

'we live at a time of unprecedented activity and innovation, in which new thinking is being applied to many areas of science and human effort. There are moves towards more holistic approaches, more relativistic outlooks, and there is more reflexivity regarding the role of the observer; interdependent relationships are more widely acknowledged, and the limitations of applying mechanical-type thinking to areas beyond engineering are more frequently acknowledged.'⁸

The views of Parlett on the limits of mechanistic thinking, and particularly the limits in relation to feedback and organizational change are highly relevant to the quality debate and developing the idea of the 'new educational technology'. Farnes,⁹ has also postulated 'new educational technology', and his ideas have been incorporated by Hawkrige¹⁰ into a major review of educational technology.

In educational technology, and open and distance learning in general, then it is within various approaches to evaluation and how change in practice and change in organizations occur that we need to theorise about quality and quality assurance.

Quality assurance

As the term 'quality assurance' appears to be firmly on the policy agenda in higher education, how has the term been defined in the literature? Malcolm Frazer,¹¹ starts with definitions from industry as follows:

- Everyone in the enterprise has a responsibility for *maintaining* the quality of the product or service (ie the sub-standard rarely reaches the quality controllers because it has been rejected at source):

- Everyone in the enterprise has a responsibility for enhancing the quality of the product or service:
- Everyone in the enterprise understands, uses and feels ownership of the systems which are in place for maintaining and enhancing quality:
- Management (and sometimes the customer or client) regularly checks the validity and viability of the systems for checking quality.

If we replace the word 'enterprise' with 'university', then a university which takes quality assurance seriously is "a self-critical community of students, teachers, support staff and senior managers each contributing to and striving for continued improvement" ¹¹

Although this definition of quality assurance implies that universities are autonomous organisations, as stated above there are a number of key stakeholders in the quality debate. I shall look at the key stakeholders as three distinct groups. Each one of these will have potentially difference concerns and priorities for what constitutes 'quality': (i) Academic staff and professional bodies, (ii) Students, (iii) Government and funding agencies.

Academic Concerns

A major concern is that students gain a thorough grasp of the subject material and to uphold academic standards. Quality is to enable students to participate in the discourse of the subject matter of the discipline area, and at the same time develop independence and autonomy in their learning.

Many of these issues are summarised in how the CNAA described its requirements of a degree-level course.

'the development of students' intellectual and imaginative powers; their understanding and judgement; their problem-solving skills; their ability to communicate; their ability to see relationships within what they have learned and to perceive their field of study in a broader perspective. The programme of study must stimulate an enquiring, analytical and creative approach, encouraging independent judgement and critical self-awareness.'¹²

Although these criteria have been developed by the CNAA acting as an accreditation body, they have been drawn up by groups of academic staff.

So if we subject our teaching and learning provision to a review on these academic concerns, using the 'lens' provided by the CNAA, we need to look at (i) the content, pedagogy and assessment of our courses, and (ii)

what students gained from from their experience of study, and how they have changed and developed as learners.

Students concerns

What sorts of teaching/learning provision do they get from the university?

Do they get fairly judged and rewarded for their learning?

Are the qualifications recognised by outside organisations?

Do the courses enable them to follow their interests and demands?

How are the power relations in the organisation experienced by the students?

These are the sorts of questions which are likely to be raised by students, as their concerns.

The National Union of Students in the UK has developed a 'Students Charter' which summarises many of these issues. Although intended for students in conventional university settings, many of the issue are relevant for 'quality' in open and distance learning. In the OU for example, the report of the quality tuition working group made reference to student charters, student feedback and the importance of monitoring quality of services offered to students. In the same way, Mills and Paul¹³ develop the notion on 'putting the students first' and how a value-driven management can make a specific contribution to quality.

Many of the concerns here are about quality of teaching, particularly face to face teaching. However, with the rapidly blurring boundaries between conventional and distance education and the transfer of credit between institutions, staff development activities to put the quality of teaching and learning in the foreground in all higher education are needed.

Government and Funding Agencies

Government concerns can probably be summarised under the three main areas of costings and cost-effectiveness; curriculum issues and the priorities of the State, and targeting particular groups of students. Quality issues here will be concerned with institutional efficiency and quality assurance will be to develop and implement appropriate measurement techniques.

The Open University Establishment Review

In the Open University the so called 'Establishment Review' is a senior management review exercise which is looking at all aspect of the University's operations. For this paper, the work of the Review Group which looked at the Regional activities is particularly relevant, as part of it focussed on the experience of being a student, and also the experiences of the tutorial and counselling staff. Two surveys carried out for the Review

Group can be regarded as part of the University's quality assurance procedures, (i) The quality of tuition and student support, and (ii) Tutorial and counselling staff—experiences of working for the University.^{14,15}

If we look at the students survey, it was designed to investigate students' views of the quality of service they receive from the University. So for example, students were asked about tutorial attendance and what factors prevented them from going (time, location, travelling time, quality of the tutor, quality of the teaching accommodation, etc). They were also asked on their views of the quality of their contact with the various parts of the University, their tutor and counsellor, the Regional Centre and the University centre (Walton Hall).

As well as addressing these questions, the survey was designed to investigate issues which are known to have a direct influence on the quality of the learning outcomes. Quality in the sense of helping students to adopt a deep approach to learning.^{6,12,16} In terms of the stakeholders in the quality debate, the survey was looking at quality assurance from the perspective of the academic's concerns and students' concerns.

The design of the survey attempted to ground the questions in more theoretical issues about how students learn. By doing this, the aim was to generate insights into the students' experiences, which would be of more general significance, besides the reporting priorities for one review group. So, for example, the concept of 'connectedness; to the university was explored, and also the 'learning milieu' which students experienced in the context of their local study centres. Also at their study centres, what the scope for interaction and discussion with their student peers and also tutors.

In terms of quality assurance, this type of study can be seen as one strand of the University's assurance procedures. Although this study was initially requested by the administration, it was conducted to explore a wide range of issue which influence the quality of student learning. It is for IET (or similar research and evaluation units) and academic staff to design the procedures which are likely to examine quality, which define our priorities in the contested meaning of the term. At the same time, the research on quality assurance and policy evaluation will involve teachers (and course teams), rather like a sort of 'action research', rather than IET being seen purely as an external evaluator.

Although what we do in terms of procedures will be overseen by the outside agency of the Academic Audit Unit (in the UK), it is for us to take the initiative in defining what we believe to be quality in higher education. The Audit Unit describes its function as follows,¹⁷

The Unit seeks to discover the extent to which the universities' quality assurance systems are appropriate for the purposes they are designed and used for, and that they work effectively. It is for the

universities themselves to say what they mean by quality and standards, and to show how they are achieved. This may not seem an unreasonable or unusual requirement, but the notion of a university, in its capacity as a qualification-awarding institution, addressing formally and systematically and rigorously the question of what are its institutional standards and what its institutional view of the quality of its teaching [and learning] is, in most respects, comparatively new.

So to conclude, quality assurance work is an important opportunity for academic staff to contribute to the quality debate. There is a need to maintain a balance between the contested views of quality--the institutional efficiency and cost-effectiveness and the quality of the learning experience students are offered.^{18, 19} It is crucially important to theorise quality in relation to academic concerns and also student concerns, and particularly to design research and evaluation studies which contribute to a wider understanding of teaching and learning in open and distance learning. Also as we attempt to use research and evaluation findings to change practice and improve learning, we need to recognise the work of Schon⁴ and on reflection-in action, and the insights of Evans and Nation on critical reflection²⁰ for understanding the process of change.

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**THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN IN ACHIEVING OR IMPROVING QUALITY:
EXPLORING SOME ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

TED NUNAN

The Role of Stakeholders in Achieving or Improving Quality - Exploring Some Issues in the Context of Distance Education in Australian Higher Education

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'Thinking about the relationships between quality control, assurance and assessment helps institutions to clarify what they mean by quality and how it can be measured'.

Introduction

One result of having institutions deal with the relationship between quality control, assurance and assessment is that those who are interested in improving the quality of education through reconstructing the educational arrangements within an institution are thrown against those who would wish to improve the effectiveness of the institution. For the first group, improving quality has to do with revaluing what the institution accepts as worthwhile with a lesser concern for how well it achieves ; for the second group quality enhancement assumes that what is being done is worthwhile and the task is to judge how well it is achieved and work upon ways of reaching greater levels of achievement.

This tension between groups is hardly surprising. Both groups are talking about quality but with different balances between 'how well' and 'how worthwhile'. Linke (1991,128) for example, notes that,

A statement about quality, then, is viewed most appropriately as a way of conveying comment on how well something is done and how worthwhile the achievement. Such a statement is relative and not absolute in that its meaning is best determined in relation to what others think. It has to be recognised, however, that perceptions of quality may be partly social, partly cognitive and partly political, and may also reflect factors other than the excellence of the activity.

It is the second consideration of worthwhileness that poses particular difficulties. At a global level it could be argued that particular processes within the institution have already dealt with 'how worthwhile' when the institution creates its own mission or goal statement outlining its commitment to particular fundamental values. Achieving quality is therefore simply a matter of monitoring and managing so that all can be assured that there is some level of achievement of these goals. Quality improvement is about making judgements valuing different levels of achievement of these given goals and attempting to bring about a situation where more valued levels of achievement are met within the institution. Statements about quality therefore make judgements about 'how well' and largely take for granted 'how worthwhile'. However, this oversimplifies the situation. There are considerable matters of interpretation of mission and goal statements which, in effect, cause continual reinterpretation of the fundamental values and particular stakeholders will bend their interpretation of fundamental values as far as it is possible to fit their perceptions of quality. Thus, valuing occurs within all activities concerned with quality improvement thereby supporting, to some extent, those who would focus upon worthwhileness as the central feature when considering quality.

The last sentence of the Linke quote above is particularly important in pinpointing the range of factors which impact upon appraisals of quality. Poole (1988, 51) sharpens this when she notes that judgements about quality are inextricably bound to values held by social groups:

fundamental questions concerning the meaning of quality need to be asked: (1) quality in terms of what (student satisfaction; performance indicators; market forces; quality of instruction?) (2) quality for whom (young people as clients of the system; for administrators as part of public accountability; for institutions of higher

education; for employers?) and (3) quality in terms of whose interests (young people, the economy, the nation, international corporations?).

The coupling of an appraisal of quality with particular stakeholder values brings questions of the relative legitimacy of different stakeholders and the processes which might be used to bring together conflicting interpretations about quality. Since the different views about quality represent differences in values that signify belongingness to a stakeholder group it is unlikely that differences can be easily resolved. Appraisal of the detail about quality is then left to fall between the relativism of values held by stakeholders who view their position as one of equal legitimacy with other stakeholders, and a situation of contestation between values which is likely to be resolved by the exercise of power. Thus appraisal of quality in situation where there are multiple stakeholders, such as education, becomes a complex issue where the focus inevitably falls upon who have power and how these powers are applied in legitimating a particular view.

Achieving quality - Advice given to Australian Higher Education

One of the major stakeholders in education is government and it not surprising that it should seek to manage higher education to ensure the greatest benefits for the tax dollar provided by citizens. In Australia, the Higher Education Council was charged by Minister Baldwin to provide guidance to institutions on matters about the quality of education. Government would encourage management to address quality within institutions by ear-marking monies for distribution to particular institutions that demonstrated attention and energy to enhancement of quality.

As Johnson (1993, 4) notes, the report Achieving Quality (1992) of the Higher Education Council is quite clear about what it expects institutions to do: They should ;

set clear, explicit, achievable goals for itself in the light of its strengths and weaknesses, its student body and the fields of employment for which it educates

ensure that each school of faculty and each department in the institution similarly set realistic goals for itself

devise measures for assessing progress towards these goals. These will include surveys of student and graduate and employer satisfaction, and external expert opinion.

provide training for staff generally, but especially at the level of head of department and dean/head of school, in the process of evaluation

emphasise in all its teaching the development of the generic competencies to a high level, not only the mastery of the discipline

review its resource allocation, especially with respect to units of small enrolments, and to the question of unnecessarily high contact hours, in order to free resources for more productive activity.'

Other advice, like the above expectations, follow well-worn tracks in relation to quality control, assurance, and assessment. For example, quality assessment, while it must be based around what universities are trying to do, must also deal with general concerns such as identifying the quality graduate, assuring different stakeholders, the use of performance and descriptive indicators in collecting evaluative data, the development of procedures of assessment of quality which account for the increasingly diverse student body and the relevance of codification of practice (eg research supervision, good university teaching) in setting normative conditions for judging quality. The response that more (student numbers and diversity of students) means worse (quality) is no longer a self evident or satisfactory!

However, there are good reasons why the interpretation of advice like that of the Higher Education Council is likely to reproduce and legitimate variants of current practices rather than generate improvements which reconstruct educational institutions and systems. Why is it that few institutions would seriously entertain a notion of quality which would give primacy to learner centred approaches? Why is it that credit transferability, collaborative program development, and credit for prior and experiential learnings are rarely included by institutions within the values by which they identify excellence in higher education? Why is it that the quality of higher education is seemingly tied to the ability of an institution's staff to attract competitive research funding? Why is it that assessments of courses involve review and expert opinion about the content but judgements about the delivery mechanisms and the learning resources available to students largely overlooked in appraising quality in this area?

To address some of these questions it is important to look at what is meant by the term quality and how it becomes shaped by those stakeholders that exercise powers within the processes which surround judging quality.

Judging quality - some stakeholders are more equal than others!

Because judgements about quality are made and legitimated it can be argued that in pluralistic societies quality determination represents the power of particular stakeholders to shape both the processes by which judgements are made and the criteria against which judgement occurs to suit their interests.

Viewed in this way a judgement about quality represents the outcome of contestation between stakeholders. While there are various stakeholders involved in judging the quality of education within the setting of higher education institutions,

goal setting and interpretation of institutional mission statements, at a practical level, are carried out by academic units. The mechanism that such units use for seeking other stakeholder views generally disadvantages those views in relation to the views of academics.

action by students in expressing a stake-holder position about the quality of the educational experiences they receive is often difficult due to the varied nature of their educational experiences, their inability to identify a collective stakeholder view, and their inexperience in adopting strategies that can penetrate organisational structures. These factors are all the more difficult for external students to overcome as they rarely get opportunities to assemble to decide or carry out collective action.

measures of graduate and employer satisfaction are difficult to construct and interpret and long term effects of educational programs are complicated and expensive to measure whereas evaluations and opinions of academics about student satisfaction are seen as part of the informal information which assists in the interpretation of quality. In addition, external expert opinion is often organised so that views sympathetic to academics are obtained.

strong traditions of 'academic freedom' mean that, in effect, values expressed through opinions of other stakeholders can be regarded as 'advisory'.

Thus, the institutional frame-work and processes which deal with quality can, in the main, ensure that what is meant by quality reflects the interests of academics within their organisational units. Quality improvement, therefore, may result in a strengthening of these interests.

Interestingly, where institutional goals are seen to act against the interests of academics within schools or faculties various types of resistance to quality improvement can occur. Take, for example an institution which wishes to attempt to both increase access to education and to provide learner centred delivery processes. Increasing access may mean providing classes at after-'office hours' times to enable those in full or part time employment to attend

the institution. In addition it may involve a strategy of providing learner centred course materials that students can study with as an alternative to attendance. Both of these may be perceived as making the task of teaching more time-consuming or difficult and represent a change in the ways that education is provided. Such changes might well be challenged by shaping a view of quality which ensures that processes to achieve increased access or student centred learning are seen as 'second class' to traditional delivery processes.

In the context of Australian 'dual-mode' institutions it is interesting to take up issues like those in the above paragraph by looking at judging quality not through the traditional structures of academic units but through stakeholder views about quality in terms of a mode of delivery. Thus, instead of collecting data and aggregating it against the activities of academic units (which largely parallel concerns of particular subject areas) an institution might also collect data by delivery mode aggregated across academic units. This would introduce new stakeholders into the appraisal of quality and raise new issues which need to be interpreted at institutional rather than school or faculty level. Thus while such an approach would draw heavily upon general conceptions of what constitutes quality in education it would, nevertheless, have to deal with issues in a different forum and generate supplementary criteria for judging quality which address this changed situation.

Judging quality - Re-organising stakeholders to focus upon mode

The Project to Investigate Quality and Standards in Distance Education (Nunan and Calvert, 1992) took the above idea of looking at quality by concentrating on mode and sought from eight Australian universities' views about quality of distance education, the factors which impact upon quality, and ways to improve the quality of distance education. Institutional definition of distance education and its purposes was investigated through reference to policy and 'working documents' of institutions, while stakeholder views about the quality of distance education were obtained through structured interviews with groups providing services to support distance teaching and learning, interviews with academic teachers teaching at a distance in particular discipline areas, and from institutional and corporate clients through their responses to a listing of factors which a client generated as impacting upon quality.

The Project generated recommendations for fostering and improving the quality of distance education in the following areas: access and equity; policy development, organisation and resource management, processes of distance education and the monitoring and evaluation of distance education. It also developed a set of indicators in the above areas which institutions might use in monitoring and evaluating their own performance in distance education against their particular missions and objectives.

Recommendations concerning issues of access and equity were treated at national and institutional levels as factors in the quality of distance education. In the area of policy, organisation and resource distribution in distance education, recommendations were made on resources for academic staff development, the development and use of appropriate technologies, encouragement of excellence in distance teaching, and the establishment of guidelines of disbursement of funds relating to distance education activities. To foster the quality of processes employed in distance education, recommendations were made regarding course materials and their teaching and learning arrangements, the need to establish policies for the development and resourcing of the use of appropriate technologies, the need to review policy statements on student rights and responsibilities, and assurance that procedures for planning and developing distance education included particular arrangements which addressed course materials and their implementation. Monitoring and evaluating were important activities and it was recommended that institutions report achievements using, where appropriate, input, process and output indicators from those developed through the project.

In effect the project provided information on how a number of varied constituencies viewed the quality of distance education, and, in combining these views, attempted to provide a more inclusive and comprehensive picture of what constitutes quality for distance education than would be provided from any single constituency. The investigation was flawed in that it did

not include all stakeholders and the sample of teaching and client groups was limited. Nevertheless the recommendations of the project attempt to deal with quality improvement in distance education and to take into account stakeholders who gain some identity through their role in distance education.

To illustrate the impact of considering stakeholders who traditionally do not belong to academic units is instructive to look at recommendations of the project which deal with student support. Such recommendations included :

that institutions establish specific guidelines for disbursement of funds relating to distance education activities, taking account of requirement for development (including research and course development) and delivery (including, besides academic costs, technology, **academic and administrative support of students** and residential schools).

That institutions ensure that students studying in all modes have **equitable access to appropriate academic and administrative support** (eg. library, study skills, counselling and computing services).

That institutions review any policy statements on **student rights** and responsibilities to ensure their appropriateness to external students.

That procedures for planning and developing distance education, and monitoring and reviewing performance in distance education, in the area of course materials and their implementation address (inter alia):
arrangements for student support.

That institutions with a substantial involvement in distance education include in their annual reports major achievements or developments in the areas of:
external course development and production;
technologies used in distance teaching and learning;
student support techniques; and
research and evaluation of distance education.

What is interesting about this listing is that by removing the focus upon professional induction into the content that students were studying a quite different set of factors aimed at quality development have been highlighted and with this there is potential to move institutional performance to consider issues about student learning as well as the quality of teaching, research, or the professional suitability of the graduates. Without this change of process and without powers given to such stakeholders quality improvement is likely to revert to accepting worthwhileness only in terms of the academic interests of academic units.

Whether institutions will take up the range of factors identified and whether their own quality assurance procedures will attempt to account for the concerns of these stakeholders will be a function of the way that the institution defines quality and legitimates processes to judge quality.

Concluding Statement

This short paper has looked at ways of considering quality in higher education and has noted the potential for quality improvement processes to be shaped in ways which reproduce existing educational arrangements. Where interpretation of the values behind institutional goals rests with academic units, quality control, assessment, and assurance can be effectively controlled by the use of processes which contain subtle advantages for those stakeholders belonging to academic schools and faculties. The interplay between different stakeholders can be shaped so that a particular view of quality is supported. Quality improvement is therefore seen as the processes that enable the institution, through its academic units, to achieve this view of quality.

Where quality improvement moves beyond traditional values and seeks to revalue worthwhileness there is a need to restructure the balance of stakeholder powers over processes which determine quality. Indeed there may be the need to move beyond traditional boundaries and have educational quality incorporate stakeholders who manage administrative systems within institutions as well as involving those who provide student support services and learning technologies directed at improving student learning. The restructuring of the academic workplace (future lecturers to be 'mouse-controlled' rather than chalk 'n talk specialists?) through the impacts of information technologies could well bring new views about quality depending on how such technology is perceived (as a research tool? , as a pedagogic tool?, as a replacement lecturer?) Whatever the case, for those interested in quality improvement and restructuring institutional practices it will be necessary to deal with the political questions about how stakeholders exercise power in determining the quality of education.

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TOWARDS QUALITY IN OPEN LEARNING

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Towards Quality in Open Learning

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Despite the vast amount written in recent years about quality and about open learning, many of us are still unsure what these terms mean for us and how we are supposed to implement them in our professional practice.

What is clear is that one of the major challenges in Higher Education in the 1990s will be the maintenance and enhancement of quality of provision as student numbers increase and the unit of resource diminishes. In East London we must contend also with a local environment which has not been conducive to Higher Education - which has, in fact, some of the lowest take-up rates of Higher Education in the country. These pressures are not new, and staff throughout the University have introduced many innovations in teaching and learning to help meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Nevertheless, the proposed rate of change over the next few years is so great that we must as an institution, like other institutions, consider the whole range of open learning approaches available to support learners and to enable staff to use their time most effectively.

To help generate debate, I would like to suggest a way of thinking more precisely about the various dimensions of open learning in relation to our courses. I will then argue for an approach to quality which is about people rather than about procedures and which is rooted in an ethos of reflective practice, sustained by peer review and by critical dialogue with our clients and with external quality assurance agencies.

Dimensions of Open Learning

Broadly speaking, open learning is about giving learners wider choice, greater flexibility and increasing control over their learning. In an open learning system, students will have a choice of entry points, pathways and exit points; they will be able to exercise greater choice in the content of their courses, the methods of study, the timing and pace of study and the means of assessment; and they will be participating in the education system at intervals throughout their lives for reasons of personal and professional development.

It would be unreasonable and inappropriate to expect every course to be open in all respects. Instead we might think, as Roger Lewis, Director of Services at the Open College, suggests, of an open learning continuum along a number of dimensions, which can be set out as in Figure 1(Lewis¹)

	Open	Closed	
Who?	●		FlexiStudy usually accepts all-comers: in-company schemes are by definition restricted.
Why?	●	●	Learners choose usually entirely on their own to study 'A' level: in-company schemes usually involve reduced choice for the individual
What?		●	MT is a modular course: 'A' levels tend to offer little choice within a fixed syllabus
How?		●	FlexiStudy courses are usually heavily reliant on print. MT is a multi-media and offers choice of learning route
Where?	●		Both courses are portable
When?	●	●	In-company courses usually introduce pacing in F5 learners usually pace themselves.
How is the learner doing?		●	More feedback is possible in-company because learners are reliably available
Who can help?	●	●	MT makes use of a number of "supporters" (tutor, trainer, manager etc): learners in FS are often relatively isolated
What next?		●	MT offers more varied options than most (traditional) 'A' level syllabuses

-----in company managing time

_____ FlexiStudy 'A' level

Figure 1: Comparison of two open learning schemes

In Figure 1, Lewis compares two quite different types of courses, which generate contrasting profiles of openness. As Lewis comments,

On every aspect except *Where?* we see roughly opposite positions, i.e. where one scheme is open the other is closed. Overall, the flexistudy example is strong on openness of access but, once the learner is in, choices are very limited. In the Managing Time case, access is relatively closed (only in-company learners can gain access, and within that only those selected by the company); but, once in, considerable choice is available to the learner.

Lewis offers this particular comparison to illustrate the danger of a too easy assumption that one type of course is more open or closed than the other: in this case, that a flexistudy A-level designed for individual learners must be open, while an in-company training course must be closed.

As an exercise, I would suggest:

1. That you try to plot the profile of your own course(s) on Lewis's scheme. It may not be easy to do this, but it will involve you in thinking through how you see your course on the various dimensions.
2. Secondly, ask yourself whether the degree of openness or closedness on each dimension is appropriate to the aims of the course and the needs of students. If not, why not? and how could a shift along the continuum be achieved?
3. Thirdly, compare notes with a colleague on the course and see where your profiles of the course differ. Discussion of differences can help you identify different values, perspectives and expectations among course team members which can lead to better functioning as a team.
4. Do the same with some students on the course. This can reveal some startling differences between how staff see a course and how students see it. It can be done as a one-off experiment or part of a review process. The important thing is a willingness for both parties to recognise differences and to explore them rather than to become defensive about one's position.

In doing this exercise, you are engaging in the kind of critical reflection which I will argue is fundamental to the pursuit of quality. Before I develop that argument, I ought perhaps to say a few words about technology and open learning, as the two are sometimes closely associated in people's minds.

Perhaps the best-known examples of open learning in the UK is the Open University, which has used high-quality media-based learning packages to offer Higher Education by part-time distance learning to many adults who would not otherwise have been able to participate. However, the success of the Open University should not lead us to a simplistic equation of open learning with glossy course booklets or video programmes or computer packages; we should remember that the technology serves to carry a structured learning experience from one group of people to another. What matters is that the learning experience and the mode of delivery are appropriate to the learner's needs. We might also remember that there are a whole range of techniques, we might call them "soft" educational technologies, based on human-human interactions, which may be at least as effective in opening new opportunities for learning - for example, learning contracts for negotiated study, self-and peer-assessment, groupwork and experiential learning methods. A good quality course will draw from its repertoire the best mix of media and methods for the educational purpose at hand.

Quality through reflective practice

I like to think of achieving quality as a learning process, which, like most significant learning processes, is on-going and open-ended. Perhaps I can illustrate this by a model of the learning process.

To work up to this model, we might start with two less complicated models. The first is a model of education as essentially about training the intellect in skills of conceptual analysis. A second model, more prevalent in professional education, may try to capture the interaction between theory and practice, (though in assessment theoretical knowledge is often valued higher than practical competencies). In order to bring out a sense of the dynamics of learning, or of learning to learn, I find Kolb's model of the experiential learning cycle very helpful. (See Figure 2).

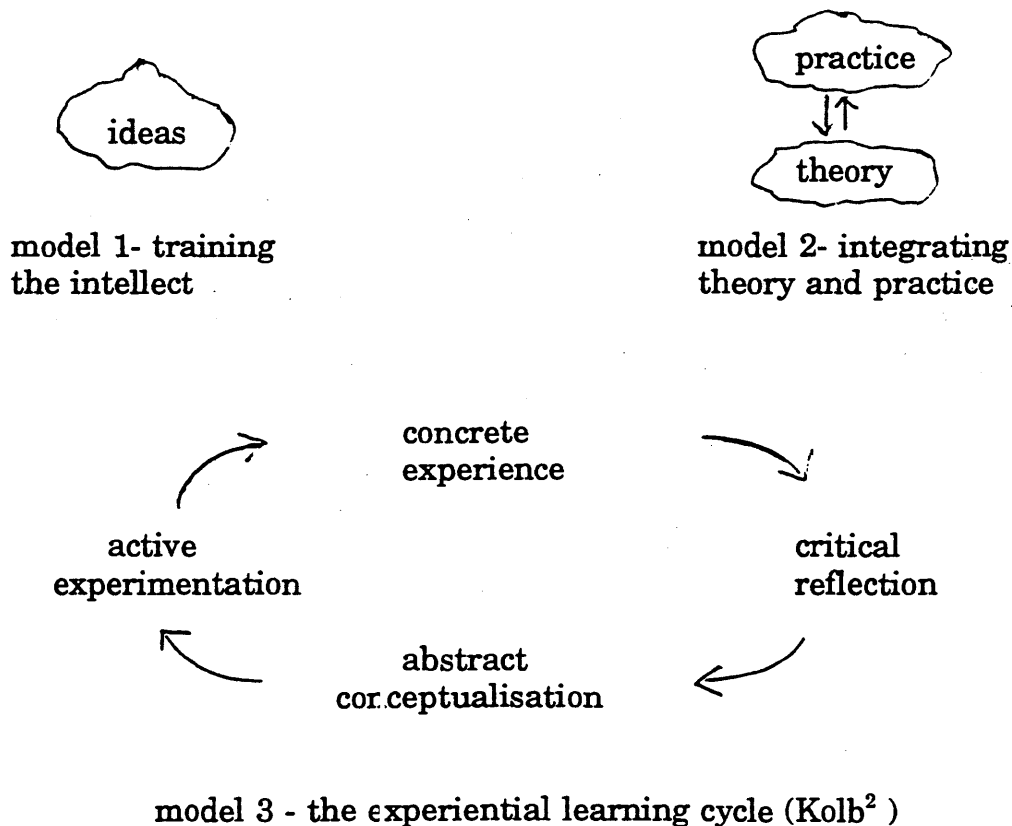


Figure 2: Three models of the learning process

In Kolb's model, active experimentation and critical reflection feature as essential stages in the learning process. Yet in most academic courses, these two stages are not sufficiently recognised as processes in which the learner must be engaged if he or she is to take responsibility for their own learning. We can think of active experimentation as planning a programme of study, which is usually done by the lecturers who write a course. Yet it is perfectly possible for the student to be involved in planning and negotiating a programme of study, for example, by use of a learning contract.³ Equally, the student can engage in critical reflection on his or her learning and produce a Critical Review or self-evaluation which can count towards final assessment. Both these techniques, learning contracts and critical review, are well-established features of independent study courses at the University of East London and elsewhere.

In independent study, active experimentation is the planning stage, so that a student can be thought of as going once round the cycle in a year of study, from planning, through carrying out the study, to critical reflection, then rethinking and on to planning for the next year. An academic course written by staff goes through a similar cycle of planning, delivery, review and revision, (see Figure 3).

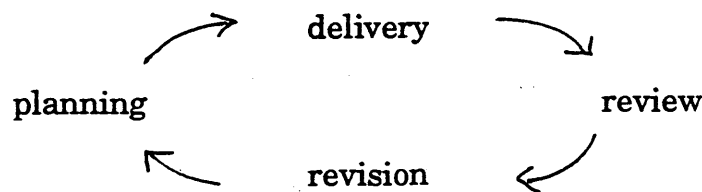


Figure 3 - the learning cycle of an academic course

In going round the cycle, learning from our mistakes and developing a better course, all the stages are important, but the process of critical reflection is particularly vital. Critical reflection is what enables us to learn from experience and what changes a closed loop, where we merely repeat behaviours and perhaps become better at our mistakes, into an open loop leading to better practice and deepening understanding (cf Boud et al)⁴.

This can be related to Argyris and Schon's notion of "single loop" and "double loop" learning⁵. Somebody capable only of single loop learning will always be limited within an inflexible framework of knowing. A person who becomes aware of their framework of knowing, their preconceptions and value judgements, becomes able to change that framework or to choose alternative frameworks in response to new problems and circumstances: that person becomes capable of double loop learning.

To some extent we are all capable of this type of critical reflection on our own, but it is actually very difficult to recognise and challenge our basic preconceptions and prejudices. Kuhn⁶ recognised this in the difficulty scientists have in accepting new paradigms which challenge those in which they have been trained. In a different vein, Argyris and Schon researched the difficulty managers have in recognising

that they might practice a theory-in-action which is quite different (even contradictory) to the theory they espouse.

For most of us, the most effective way of ensuring double-loop learning is by engaging in critical dialogue with other people about our work. More specifically, we need to engage in dialogue with people who cause us to articulate the basis of our practice and to consider it against other approaches. Course team colleagues and students are a good start, but there are dangers of collusion and inhibitions due to power relationships. Our institutional quality assurance procedures offer a further level of critical dialogue, followed by external scrutiny by professional bodies and audit bodies.

In his more recent writings, Schon^{7 8} has proposed making critical reflection central to the self-concept of the professional. He argues that the old notion of the professional as a technical-rational expert with the right answers is no longer tenable in an age of rapidly changing knowledge and equally rapidly shifting client needs and problems. Instead, he advocates the notion of the reflective practitioner, who accepts that even the best trained expertise is limited in its scope and who negotiates with the client to reach the best match of expertise to the client's needs. Some of the characteristics of this relationship are set out in Figure 4. Interestingly, to work fully, the relationship requires the client to be reflective too. So in order to ensure quality, we need to be critically reflective and we need to ensure that our students are too.

Expert	Reflective Practitioner
<p>I am presumed to know, and must claim to do so regardless of my own uncertainty.</p> <p>Keep my distance from the client, and hold onto the expert's role. Give the client a sense of my expertise, but convey a feeling of warmth and sympathy as a "sweetener."</p> <p>Look for deference and status in the client's response to my professional persona.</p>	<p>I am presumed to know, but I am not the only one in the situation to have relevant and important knowledge. My uncertainties may be a source of learning for me and for them.</p> <p>Seek out connections to the client's thoughts and feelings. Allow his respect for my knowledge to emerge from his discovery of it in the situation.</p> <p>Look for the sense of freedom and of real connection to the client, as a consequence of no longer needing to maintain a professional facade.</p>
Traditional Contract	Reflective Contract
<p>I put myself into the professional's hands and, in doing this I gain a sense of security based on faith.</p> <p>I have the comfort of being in good hands, I need only comply with his advice and all will be well.</p> <p>I am pleased to be served by the best person available.</p>	<p>I join with the professional in making sense of my case, and in doing this I gain a sense of increased involvement and action.</p> <p>I can exercise some control over the situation. I am not wholly dependent on him; he is also dependent on information and action that only I can undertake.</p> <p>I am pleased to be able to test my judgements about his competence. I enjoy the excitement of discovery about his knowledge, about the phenomena of his practice, and about myself.</p>

Figure 4: Schon's contrast of the expert and the reflective practitioner and their contractual relationship (1983, pp 300 and 302)

Peter Funnell and Dave Muller of Suffolk College came to a similar conclusion with regard to the delivery of quality in vocational education⁹:-

In conclusion, what emerges from the quality debate is that TQM (Total Quality Management) is about people and not procedures. The emphasis placed on involving individuals in the ownership of their day-to-day activities is critical and is a means of delegating power while retaining managerial accountability. Developing quality systems depends on a management approach which releases individual creativity and innovation rather than on the introduction of procedures

which ensure conformity to standards. This recognises that the emphasis on what customers require can in fact only be determined by asking them and engaging in some form of dialogue with them (1991, p12).

Ultimately, quality rests on the values of the people involved. The openness of a learning system depends on the openness of the people who deliver it, and that in turn depends on the creation of an educational environment which encourages and rewards reflective practice.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING AN OVERSEAS PROGRAM

AMNON ORENT

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING AN OVERSEAS PROGRAM

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Noel Annan, in a book review of Jaroslav Pelikan's The Idea of the University: A Reexamination, wrote that "The United States is ... the supreme exemplar of second-chance education. Around the university cluster varieties of institutions like community colleges and night schools. These are the trampolines that, if an unfortunate falters, still offer the chance to bounce back and catch the trapeze that will swing him or her up to the heights of the big top." (New York Times Book Review, May 24, 1992). Empire State College is another such institution which honors its duty to the community at large and consciously and purposefully accepts its social responsibility. Consequently, we serve the adult student, the greater majority of which is married, with children and working full time. Most of our students have had various experiential learning opportunities prior to studying at our college and this fact brings a valuable degree of intellectual maturity to their studies with us. The purpose of this paper is to examine how we try to insure that a student at our college receives an opportunity for quality education in an experiential mode of learning while being geographically removed from the home institution.

Quality Assurance in higher education sounds like such a foreboding topic to the traditional academician because it is usually associated with producing a mundane material product such as an automobile or a computer chip and not the intellectual pursuit of knowledge. Nevertheless the effective mentor and tutor has traditionally worked toward the goals of producing an informed student who aspires to be able to think for himself within the parameters of a particular discipline and that he do so by striving toward excellence. The means by which we create the opportunity for this to work must surely be the academic equivalent of Quality Assurance. This paper represents a modest attempt of one mentor to share his reflections on how he has worked to create opportunities for students to learn about particular disciplines by learning to think for themselves and thus learning to ask meaningful questions which would open doors to the further pursuit of knowledge about that discipline. I shall also explain my subjective idiosyncratic approach for understanding quality of learning based on the experiences of my students.

Because of the mode of learning at Empire State College which allows for experiential learning as part of the baccalaureate experience, this paper will also give some attention to how we monitor the learning in a working professional environment. Of particular importance in this enterprise is the

means by which the home base, in this case over 6,000 miles away, monitors these academic activities.

During the past fourteen years I have been a mentor at Empire State College - The State University of New York. For the great majority of that time I have been the mentor-coordinator of an overseas unit of the College in Jerusalem, Israel. The Israel Program, as it is known within the College, serves mostly American students although we have had students from Canada, England, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, South Africa, Australia, Argentina and Mexico.

Using the well known Learning Contract model these students have all studied within the mentorship framework whereby they met with their tutors, for any given subject only six to eight times during a sixteen week cycle. The initial meetings are always preceded by an in depth discussion with the tutor on the focus of the particular study and the student is given a recommended reading list whose function is to allow the student an opportunity to explore some of the questions which have been raised at the initial planning meeting. These readings are designed to allow for some degree of academic development by the student, the idea being that the initial discussion should not lock the student into a fixed plan with closed parameters. These learning contracts are developmental in nature and my experience has shown that when one uses this open system students become very interested in a particular focus within a subject and then learning builds on that interest.

A very important aspect of what the student studies at ESC is writing skills. By and large the great majority of work that the student completes at the college, in all disciplines, is in the form of essays or research projects which require full written reports. We emphasize the importance of successful, high quality writing as being crucial in advancing careers, and we encourage students to complete two writing sequences as part of their plan of studies. This kind of learning has worked well on subjects within the fields of history, social sciences, educational studies, literature, theology and other subjects in the humanities. It has also shown excellent results in business studies, especially in such areas as marketing, personnel management studies, and developing the small business enterprise.

Once the learning goals have been defined and written up in the form of a Learning Contract, and signed by the student as well as his mentor, the document is then sent to the dean of International Programs at ESC in New York. He and his staff then review the proposed learning activities and, if they find them academically appropriate they will sign the document as a formal agreement between the student and the college. The dean also has the option of consulting any member of the faculty of the college with regard to the adequacy of a learning contract. The dean and

his staff will also consult an outside expert if the college does not have a faculty member who can properly evaluate a learning contract for its proposed plan of studies.

During the next sixteen weeks the student must meet with her tutor a prescribed number of times during which she will hand in assignments for commentary and if necessary, advice on how to proceed further. At the end of this period the tutor will write an evaluation of the student's progress. The thrust of the evaluation is to show the level of progress the student has made within the original projected goals. After a review of the evaluation between student, tutor, and mentor, the document is sent to New York again where it is reviewed by the dean. If it meets the academic standards of the college the dean then signs the evaluation and it becomes a permanent record.

In order to assign the appropriate tutor in Jerusalem we have a bank of qualified tutors, mostly holding Ph.D.'s in their respective disciplines. These tutors help the students to design their learning contracts and they are then responsible for working with the student until the study is completed. The mentor is responsible for conducting periodic consultations with the student and the tutor to make sure that all goes according to plan.

At this point in my essay some concrete examples would be appropriate. We have had students who have expressed an interest in learning about the field of special education. After an initial exposure to the range of problems that can be present in the classroom, some students have chosen to study how to work with children who have speech and hearing problems. We have been fortunate in that there are three clinics in Jerusalem that work with these kinds of problems and they have consented to take on some of our students as interns working under the supervision of a therapist. After some weeks of observation the student is then ready to delineate which subjects they ought to be studying. They must then consult with their mentor and in this case they requested to study audiology, diagnostics, the anatomy of the head, neck and throat, sign language and a host of other subjects which became the core of their curriculum at the college. The point is that they have learned from first hand experiences what it is that they must know if they are to work with children who have those kinds of handicaps. There is a qualitative difference between this kind of educational confidence building and the usual kind of structured learning where students are given a list of texts which they must complete without explaining why these subjects have been chosen over some other set of learnings. The point is that mature students bring experience to bear upon the books they are given to read. Our view is that the obligation of the college is to provide an opportunity to integrate theory and practice.

Another student was working towards a degree in Business

Studies and she decided that she would like to do a study on marketing. Her tutor, an experienced businesswoman with a Masters Degree in marketing from the University of Sydney, was engaged in her own marketing work promoting a line of kitchen accessories. She began to work with the student on marketing concepts from a well known text in the field. After some theoretical studies the student proposed that she would like to do a study based on marketing the ideas of a non-profit organization. In particular, she wanted to develop an audio tape which presented an educational format to explain Christian holy sites in Israel. This project came from the needs of a non-profit Christian organization in Israel where the student was employed, which brings thousands of pilgrims to Israel throughout the year. The student wished to produce and market this explanatory audio tape. With the help of the expertise of her tutor she succeeded in her project and she produced a thousand cassettes packaging three audio tapes and an accompanying booklet. She learned about researching a product, electronic fidelity in reproduction of sound, visual displaying of the product and pricing. Her product was totally sold out soon after production and her tutor gave her top ratings for her final paper summarizing her learning experience.

The American baccalaureate is usually a liberal arts degree and students are often at a loss which subject to study outside of their designed area of concentration. In the past I have arranged some group presentations where tutors can speak about their interests. For example, one tutor spoke about her experiences as a published poet, another about her activities as a librarian in charge of a film archive, and another about his work as an archaeologist. All of these presentations allowed students to choose topics which genuinely interested them and which gave them an opportunity to work with these experts in their fields. This tutor-student connection allowed the students to build learning contracts around each discipline which then developed into a learning experience as well as a collegial connection. Allowing the student to observe the expert at work and then participating in the activity itself created a learning situation which produced high quality work.

Distance Learning:

Distance learning has two implications at the Israel Program of Empire State College. First of all, our Jerusalem office is at a great geographical distance from the offices of the International Programs of the college in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Second, we have students in Israel who reside quite a distance from the Jerusalem office. In both cases the learning process must be monitored by the appropriate academic staff.

I have described how our home office in New York is involved with the academic process in Jerusalem in a previous section of this paper. What remains to be explained is how our students who are not near our office in Jerusalem carry out their learning activities. These students study very much the same way as do our other students, however their location requires some further supervision. For example, we have students who are studying teaching methods under supervision in specialized areas such as Teaching English as a Second Language. These students are in Haifa, Beersheva and in Tel Aviv and they are visited periodically by the mentor-coordinator of the Israel Program while they are engaged in their work.

We also have students who live on various kibbutzim in Israel. For example, one student was studying econometrics and its relationship to dairy cow production. She worked at the Vulcani Institute with experts who design computer programs for dealing with such problems. Eventually she was able to revitalize the whole dairy cattle enterprise on her kibbutz. Another kibbutz student was working on designing music and art programs for early childhood education. Yet another student had created a regional program in the upper Galilee that offered classes in birthing and post partum care for couples.

These site visits gives the mentor an opportunity to observe the learning process in a field situation. In addition to the field experience the students are also involved in learning contracts that deal with the theoretical aspects of these subjects. The contract evaluations then reflect the dual experience of learning while working and the integration of the practical with the theoretical.

Quality Assurance

What then is quality in higher education? When we award the baccalaureate degree how do we know we have given a quality product? How much is the diploma worth? After all, with the gradual withdrawal of State and Federal monetary support for higher education in the United States we are selling an expensive product and at the same time we want the name of our institution to stand out and we want the word excellence associated with our name.

In terms of higher education the highest goal toward which we can aspire is to produce a student who can think for herself. Our mandate, it seems to me, is to produce an individual who can take her learning experiences and connect them into a means by which she can make the best out of the world around her. Putting it another way, we hope to help our students to develop the necessary skills of a profession of their choice and, perhaps even more critical, we hope to sharpen their native abilities to process information from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. And, just as crucial, we want our students to be able to effectively express themselves both orally and in writing. Other than helping our students to create effective learning opportunities how do we know that we have achieved some measure of quality?

It seems to me that whatever assurance we put into creating learning opportunities we will never really know the measure of our success if we do not have follow up on our graduates. After all, how can we know if our product is living up to its expectations if we don't know what our students are doing with their knowledge after they complete their studies. Education lays the groundwork for the future. It seeks to give the skills for carpe diem - to seize the day so that when the opportunity arises the individual will be able to make the most of the situation. Looking at our records I have found many of our graduates to be engaged in life long pursuits that permit them to continue to grow in their chosen professions or to branch out into new directions. I sincerely believe that the following four short examples are a good measure, if not a statistically accurate measure, of the quality of our product.

Amos was a student who was not very happy with his engineering studies in another university when he transferred to our college. After some deliberations with his mentor he chose studies in the social sciences and business which earned him a degree in Business Studies with us. After working for a short while he then went on to earn a Masters Degree in Management Studies and today he is managing director of a branch of one of Israel's largest chemical concerns.

David had been a life long student of Jewish religious subjects and he came from a world in which young people do not

aspire toward a college education because of religious convictions. But he had secretly been reading psychology for some years (a totally alien topic in some ultra orthodox Jewish communities) and he felt drawn toward studies in that field. He completed his degree in psychology with us and today he has succeeded in publishing five well received books in the orthodox Jewish world which seek to combine humanistic psychology with the religious teachings of rabbinical scholars. At the same time he is also a therapist and counselor to young people in a well known yeshiva (Rabbinic Academy) in Jerusalem.

Armand came to us from the City University of New York where he had received a significant monetary prize in a poetry writing contest. He decided to take a year break from college and to write poetry. He came to the Israel Program of ESC in order to find a framework to study with well known Israeli writers. It was at this time that he developed an interest in medieval Judeo-Arab-Spanish literature which he began to express in his own writing of poetry. With various tutors he learned modern and classical Hebrew and Arabic and he built on his knowledge of Spanish focusing on the medieval form of expression. Today he is assistant professor of classical and Oriental literatures at Queens College, the City University of New York. In a way he came full circle because he had returned to the system from which he had come. Recently the University of Minnesota Press published his first book.

Another example is Jonathan who was a premed student at the University of Chicago. He took a leave of absence in order to come to Israel for a year to study some humanities, social sciences, language, and historical studies. It was during this time that he joined our college and he decided to switch his studies to political science and international relations. He studied these subjects with tutors who are experts in this field and when he completed his degree at ESC he joined the cadet program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Israeli government. Having completed some foreign assignments as a diplomat he is currently on the planning committee for the Middle East peace negotiating process.

These four examples are one measure of success in that they show what our alumni have done with their careers. They are examples of second-chance education as well as alternative education. They are examples of individuals who have taken over the direction of their own education. I believe that what we have done at ESC is to provide an opportunity to train people for excellence.

A common situation in higher education in the United States is that many students complete their baccalaureate degree in one subject but develop their careers in something quite unrelated. Speaking to alumni of Empire State College about this phenomena I

find that no one regrets that their diploma title does not match their current professions. The best example of this is one of our graduates who completed his studies with us in philosophy and who is now a well established composer in Israel and in Europe. He said, "what I learned as a student at Empire State College helped me to reason and think clearly. These skills are applicable to everything I do and not just music."

Another expression of quality is when your graduates return to your institution with advanced degrees in order to act as tutors to your current students. Thus, at the Israel Program we have had the privilege of utilizing the services of our alumni in the fields of computer sciences, education, public health and epidemiology, community and human services, early childhood development, and fine arts and photography. I'm not sure if it is totally relevant but one of our graduates who had completed her B.S. degree in Community and Human Services, with a concentration in Community Health, recently acted as the midwife for our unit's secretary who gave birth to a son in January of this year. Of course that student came to us with an established career in nursing and midwifery before completing her baccalaureate studies at ESC. Nevertheless the birth was definitely an in house success and a product of high quality.

The different kinds of successes which I have described above, those that come from the actual learning experiences and those that come about after the student has completed his degree, I believe are due in part to the quality of students who we serve and the kinds of tutors and learning experiences which we provide for our students. What I have described in this short essay is how we create learning opportunities which allow for students to develop their full potential. Our students have gone on to careers in public health, academia, teaching, industry, banking, and private enterprise. They have developed careers based on contributions to their respective fields through their publications and original ideas. These results are then some measure of the quality of what Empire State College does for its student body.

**QUALITY IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER? STRATEGIES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT
OF QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

JENNIFER O'ROURKE

Quality in the Eye of the Provider? Strategies for Self-Assessment of Quality in Distance Education

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Several years ago, someone I know applied to a dual mode institution to take a distance course and to have her prior credits assessed. The institution with which she had previously taken most of her credits was phasing out undergraduate teaching, and she needed to find a new educational "home" if she was to fulfill her lifelong dream of obtaining a university degree. After some delay, she was enrolled in a course, which she completed successfully, but a year later, had never received an assessment of her prior credits. When she visited the institution in person and asked to meet with someone who could assess her prior credits, she was referred to the department chair in the discipline in which she had chosen to specialize. He was unable to help her. There was only one person in the university who could assess her prior credits, and he was away on vacation.

When the learner asked why she had received no response to several requests for credit assessment, the chair ventured that possibly the person who assessed credits may not have been familiar with her prior institution, even though it was an affiliate college of one of Canada's largest universities. The chair, however, did know the institution and its work, and would have gladly provided credit for the completed courses. He just had not been asked by the assessor.

After the visit, there was no further word from the institution on the credit assessment process, and the woman dropped the matter. She did not enroll for further courses at that institution, and pursued other interests instead.

The student was my mother, and I worked at the institution to which she had applied for credit assessment. I tried to help, not by intervening, but by connecting her to those who were officially responsible for academic issues. Their lack of response to her requests illustrated a gap in service and a fragmentation of responsibility that meant learners were not always well served. Given that distance education is designed to open up opportunities to learning, it seems reasonable to expect that many distance students would be accumulating credits from a variety of institutions, and would need ready access to assessment of prior credits, as well as provision for transfer credits. Keeping responsibility for this

assessment with one individual who served both on campus and distance students may meet the institution's concept of quality control, in terms of ensuring that its degree was credible, but the delays and limitations with this arrangement did not provide quality service to learners.

This anecdote provides an illustration of the difference between quality in the eye of the provider and quality in the eye of the learner. The rest of this article will present a short case study, which illustrates typical issues raised by a quality appraisal process, and will also provide some strategies for distance education providers to to conduct a self-assessment of quality in service to the learner.

Prerequisites for quality appraisal. It is rare for a small group of enthusiasts (and distance educators tend to be enthusiasts) to instigate organizational change unless conditions are right. Literature on organizational change has documented the general preconditions, in terms of organizational values and structures, which are essential for successful re-orientation towards quality. These include: commitment at all levels of the organization; the means to implement change; and perceivable benefits from change, for both clients and providers, which provide positive feedback and ongoing motivation for the process- Kanter (1977) Peters and Waterman (1982) Harvey (1988).

However, quality appraisal in distance education presents an additional challenge; the scope and diversity of possible dimensions for assessment. There is a wide diversity of products, if each course or program is considered as a separate product, and a variability among service providers, if each administrator and tutor in contact with learners is considered a service provider. Moreover, clients have a broad range of expectations about educational and administrative interaction needed for a specific study program and about how providers support their long term learning goals. This difficulty in establishing a quality appraisal framework for a complex service like distance education is noted by The Open College and The Training Agency in its quality management program for providers of training, *The Management of Quality* (1990).

In a quality appraisal process, it may be tempting to focus either on administrative aspects which are readily measurable, such as assignment response time, in isolation from the quality of the learning experience, or on nebulous "student satisfaction" quotients obtained from successful students' feedback at the end of the course. However, an attempt to focus on quality in distance education has to tackle at least these dimensions: level of service; learning experience; and the extent to which the provider

enables learners to meet their long term goals. In order to benefit from constructive self-appraisal, a distance education provider must have a clear definition of its goals and clientele (what business are we in) and a commitment at all levels of the organization to review quality and take steps to improve it. As the appraisal proceeds, further requirements will emerge; a means whereby learner feedback on quality issues can be forwarded, unfiltered, directly to decision makers, a mechanism for implementing change, and a system for monitoring the outcome of change. Throughout the appraisal process, the extent to which these systemic changes are also taking place serves as an indicator of commitment: without them it is likely that the appraisal will be shortchanged and will not provide clear indicators about which measures would improve quality.

Suspended disbelief. The advance assumption that providing a quality distance learning experience is beyond the organization's financial and/or human resources is clearly self-defeating. But in the era of restricted budgets, it can be difficult to convince decision makers to undertake quality assessment because it is feared that the outcome will demonstrate shortcomings that are too costly to address, and the result will be a clientele who have expressed their dissatisfaction to no avail, and a more discouraged workforce. A useful way around this is to collectively undertake a willing suspension of disbelief, and to regard the exercise as an opportunity to articulate a vision of how distance education should be, as much as a housekeeping effort to pick off the worn threads of fraying service levels. Operating on both the visionary and the practical planes simultaneously can call upon both the idealism and the realism characteristic of many in distance education. Moreover, engaging people at all levels in the organization in defining issues around quality often highlights how much can be changed with relatively simple and cost-effective measures. The process empowers individuals by recognizing the validity of their experience and their contribution and renews commitment to continued quality service.

A Case Study in Quality Assessment. Although we would prefer to believe that our organizations are all extremely quality conscious, and that undertaking a quality appraisal would be aimed at refinement rather than overhaul, very often it is a crisis related to quality that prompts a concerted effort to identify and change systemic shortcomings that affect how we serve our clients. This was the case at a Canadian distance education institution several years ago, which found that after a period of rapid growth, it was no longer providing acceptable levels of service to its students. The crisis emerged around a very obvious shortfall: 25% of students did not receive their course materials before the start of their

paced, 13-week credit courses. At first glance, it seemed to be simply a question of insufficient staffing. Although clerical and administrative staff worked very hard in the peak period each term during which about 8,000 students were enrolled in over 200 courses, they could not keep up to the volume. Both students and staff were predictably discouraged; students dropped out after finding they could not catch up and staff were demoralized because they felt their best efforts were inadequate to the task.

A task force gathered, informally at first, to analyse the problem. The task force included individuals directly involved in processing student enrolments and in preparing course materials for final production and delivery. They identified a series of issues:

- Deadlines for prospective students to submit applications for courses had been set at a time of much lower volumes and were no longer manageable. Because no analysis had been done of processing times required, these deadlines were often postponed from the official published deadline to an even later date, exacerbating the problem. Providing leniency on deadlines was regarded as an effort to provide good service: in fact it had the opposite effect, and many late applicants who received their materials late subsequently dropped the course.
- Students were allowed to "browse", to enrol and obtain materials for a course, and if the course was not acceptable to them, to return the package unused and enrol in a different course for that same term. This in turn meant increased processing of late entries, delayed delivery of the second package, and increased dropout.
- Timelines for course authors to finalize course materials did not provide sufficient time for production and duplication. Again, these timelines had been set during an era when course materials were relatively unsophisticated, and handwritten notes were simply duplicated and distributed to students. The schedule did not accommodate time required for copyright clearance, word processing, or any other finishing details. Delays in completing course materials meant that even students who had enrolled early might receive their course materials too late to begin the course.
- Course materials were duplicated for only one term at a time, on the assumption that authors would change the course materials from one term to the next. In fact, the majority of courses were unchanged between terms and about 40% underwent some change in any given year. There was

no systematic method for estimating demand for courses in advance, which meant little or no lead time between receiving requests for the goods (enrolment applications) and delivery of the goods, (course materials mailing). This in turn meant higher costs, and a higher error rate in course duplication, assembly and distribution.

The task force presented their findings and their recommendations to senior management:

- Given that enrolment staff could process at most 1,000 applications per week, they needed at least eight weeks to process the 8,000 applications they received each term. (The alternative presented was to hire more staff to process applications faster, which was not considered financially viable.) Therefore, the application deadline had to be moved back, from four weeks to eight weeks prior to the last date when course materials could be mailed to students in time for the beginning of term. Deadlines would have to be adhered to in the interest of fairness, rather than jeopardizing service for all in order to provide exceptional service for a few.
- Delaying deadlines was not providing a service to students, and in fact fostered discouragement and drop out when they found they could not catch up after receiving materials late.
- Providing a "browsing service" was costly and inefficient, and also meant that students received course materials too late. As an alternative, it was recommended that calendar course descriptions be enhanced, so that students had a better idea of the product before they bought it.
- Timelines and systems for course materials preparation needed adjustment so that time consuming processes, such as copyright clearance or video production could happen concurrently with other aspects of course preparation, rather than after course materials were completely written. This required more ongoing consultation between course authors and course preparation staff.
- Unless an unexpected problem emerged which required immediate attention, there would be only one opportunity each year for an author to make minor revisions to courses, and courses that were revised were to be ready for production for the first term they were offered in the new academic year. (Some courses were offered all three terms, others were offered one or two terms only.)

- A system of enrolment projection which factored in the pattern of enrolment and drop out in each course over the previous two years, would estimate production levels for each course for the forthcoming year, providing more lead time for advance production, rather than custom producing on a "wait and see" basis.

Virtually all recommendations were accepted and implemented over a two year period, during which time systems were developed and refined for accurate enrolment projection and production management, and improvements were made to application processing procedures. Besides improved service levels and more manageable workloads, a longer term positive outcome was the re-orientation of the distance education unit staff towards improving service on an ongoing basis. They developed a confidence in their ability to identify and solve problems, and took a questioning approach to many systems and procedures which had been in place for over twenty years. They began thinking in the same terms as production planners, (and many educators) working from outcomes back to inputs.

They also began to ask more substantive questions about the quality of the learning experience itself, especially when drop out rates did not decline as dramatically as they had expected even after service levels improved. They paid closer attention to details provided by students in their written requests to drop courses, especially those in which students noted intrinsic problems with the course materials or with tutorial support. Having taken a stance of continuing appraisal and improvement of administrative systems, they began to question how well students were served academically. As the first point of contact with students, staff were aware of problems with old or inaccurate course materials, tutors' delays in marking assignments, and of academic systems, such as that of credit assessment, which fell short of serving distance learners' needs. They raised questions about issues which are often protected by the invisible electric fence of academic freedom -the line that becomes evident only when touched.

Questions raised in this next phase of the process did not lend themselves to administrative solutions as readily as those of the first phase, which could be largely addressed within the distance education unit. These were far reaching questions about the quality of the learning experience and the rationale and commitment for the institution's involvement in distance education. They were developed by distance education administrators and some academic staff in a variety of contexts over the next two years, including organizational seminars and systems review consultations.

Questions like these, covering a spectrum of administrative and academic issues, can be used by other providers for their own "constructive self-appraisal" of distance education to identify significant quality concerns:

- Who are our clientele? What are their learning goals? Do we provide the types of courses and programs, that meet those goals?

(For example, if clientele are largely adults who have completed secondary school some time ago and are seeking a university degree, do we offer sufficient courses and enough choice that it is feasible to complete a degree with our program? Do we provide support for those whose skills may be rusty, in terms of bridging courses, or short term skills based courses? Do we provide an introduction to university studies, or to the unique demands of distance learning?)

If it emerges that our clientele expect something from us we do not offer, do we want to change what we offer or change our marketing to reach the clients who want what we do provide?

- What are the institution's expectations regarding cost effectiveness and profitability of distance education, and are these expectations reasonable and feasible? What are the implications of these expectations for quality? Do we need to change the expectations or change the way we operate?

(For example, if there is an expectation that distance education provision will make a profit for the institution, how does this affect quality? If a student who drops out still contributes revenue, does this mean it is more profitable to have high drop out levels and fewer students to serve in the long run? This might serve as a disincentive to improve service in order to reduce drop out rates.)

- Would we wholeheartedly provide sample copies of any of our courses to a) colleagues in distance education; b) an external evaluator; c) a group of students specifically mandated to review and critique courses?

(And if not, why not? Which courses would we be reluctant to "show off"? Is our opinion shared by others, especially those who have studied the course?)

- If a course or program is not available at our own institution, would we recommend to a learner requesting it that they take it from another institution? Would it be easy for them to do so and obtain credit?

(While it may not be realistic for distance education providers to be all things to all learners, it is more supportive of a learner's goals to help them study courses of their choosing, whether provided by our own institution or not, than to insist on "brand loyalty" and require they complete all courses with one provider, whether or not that provider has what they want.)

- Which courses have the highest completion rates? Do they have any common characteristics that would indicate possible reasons for their success? Can a small scale research project identify significant features of these courses which may foster learner success?
- What proportion of staff within the distance education unit are also its clients? Do they feel confident enough in their own product and service that they are users themselves? Or are they students elsewhere?
- If we feel constrained by budget limitations, what would be the first priority for spending if x amount of money became available? (x could equal a quarter of the annual budget, for the sake of the question).

(This is one way of identifying areas that need improvement. It is often a lot easier to think of ways to spend money than to save it, and this type of question is a lot less threatening than the "what must we fix" questions. But honestly identifying an important concern is often the first step in addressing it, often in ways that do not require large sums of money).

- How long does it take for a student to receive a response to a routine enquiry? What is the evidence that this is satisfactory, or unsatisfactory, for the majority of students? Do delayed responses impede learners from registering for or completing a course, or have any other impact on their learning goals?
- How long does it take to respond to a more complex question, for example about considerations for choosing a major?
- How available is academic advice or support for distance learners? What proportion of responsibility do the learner or the institution bear for a) initiating contact with a tutor? b) tracking progress toward a learning goal.

(Taking responsibility can include a number of factors: i.e., who bears the cost of the phone call, does someone in the institution make contacts with others on behalf of the student, who does the follow up, etc.)

- In a dual mode institution, are credits earned at a distance distinguished in any way from credits earned face to face?

(This is related both to the learners' goals, who is seeking recognized accreditation, and to the institution's goals, which may indicate a reluctance to acknowledge the equality of distance education by distinguishing distance courses from face to face courses on transcripts.)

- How long are course materials offered before they are reviewed and revised ? What is the evidence that this revision period is adequate or not adequate? Are there some disciplines for which materials would be outdated before this time was elapsed?

- How do we address a problem with a course that a learner points out? That an academic points out?

(If we really mean what we say about respect for the learner, should there be a difference?)

- How satisfied are learners with opportunities for access to a tutor or instructor? What is the evidence for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction?

(Learners may be reluctant to complain about inaccessibility, or other problems with a tutor, while a course is in progress, for fear of reprisal. A number of consistent complaints, therefore, can be considered a bit like letters to an M.P.- representative of dozens more who feel the same way.)

- Who receives and reviews learners' evaluation forms after the course is completed? Is information gathered from all those who attempted the course, or just those who completed it?

(Depending on the timing of the opportunity for learners to evaluate the course, their feedback is often very valuable and honest, despite the inevitable glow of gratitude many people feel after they've just completed a substantial amount of work. -[thank god it's over] - However, if this information is passed on only to course authors, who may or may not attend to it, there may be lost opportunities to identify and remedy problems which could jeopardize future students' work. An educational

provider which ensures that only course authors see their course evaluations may be valuing academic freedom more than providing a quality educational experience.)

It would be heartening to report that in this case study, questions like these prompted a wide ranging re-evaluation of the distance education program and the implementation of well-considered strategies to improve the quality of the learning experience. However, at this stage, it is too soon to determine what the outcomes will be. Changes within the organization and continuing fragmentation of accountability for each aspect of the program made it difficult to proceed with the next phase. In many academic institutions, there is a belief that administrative staff, however close to the customer they may be, should stick to their paperwork and not raise questions, even if they encounter students clearly distressed about their treatment as adult learners. What is clear is that once the issue of quality is raised, it is virtually impossible to confine it to just one aspect of a system. In many distance education systems, there are at least two groups who are close to the learners; administrative staff and tutors. The insights and direct experience of these individuals are as essential to any endeavour for assessing and improving quality as is genuine organizational commitment at all levels to the process.

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**DISTANCE TEACHING FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL? ACHIEVING QUALITY IN A
MULTI-SOURCED EUROPEAN COURSE**

NOEL PARKER

Distance Teaching from the Tower of Babel?

Achieving quality in a multi-sourced European course

Dr Noel Parker (Open University, Manchester)

Introduction

Over the past two years, I have been one of a small team in the Open University producing a course called "What is Europe?", in collaboration with five other European Universities. The course drew on the services of a total of 25 European academic authors, writing in four different languages. My job was to co-ordinate in particular one of four modules of the final course, a module entitled "European Democratic Culture". That involved liaising with authors, translating material and re-translating the drafts prepared by other translators, editing and annotating the resultant texts, and preparing a raft of supporting teaching material. "My" particular module was the work of nine authors, from eight different institutions, submitting material in four different languages. The challenges inherent in the preparation of such a course for distance learning were well illustrated in the work I was engaged in. This paper is a reflection on that experience.

Definitions

1. When I see the word "quality", I am inclined to reach for my red pen. For it is all too often a flummery version of "good". Of course, no-one here is guilty of such crude hyperbole. For myself, I mean this by "quality": the goodness or worth of a course as an educational experience *stimulated by some kind of explicit checking mechanisms*. Just as quality control on the production line lays down margins of error and lines of responsibility for monitoring them, in the hope of achieving a consistently good product, so "quality" in a distance-learning course is the aim of any mechanism which explicitly encourages educational worth and discourages shortcomings.

This definition, not particularly contentious in itself, does not at all exclude long-established mechanisms such as external examiners. Nor does it imply that some definite or quantifiable standard of worth is achieved or achievable: the "margins of error" for an educational experience are qualitatively different from those of integrated factory production. Finally, it does not only embrace feedback mechanisms monitoring the finished product (whatever may be called the "product" in the educational context); the means to ensure good relations amongst the staff may count as a quality mechanism.

2. I call "What is Europe?" a "multi-sourced" course because it was drawn up from "components" supplied by academics from different countries. Its assembly is in some ways comparable to the production of IT equipment for a company such as AMSTRAD, where the design may be done in the USA, the marketing in Britain, the hardware assembly in Taiwan, the chip production in Japan and so on. More accurately, we could call the course "multi-nationally, multi-lingually sourced", for the contributors worked in different languages as well as different countries. "Multi-nationally, multi-lingually sourced" courses may well be the shape things to come for European distance learning.

Checking Mechanisms in the Process of Course Production

Producing the usual in-house Open University course already incorporates a number of checking mechanisms in the terms of my definition of quality. It is useful to ask, then, how many of the established mechanisms applied in a course like "What is Europe?". I would list the established mechanisms as follows:

- i) drafting and re-drafting upwards of 80% of the course under the critical eye of colleagues in the team, and (later) tutors and OU staff in the field. All this happens after discussion and agreement (if possible) regarding the aims of the course, the grounds for including material, the assumed level etc.

ii) formal checks by external assessors and external examiners, surveys of students' views (expensive and less used than heretofore).

iii) the general ethos of the institution, which is given to discussing aims, assessment objectives and pedagogic structure. If you devise a question for students to answer, you may find you have to write an answer to it yourself! This ethos focusses the mind on the students' learning, the coherence of the items in the programme etc.

iv) monitoring of tutors' performance with the completed course, which may reveal shortcomings in the tools they have been provided with.

As we are dealing here with a multi-sourced course, let us also bear in mind the quality-assurance mechanisms in modern multi-sourced industrial production:

i) an overall design tailored to an explicit marketing strategy and broken down into component parts each of which is precisely defined in a universal language (that of engineering);

ii) explicit specification of standards for contracting suppliers;

iii) intensive training of suppliers' staff; and

iv) penalties for failure to supply to specification.

The Production of the course

The conditions under which "What is Europe?" was produced impeded both the in-house and the industrial quality mechanisms listed above.

The plan for the course was first conceived by the Humanities Programme Committee of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities. Only a loose overall conception was formulated of what a "humanities" course on Europe should include: i.e. sections on ideas of Europe, on cultural diversity, on democracy, and on Europe's economic and political relations to the rest of the world. The modules were then farmed out between the five participating institutions (two took on one module jointly). There was an agreement to swap the resulting material, in the original languages. The institutions would then, as they saw fit, translate the material and offer it to their own students without payment to the initiating institutions or authors. But rights of intellectual property remained in the hands of authors; there was no entitlement to alter or select from what had been written in any given module.

This was a neat arrangement, free of legalistic complexity, but awkward for quality assurance purposes:

1. In-house mechanisms: Given the loose network of contributors, long lines of communication and differences of languages, many of the Open University's in-house mechanisms were hampered.

i) Far from sharing a common agreement on aims, level etc, the majority of participants only communicated with one or two others. Nor was there much common ethos as distance-teachers - many contributors were not from distance-teaching institutions anyway.

ii) Far from mutual comment on drafts, few contributors had possession of all the material. When they did, they might not be able to read the language it was in. Specific Open University course-team practices were unknown to most groups of module contributors, who had no expectation of circulation and modification by the team. Furthermore, budgets would only stretch to one translation of any given contribution, so that translations could only be circulated fully when texts had reached their final, unalterable form.

iii) Whatever the content of drafts, under the terms of the original understanding the Open University team had no clear right to modify or exclude material.

2. The industrial model: The model of multi-sourced industrial production did not apply well either.

- i) There were no detailed overall conception or component specifications for contributors to work from.
- ii) Neither formal contract nor informal understanding existed between the contributor and the final user. An Italian author, for example, was given an undisclosed brief by a French co-ordinator, to supply a text in Italian which the French co-ordinator could not read and the British co-ordinator (me) had no power over. There were no clear, enforceable deadlines. Authors could, and did, send in modified drafts long after we in the Open University should, according to our own schedule, have progressed the editorial processes.
- iii) Contributors did not have (and might not have wanted) training and guidance about the Open University's requirements and methods.

Outcomes: the difficulties of assembling the learning pack

The rest of this paper is concerned with any factors that might counteract the above impediments to quality.

For "my" European Democratic Culture module, the immediate upshot of the farming-out was that the Open University received in four different languages eight essays to present to its students. They covered (in the order laid down by the co-ordinating institution): European traditions of scientific and democratic thought; the political sociology of 19th- and 20th-century republican and democratic institutions; justifications for democracy in 19th- and 20th-century democratic theory; the meaning and benefits of the rule of Law, as understood in continental jurisprudence; the 20th-century crisis in the legitimacy and functioning of public opinion; the need for a diversity of bodies of knowledge; organs of state and political parties in the contemporary European democracies; the democratic claims and shortcomings of the European Parliament.

Students need to follow coherent, developing strands in order to measure their progress. How was this material to be assembled into a pack for the distance-learning students we envisaged studying it? No common strand, much less any specific aim for study, is indisputable and obvious. So it is possible to set down a number of plausible strands holding together the components we had. They could, for example, be said to concern the dependance of democracy on the mutual interaction of rational debate and an organised body of law.

Basically, though, the essays were held together like a collection of academic essays. What manifest pedagogic aims they had reflected the minimal agreement between a set of European contributors to such a volume: a broad interest in Europe, respect for scholarship, acceptance of a diversity of views, the open-endedness of the debate. Legitimate as they are, such aims hardly fulfill all the students' needs for specific pedagogic objectives.

Moreover, even where they were stated in the text, those points of agreement could be obscured by differences between intellectual cultures. The defence of diversity of views, for example, appeared in a "French" version: a discussion of the post-modern limitations on rationally-grounded consensus. Unfortunately, this is indigestible to many British readers.

Some pedagogic coherence might be founded on the values of teaching and on common academic disciplines. But there are divergencies between the different European university practices: distinct intellectual and teaching styles; and differences between the disciplines as practised in different countries. Thus, the teaching of the *cours magistral* - the lengthy, leisurely, detailed exposition in lectures two or three times a week - showed through in the writing of some essays. It is a cumulative style of presentation not intended to evoke immediate responses from students, such as the Open University's interactive distance-teaching specifically aims to do (e.g. by in-text questions). Similarly, the research-monograph style of high-quality German social theory risked drowning our inexperienced student readership in a welter of references and interpretative criticism.

As for differences between disciplines, take the case of jurisprudence. Because an overarching rational "doctrine" lies behind the continental notion of jurisprudence, it is expounded in abstract chains of "pure" juridical principles. Such thinking is little known here, exceedingly dry to students and strange alongside common British notions of the law. Similarly, French philosophers are taught to discourse *through* voices from a large philosophical canon, and assume a knowledge of that in their readership. This can inspire allusiveness that is baffling for the British student, such as the following: "For every Pericles there has always been a Socrates blocking [democracy's] path, wielding his critical doubt." That canonical style of presentation fits with a characteristic French objective for student assessment: commentary on gobbets of text from the "Greats", where the student identifies the presence of certain issues but does not argue them. Outside of literature disciplines, it is a mode of assessment rarely used in British higher education. Thanks to our different teaching styles, we thought our French collaborators' *presentation* was too difficult for students, while they thought our manner of *assessment* was too difficult.

Some strategies to recover teaching quality

The main quality strategies available to the OU team were *post-hoc* additions to the mainline texts as provided by our collaborators. Written comment on drafts was possible. But so great were the differences of ethos, language and teaching values that contributors' responses sometimes compounded what we saw as the problem. On the other hand, a whole raft of additional teaching strategies were interposed *between* the student and the texts supplied.

1. Additional components - booklets, cassette tapes, broadcasts, timetables, guidance to tutors etc. - are quite usual in Open University courses. Their limitation is that the student may find it difficult to organise things so as to refer concurrently to so many different sources. Nonetheless, in components of that kind, the programme of study could be enhanced with:

- i) short summaries explaining the material in terms tailored to our choice of teaching objectives;
- ii) questions and/or activities to be undertaken whilst reading the text;
- iii) examples to illustrate the topic of the authors' material;
- iv) local or personal colour to bring text authors and their purposes closer to students (e.g. interviews and discussions with authors, comments on their situation such as the contemporary political background of the Italian contributor's views);
- v) thematic strands to link the parts of the module;
- vi) explanations of the teaching style being followed at any given point in the text;
- vii) commentary on the language and the disciplines used.

2. The texts themselves could be annotated. This can function well where a brief explanation can be attached and read immediately. For example, a footnote on Pericles can explain the reference quoted above. On the other hand, notes are too close to the text for the reader to take in and evaluate if they expound broader issues. Pericles may appear only once or twice; Socrates not only appears more often but represents something much broader than his life and works - namely, the entire direction taken by Western thought. So, there is a grey area between in-text annotation and amplification in the additional components.

3. Finally, we edited the texts heavily in the process of translating them. This had the enormous advantage that (unlike 1. and 2.) it left no visible overlay in the text to complicate the student's task. We restructured much of the language of the original material, simplifying it, making choices as to the explicit meaning of anything that appeared ambiguous in our estimation, modifying terminology to fit our teaching aims.¹ The resulting texts read more like something originally written in English. In the end, the scope translation gave us was so useful, that at times I regretted that some texts were supplied in English.

On the other hand, because different cultural environments underpin different meanings, one may wish to convey the fact that terms in the text are foreign. If the French author epitomises modern biology by referring to the little-known Lamarck, should we substitute the well-known Darwin? Where the Italian author writes of the *stato di diritto*, for which there exists no true English equivalent, are we entitled to speak of "the rule of law", which is roughly similar though distinct. The answer in both cases appears to be no. In the first, we want to preserve the Frenchness of the writer. In the second, we would not only elide a genuine intellectual difference, but also undermine the author's own discussion of the difference between the *stato di diritto* and the rule of law.

In view of that, it seems inevitable that any course which draws on the intellectual cultures of different European countries must be partly a course *about* those different cultures. That is legitimate because a university course ought to be aware of its own concepts and because learning about differences belongs quite naturally amongst the aims of a higher-education course on Europe. But it does require the student to operate at more than one level of interpretation.

Final comment: the outstanding problems

By these strategies in texts and in additional components we hope to have palliated the quality problems arising from multi-national multi-lingual sourcing. But at least three problems remain:

1. The process of inserting the above strategies is enormously time-consuming - more so than for a single-language or in-house course. That has to be planned for in advance.
2. Any *post-hoc* overlay on the mainline texts complicates life for students. It would be preferable to incorporate many of our add-ons in the core material offered to students. But that entails more power to intervene in, edit and amend the texts provided by initial authors.
3. If we return to the parallel between producing a course like this and multi-sourced industrial production, we are reminded that our strategy remains *post-hoc*: the product is "designed" only *after* it has been "produced". This runs fundamentally counter not only to principles of marketing, but also to pedagogic principles of building a course around the responses we anticipate from the student.

So, would it be possible to build this type of course in that fashion, designing in the pedagogy where it ought ideally to be: at the start? I suggest it is unrealistic to seek, on the industrial model, a set of formally defined contractual relationships carrying through a coherent initial "design". That would run counter to the academic ethos and values, and require an unachievable precision in the "designers" specification.

On the other hand, it may be possible to include a substitute for a prior design: a stage of consensus-building involving *all* the contributors. Shared educational objectives, standards and compositional styles could be generated - even if they had to include some recognition of differences. In other words, contributors *could* be brought more fully into the quality mechanisms of the team-production process. If such shared "design" features were to be established and sustained, a large face-to-face gathering of contributors, and a continuous process of exchanging material and ideas would be necessary. More, and more continuous translation would be needed. And the contributors would have to focus their attention at an early stage on the end product, in the form of the student responses to the course. But this appears to me to be the unavoidable price of achieving a higher-quality distance education package with a range of European academics.

1. There are theoretically unresolvable problems about what makes a "true" translation. Moreover, translation of academic material is a specialist business. As a new body of thought initially gets into translation, certain terms are transposed into the language and established, sometimes quite esoterically (one thinks "difference" or "deconstruction"). These translating conventions may present problems for students, so that one is entitled to choose *not* to follow them.

QUALITY IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT - CARROTS OR STICKS?

ORMOND SIMPSON

QUALITY IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT-CARROTS OR STICKS?

Ormond Simpson-Senior Counsellor, Open University East Anglian Region

What's quality for?

Let me start by putting an obvious and simple proposition to you because every time I sit down to write about quality I find I tend to lose sight of ultimate truth that quality is only a means to an end. That is, quality in any area only has a purpose if it leads to an ultimate objective. So I keep reminding myself that quality in staff development is only of value if it leads to quality in student support, and, in turn, that it is only of value if it leads to helping students pass their courses - what a colleague of mine calls 'helping the punters do the business!' [In parentheses I prefer the term 'punter' which in England comes connotations of someone who's taking something of a gamble, to the term 'customer' which is much too slick].

You might argue against the baldness of 'helping the punters do the business' in favour of something vaguer - 'providing students with a quality educational experience' might be more elegant. But aside from the small numbers of 'success-resistant' students who do prefer to fail I think it's fair to say that most students would put passing their courses as their ultimate goal and it's our job to get them there. So we can only define quality in staff development by asking what kind of student support is most effective in attaining that goal. Do we really know?

George and John

Consider the cases of two OU tutor-counsellors who I shall call George and John. They teach the same course, live in similar towns with similar students. There the similarity ends -

- George is frankly getting on a bit (he tells me he went in with the first wave of assault craft on D-day and that nothing that's happened since has seemed quite real). He's a bit staid and formal, ostensibly rather cynical about the OU and its students, his face-to-face tuition is OK but nothing special and I guess if we were interviewing him for the job now he wouldn't get anywhere near the short list.

- John is a contrast. Young, lively and charismatic, he gives superb face-to-face tuition. His commitment to the OU is total and he knows all there is to know about adult students and their needs.

So why is it that year after year for the last six years George has got more punters doing the business than John? To a significant level of better than 2%? Actually I find this result quite encouraging. It suggests for instance that student support does affect student pass rates. But it also poses two difficult questions:

- (i) what are the causal differences between George and John and
- (ii) if we can identify those differences how do we go about promoting them to all student support through staff development?

It turns out that the essential difference between George to John is probably to do with individual student care and monitoring rather than group support. If I phone George to ask him how student X is getting on he can tell me immediately. If I ask John he'll probably say 'Oh yes old X - I haven't heard from him recently - I wonder how he's doing?' John in effect is in love with teaching but not with the taught, a syndrome common in all areas of education.

Some more recent work tends to confirm this picture. In a recent survey of OU Tutorial and Counselling staff it was clear that they got most reward from face-to-face group teaching and from long

term relationships with (by definition) successful students. Working with weak and unconfident students and through the medium of one-to-one phone calls wasn't nearly so motivating.

So the answer to my second question about how we can change the way student support staff go about their work is not a simple one. And there is another factor to be taken into account.

The Brindley Report

Some years ago Jane Brindley conducted an informal survey into the support needs of OU Tutorial and Counselling staff. One of the interesting things to emerge from her report was how autonomous such staff saw themselves to be. They hardly recognised any hierarchy at all and saw full-time staff as helpful in dealing with problems but not as supervisors or managers. It was also clear that this autonomy was a highly valued part of the job. It looks likely to me that attempts to interfere with that autonomy could well damage the self-motivating energy that lies at the heart of the success of the tutorial and counselling staff. Perhaps then we should look rather at the goals of staff than their behaviour.

Tutorial and Counselling Staff Goals

We still need to know more about what tutorial and counselling staff see as their overall goals. We might expect these to vary widely and it would be essential to clarify and re-negotiate these goals with them. Such a process might be complex but there would be various stages:

(i) We should provide appropriate data. If we are to foreground student progress with staff then we need to publish student progress data. What would be the effect if at the end of the year each tutor received the progress data on his/her group of students at various stages compared with Regional and national data, together with an accumulative total (as one year's data could be fairly random it might be helpful to have a statistical measure of progress over the years)?

This data would not be used for appraisal but would indicate areas of weakness and strength (a tutor might find that his or her drop out rate was good during the year but that the exam pass rate was low suggesting a re-emphasis of his/her student support strategy might be appropriate). The mere publication of such data at regular intervals would also forefront the issue as nothing else could. And the same could be done for full-time member of staff....

(ii) We should provide student feedback. We could encourage students to give their tutors feedback by giving tutors or students a feedback form that students could return to their tutors direct. We wouldn't see it at all so again the question of appraisal does not arise. But there is a weakness here in that this feedback was at the end of the year it would be almost only from successful students.

(iii) So we would need to forefront student withdrawees' for tutors both indirectly by expecting tutors to report on withdrawals in their groups directly by asking such students for feedback on their experience.

Tutorial and Counselling Staff Empowerment

But my last strategy would be in a different direction. Although the tutor's role has a great deal of autonomy it is still very constrained by the system. We still specify how tutors should use their student support time if not directly then by custom and practice. And we stimulate this flexibility by administrative procedures such as the timing of allocation of students.

What we now need to do is consciously minimise the remaining constraints on tutor roles saying to tutors in effect "We shall allocate you these 20 students for this course this year. Your aim is to get as many as possible through the course. You will plan your support programme for them as seems most effective to you. You can experiment - but evaluate your experiments and tell us so we can build up portfolios of experience to spread to others. You can ask us for the help and resource you want and we'll try to give it. If you want changes in the system we'll do our best to deliver those too."

"Tell us what kinds of staff development would be most helpful to you. And at the end of the year we'll help you get feedback from your students and we'll provide you with basic student progress statistics to help you measure your success"

What would happen in these circumstances? It would take some time for tutors to adjust but slowly they would begin to make the demands in the system that would enable them to support students more effectively. To take an example of something that's happening already one of my tutors contacted me in June this year to say that he thought his current group of students was now reasonably independent of him. He had reserved some time out of his allocation for the year - could he have his next year's students now so he could work with them?

By stretching the system a little I was able to do this. I shall spread what he's doing to other tutors and I expect some of them to start asking for similar developments. As tutors became more accustomed to their responsibilities as 'student progress managers' rather than teachers they will pinpoint other weaknesses in the system (such as the lack of exam feedback) and will demand that such weaknesses be fixed. And because of their new empowerment they will be more successful in getting that done than people like myself.

Sticks or Carrots?

Let me return to the question I asked in my title 'Staff development - sticks or carrots?' The answer is of course neither. Staff development in future will be there to answer the needs identified by tutorial staff in response to their students' progress. It will be very hard to guess what tutorial staff will demand but the focus might be on (for example) 'withdrawal inhibiting skills' (if such exist), or boundary setting skills (to clarify what could otherwise be an open-ended job specification) and on experimental evaluation and exchange.

And then quality in Staff Development will be determined not by us by the tutorial staff who want it.

**SYSTEMS, VALUES, AND DISSENT: QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE
LEARNING**

ALAN TAIT

Systems, values and dissent: Quality Assurance for Open and Distance Learning

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While Quality Assurance may be a recently applied term in the educational context , there is nothing new in Open and Distance Learning about systematic review and inspection of products and services to ensure their Quality. This has related both to the production of course materials and to presentation systems for learner support, and has involved major Quality Assurance methods in embryo, including peer review, performance indicators, customer feedback, and a philosophy of continuous improvement.

From one Distance Teaching University, the Open University UK, a number of examples of long-standing Quality Assurance related activities can be drawn:

The Course Team, where collaborative non-hierarchical teams work and rework drafts of materials (Perry 1976)

Developmental Testing of course materials before general availability (Nathan and Henderson 1977)

Monitoring of correspondence teaching , (Miers 1986)

Monitoring of student assignments turnround times by tutors (Fage and Mills 1987)

Inspection and support of tutorial and counselling staff face to face activities (Murgatroyd 1980)

Collection of feedback from students (Bradshaw 1987)

Indeed those fields of open learning which choose the distance mode, breaking the link between the physical presence of the learner and the teacher in the same place and at the same time, have in the UK context at least been early achievers in the Quality Assurance field. This has been due to a number of factors, some systemic and some value driven.

On the systemic side, the characterisation of distance learning as an industrialised form of learning, pace Peters (1983) , has meant that the move from the craftsperson approach to the division of labour brought with it the need for inspection of process. Sallis (1993) comments on the origins of Quality Assurance in the industrial sector:

It was the breaking down of work into narrow and repetitive tasks with the advent of mass production which took away from the worker the possibility of self checking quality....A strict division of labour developed from it and necessitated the expansion of the system of inspection known as Quality Control .

p 14

While Peters has protested that he was no advocate of the industrialisation of learning (1989) he was surely correct to observe that this was the process that was being applied in universities like the OU UK, the FernUniversität, and other large scale institutions where students numbers have reached unprecedented levels. In the context of Quality Assurance the industrialised system also creates greater transparency in Distance Teaching University work, with the often commented on fact that lectures in a conventional university are essentially private, while course units are published documents widely available .

The transparency of Distance Teaching Universities is also linked to the values which associate themselves with the term open learning. It has been part of the ideology of that movement that learners should drive what is provided by the institution to a greater extent than the conventional Higher Education institution, which defines products and services for students who do not have the status of the academic elite which govern. Simpson (1992) reveals in his discussion of Student Charters, which are a logical outcome of the overall ideology of learner support in the OU UK, how a student centred approach maps on to the Quality Assurance concept, although he questions whether there are some misconceptions in simply equating student centred learning with serving customer and market demands.

Another area of transparency can be identified on the presentation side in the OU UK, where the regular visiting of tutorial and counselling sessions is perhaps unprecedented at a Higher Education level. While Quality Assurance in the previously termed Polytechnic sector was very advanced in the field of course design and structure through the activities of CNAA (Silver 1990), the visiting of teaching, discussion of process therein, and occasional dismissal because of inability to comply with approved of learner support styles of interaction remains a largely unacknowledged Quality Assurance related achievement at University level on the part of the OU.

We thus have a situation in Open and Distance Learning where Quality Assurance related activities are long established, and have been until now relatively uncontentious. It is also not the case that Quality Assurance has been introduced because of recent financial stringency, or because of shrinking markets, often quoted as environmental influences that demand the introduction of Quality Assurance. A number of factors however have brought the issue to prominence in education as a whole, including Higher Education and Open and Distance Learning. This conference "Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning: International and European approaches" is by no means the first of its kind in recent years , nor is this collection of papers (see for example Atkinson, McBeath and Meacham 1991).

The environment of change

The more recent emphasis on Quality Assurance can be attributed to Government interest in the return on public investment; and the twofold assertion that education and training is essential to economic recovery and growth, and that the institutions responsible have failed in their mission in the recent past through ivory tower or anti-business attitudes. Further, Open and Distance learning is now seen as mainstream provider of the learning opportunities necessary for and capable of providing large scale expansion in flexible ways without the full cost of conventional delivery methods (the location of the learning environment in the home or workplace removes the need for campuses, for example). The final element in the picture concerns management: if educational institutions are judged to have failed in answering social needs in the eyes of government, then government seeks more immediate ways of directing their work (diminishing institutional autonomy), and within institutions collegial self-government gives way more or less willingly to executive line management in order to ensure that organisational mission is fulfilled. Finally, a competitive environment is created so that the university takes on more and more of the characteristics of a company in a free market, with implications for the status of employees. Customers (formerly students), who now pay more and more of the real cost of the services provided, come to the centre of the stage in management's concerns.

As has been observed by Nunan and Calvert (1992) in a Report specifically on Quality and Standards in Distance Education (p 27):

'The prominent place of Quality and performance monitoring on the Australian educational agenda ... is in fact the current phase in the intervention by the state into the affairs of the higher education system.'

It is this context of a changing environment in many countries, not just the UK, that Quality Assurance has gained a central place, and in this context that Quality Assurance is now seen more than previously as a contested area.

Key terms and contested ideas

Recent books by Freeman, *Quality Assurance in Training and Education*, (1993) and Sallis, *Total Quality Management in Education*, provide straightforward accounts of the benefits of Quality Assurance for educational institutions. Freeman's book, by a practitioner and writer best known in the Open Learning field, offers a practical step by step path for educational institutions aiming to achieve registration with the British Standards Institute BS5750. The work by Sallis, although broader in conception and offering some interesting informational background on the origins of TQM, like that by Freeman sees no need to detain readers with discussion of any ideology of Quality Assurance.

This paper seeks to challenge whether a technocratic approach to Quality Assurance is adequate, i.e. operationally based discussion on how to introduce it, or whether there needs to be discussion of terms like **product, service, customer, standard, leadership** and **competition** which are the essential vocabulary of the Quality Assurance movement.

Organisational mission and dissent

Sallis sets out the origins of Quality Assurance in manufacturing industry, with the ideas coming from Americans like Deming, Shewhart and Juran in the USA in the 1930's, but implemented in Japan in the 1950's (p13-19) . BS5750 was first published in 1979, with the title 'Quality Systems', and originated in the defence procurement field in the British Ministry of Defence and NATO. We know that organisational mission and its clear understanding and adoption lies at the heart of Quality Assurance, and it is evident that neither Japanese industry nor the British Ministry of Defence (at least in the 1950's) would find it difficult to agree on organisational mission: neither sectors are known for ambivalence or contested values, indeed the opposite.

We can usefully consider in a Higher Education context how the adoption of organisational mission works, and whether Open and Distance Learning is of particular relevance here. Sallis writes that there should be 'A single command for each process - the key processes, whether they are curriculum, pastoral or administrative need to be charted and organised so that each process is brought under a single chain of command.' (p84). He also provides diagrammatic representation relating to 'institutional alignment', reproduced below:

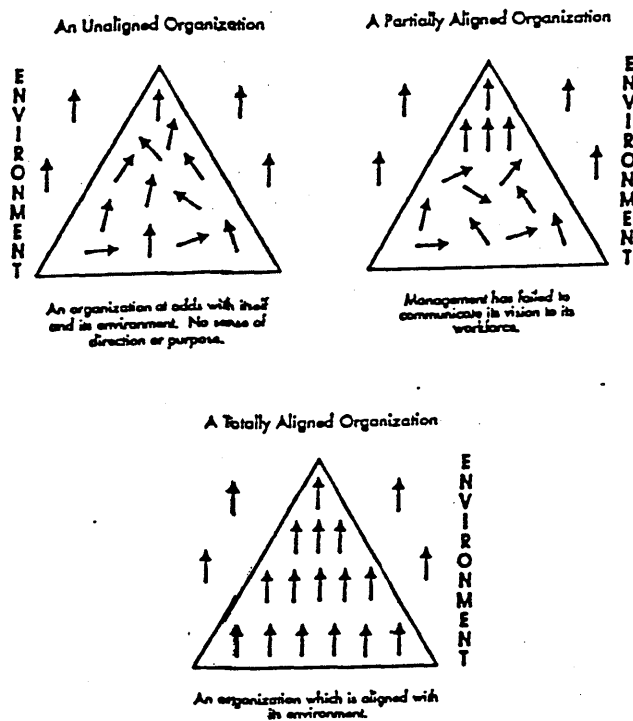


Figure 1 Organisational alignment , as represented by Sallis

If we contrast this approach with that of Barnett (1992),

'Higher Education, as an enterprise, is centrally focused on knowledge; knowledge is more a process than a product, a structured conversation conducted by those seriously interested in getting at truth..' (p132)

we can see that the achievement of organisational alignment, where all individuals are facing in the same direction, would in Barnett's view be the negation of what an institution of Higher Education should be about.

The product, the service and the standard to which they should be delivered are properly the subject of enduring disagreement in Higher Education in important ways, not just in a preliminary way during the debate of institutional mission. There will continue to exist in a university conflicting understandings of what the product is and how it should be delivered, which inevitably impacts on standards. Within the same institution theoretical physics researchers, teachers of literature, colleagues in the Business School and student counsellors will maintain opposing as well as complementary understandings which the institution benefits from tolerating, partly deriving from the knowledge worlds which they inhabit and partly deriving from individual differences, which may express themselves thorough religious or political commitment. This point was made in a related way by Costello (1993), whose research into the OU UK revealed three worlds with different pictures, based on organisational location, namely the central academic staff, the operational and administrative staff, and the regional academic staff.

Management

It is worth noting that Sallis suggests that flatter hierarchies will be created by TQM approaches:

'it (TQM) has enormous implications for the organisation and the relationship within it. The first casualty is the traditional notion of organisational status.' (p 37)

and

'The evidence suggests that as TQM develops much of the hierarchy is eliminated, and flatter structures with strong cross-institutional links take their place..' (p 81)

These comments might suggest that companies are moving more towards the traditions of collegial government of Higher Education, but Sallis also notes that 'Leadership is the essential ingredient in TQM' (p 86).

While leadership might be developed in a non-hierarchical structure, it is also the case in recent years that the introduction of Quality Assurance in Higher Education has been accompanied in the UK at least not by greater emphasis on flatter hierarchies, but

by exactly their opposite: higher status and salaries for the 'Management Teams' and greater executive powers.

Customers and students

If there is a complexity about the product and the service in Higher Education, then it is also the case that term customer will not adequately cover major aspects of the category of participants whose primary function is as learner. It is a point of principle in Quality Assurance that all actors within and outside an organisation are customers, providing a service to others. Yet, as Simpson (1993) amongst others has pointed out, we have in a University to fail students from time to time, acting in accordance with other stakeholders outside the institution including Professional Bodies, academic peers, the public who need assurance re professional competence etc. Thus, there remain elements in the relationship which the student has with any formal educational programme which are not based on the purchase of a service (where the customer is said always to be right) but with deferring to the academic status of the institution whose award is aimed at. Thus Sallis' statement

'Quality is what the customer wants and not what the institution decides is best for them' (p 39)

does not helpfully reflect the complexity of Quality Assurance issues around terms like student, learner, client and customer, all of which relationships exist. Similarly the term customer has at the heart of it in any dictionary definition the notion of the purchase of a product or service; it is a market based activity.

While students certainly, and increasingly, pay fees which reflect this, there are elements of the relationship between teacher and student which, like others in our culture, are generally considered to be corrupted by market factors e.g. parenting, friendship, love. Similarly, the best teachers give over and above any cash reward, and are looked on by the student as friends and guides (in open and distance learning as well as in conventional education). Thus, while the market may have increased its dominance in human relations, the simple use of the term customer for the student-teacher relationship within education firstly will not recognise what is actual, and secondly may through the use of language reinforce the dominance of the market in yet another area of human relations.

The competitive environment

The extent to which Quality Assurance is introduced as a necessary corollary to competition in the educational field is a related topic. Certainly both Freeman and Sallis are explicit in their linking of the educational market place, competition, and Quality Assurance. Sallis, for example, writes

This deregulation of educational provision requires competitive strategies which clearly differentiate institutions from their competitors. Focusing on the needs of the customer, which is at the heart of Quality, is one of the most effective means of

facing the competition and surviving.' (p 19)

But competition between institutions in the educational context results from a set of political decisions embedded in values and judgements about human relations, rewards and resources: it is not an uncontested social vision. There are alternatives, and indeed if educational policy were to change to one of collaboration and planning, would that obviate the need for Quality Assurance? Elton (1993) argues that Universities will work most effectively where certain institutional needs have been met, using Maslow's celebrated model, so that 'the deleterious effects of competition in a climate of scarcity' can be avoided. This will create the basis, in his view, for a professional model of Quality to develop.

This brief examination of the central terms of Quality Assurance in a Higher Education context has revealed, I believe, that there remains a great deal of work to be done if they are to be used fruitfully and not shallowly. Reflecting on what is 'fit for purpose' engenders a complex discussion of the relationship between the learner (customer), what is offered and how it is offered (product, service and standard) and has implications for the management of the institution (leadership). The managerial or technocratic imposition of the notion that a University is simply another company in a free market, without due consideration of the diversity and conflict of ideas, will diminish Higher Education, as well as Open and Distance Learning. The fear will be, as Peters (1992) puts it, that 'their (the universities) critical roles viewed widely in political and cultural terms- will be actively contained or bypassed completely as they are reduced to new techno-economic imperatives.'

Constructing a way forward

We have a situation where Quality Assurance has been well established in Open and Distance learning at Higher Education level in both curriculum and presentation, but where the broader context of educational and social policy has created anxiety that the basic purposes of Higher Education, at least as they have been hitherto understood, are now at risk from Governmental intrusion. Is it acceptable to retreat to earlier positions in Higher Education, if not in Open and Distance Learning, where it would have to be acknowledged that students can be recipients of badly prepared teaching, hostile administrative environments, and the arrogance of professionals? On the assumption that this question must be answered in the negative, how can the student-centred and practical concerns of Quality Assurance and Open and Distance Learning be brought together with what has been argued here is appropriate questioning of its (Quality Assurance) key vocabulary?

It is interesting to note that one major service, as opposed to production, industry where Quality Assurance has been developed is the Health Care Sector (Whittington and Ellis 1993). Similar concerns re the mounting cost of Health Care, its enormous importance in a national context, the centrality of human relations, and the perceived ownership and sense of vocation in the range of professions are all present, as are radical questions re the role of Health Care functions e.g. treatment of disease versus preventative strategies. In a chapter which draws many explicit analogies between the Health Care and University sectors in the context of Quality Assurance, Whittington and Ellis report on two broad approaches, namely implicit review, which stresses the

value of professional judgements, and explicit review which involves careful specification of standards before the review of care.

There are clearly areas in Open and Distance Learning where explicit review is appropriate, and as already noted takes place e.g. the management of course production to schedules, and the monitoring of turnaround times of assignments from tutors. Neither of these procedures however will assure excellence in curriculum or student support; but they will rule out certain kinds of poor quality. There is an essential task in identifying operations which can be systematised by explicit review.

As important however is the identification of areas where implicit review is essential, and can complement explicit review. Confusion of the categories, e.g. using explicit review where implicit review is appropriate, is dangerous in the false objectivity which will be assumed and the mistaking of value judgements for data.

If we take the example of the inspection and support of face to face tutoring and counselling in the OU UK, where much Quality Assurance activity takes place albeit on a variable and to some extent informal basis, there is a need from the perspective of explicit review, for example, to ensure that visits by appropriate staff take place at agreed intervals. However implicit review needs also to take place to develop strategies for observation, identification of tutoring and counselling practice that is agreed as essential and desirable, and activities dedicated to continuous improvement.

Such an example, drawing on concepts of implicit and explicit review developed in the Health Care sector, but not in themselves new, provides building blocks for charting a way forward. There is however an important issue which needs consideration, namely the balance between professional and customer or stakeholder driven approaches to Quality Assurance.

Professional and customer driven approaches

The work by Freeman and Sallis, based on simple adoption into education of Quality Assurance concepts, makes it clear that customers in the technical sense exist inside and outside the organisation. Nonetheless there is a substantial emphasis on external customers in the commonly understood sense of the term, which is problematic in education as these are students. Meacham (1991) makes the point as follows

'The demands of the market must be tempered by some consideration of standard, based on professional expertise rather than immediate client satisfaction.' (p vi).

It is also the case that profit-driven approaches can masquerade as customer-centred approaches eg where companies put communities out of work by moving plant to a location where labour costs are lower in order to reduce prices 'for the customer'. In other words, customer-centred approaches can be driven by the international free market and concomitant employment practice rather than a humanistic or other philosophy at the heart of student-centred learning. It is not impossible that such a confusion of narrowly defined customer focus and broader social policy might take

place in the Open and Distance Higher Education environment where international competition is a reality (Jarvis 1993).

There is a discussion to be had however as to the status of professional judgement. It is surely the case that externally imposed criteria will diminish the autonomy of those working in Higher Education whose judgement has hitherto been deemed to be an essential part of their role in assessing the nature of a task, and whether it has been carried out effectively and to an appropriate standard. De-skilling as a result of industrialisation is a well-known phenomenon. Such a reduction of reliance on individual and group autonomy fits in with the new managerialism, and appears to fail to understand the critical importance of intellectual capital, and how it is to be managed, in a University.

In accordance with this view, Barnett places the principal emphasis on what he calls the developmental approach to Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which is internally generated and professionally driven, as opposed to objectivist and relativist approaches, which are both externally generated, either as with the former with quantifiable aspects of the activity under review, or as with the latter on a comparative basis between institutions. I have commented elsewhere (Tait 1993) on the usefulness of the developmental approach within the field of Open and Distance Learning in the context of study centre activities on a European basis.

However there are concerns about the defence of professional independence. As Nunan (1993) suggests

Where interpretation of the values behind institutional goals rests with academic units, quality control, assessment and assurance can be effectively controlled by the use of processes which contain subtle advantages for those stakeholders belonging to academic schools or faculties.

In support of Barnett on the other hand, O'Reilly (1993) envisages a key activity in Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning as practitioner reflection, following Schon's seminal work (1983) based on professional practice. No doubt Nunan and O'Reilly's approaches are both necessary, but it is possible that the reliance on professional judgement which is internally driven will slip back to the older tradition of academic professional arrogance, which open learning with its student centred commitment has done so much to oppose.

Conclusion

This is the ground for major debate in order to resolve a way forward which:

- * gives the learner appropriate and negotiated rights;
- * preserves the essential intellectual independence in the academic sphere without which a University, or indeed any educational institution, gives up one of its terms of reference;

*answers the needs of society as mediated by government and other bodies in ways which do not negate the former.

Quality Assurance must surely play an important role in creating and maintaining the structures which achieve such a balance. It cannot do so without the sort of debate which this and other articles demand, or risk destroying the very process, Higher Education through Open and Distance Learning, which it is aspiring to support.

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