**Studien und Berichte der Arbeitsstelle Fernstudienforschung
der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg**

Volume 4

Börje Holmberg

Distance Education in Essence

An overview of theory and practice
in the early twenty-first century

2nd edition

Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg
2003

Distance Education in Essence is a short overview of distance education as developed over the last century and practised today. It is highly readable, written in a somewhat conversational style. The author, well-known in the field both as a practitioner and as a researcher, looks carefully into the character and applications of distance education, and presents a revised version of his much discussed overarching theory. Particular attention is paid to the innovatory character of distance education and the role of technology in today's practice. Technology is regarded as an auxiliary means that may serve educational purposes, not as important in itself.

Methodology, particularly as related to the empathy approach that Professor Holmberg's theory is based on is discussed at some length and so are the new developments made possible by information and communication technologies. The consequences of the educational principles advocated for the organisation and administration of distance education are analysed and the role of this mode of education in society is briefly looked into. The book also includes a short overview of the research areas that have so far been given particular attention.

ISBN 3-8142-0875-7

Orderform and information on the ASF-Series:
http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/zef/mde/series

Contents

Series Editors' Foreword 5

Preface 6

1 Prolegomena 9

2 Distance education as innovation 21

3 The technology debate 27

4 The theory of distance education 35

5 Methodology 47

6 Organisation 63

7 Expectations and outcomes 71

8 Distance education and society 81

9 Research on distance education 85

10 Summing up 89

References 93

Appendix:
The evolution of the character and practice of distance education 107

Index 115

Series Editors' Foreword

The editors of *Studien und Berichte der Arbeitsstelle Fernstudienforschung der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg* are pleased to acknowledge that Börje Holmberg has entrusted his latest work to the Oldenburg University series of publications on distance education research. With this step a fruitful cooperation begun in 1996 is further corroborated. At that time Börje Holmberg had joined a pioneering project concerned with online teaching and learning initiated by Ulrich Bernath and Eugene Rubin. As a member of their team he contributed to the development of the *Virtual Seminar for Professional Development in Distance Education*, which was successfully conducted in 1997 and 1998 with participants from all over the world. This course became the recommended first core course in the online *Master of Distance Education (MDE)* program, which is jointly offered by the University of Maryland University College and the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. Over 500 MDE students have met Börje Holmberg in his capacity as a visiting expert in the first module of the course, the subject of which is *History and Principles of Distance Education.* One of the required readings of this course is Holmberg's comprehensive book *Theory and Practice of Distance Education.* The MDE students have the unique privilege to interact personally with him as their tutor in the online learning environment.

Börje Holmberg has identified mediated subject matter presentation and mediated student-tutor interaction as the two constituent elements of distance education and insists on an empathy approach to its practice. In the online seminars he himself consistently practices this approach by providing individual guidance and feedback while discussing each student's questions and opinions. For the seminar work his *Theory and Practice in Distance*

Education has proved an excellent basis providing essential parts of the subject matter presentation.

The present book is on the one hand a short, somewhat conversational presentation and updating of the most important concerns studied in depth in *Theory and Practice in Distance Education.* On the other hand it is a discussion of the status and trends of distance education at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which among other things includes a scrutiny of the relationship of technology to distance education.

What has led to the writing of *Distance Education in Essence* is both the author's commitment to lucidity, which is badly missing in many of today's confused references to distance education, and his wish to provide up-to-date information about its theory and practice. In his work he has been able to draw on his rich experiences as a scholar and tutor of distance students. It is a unique and eloquent expression of a successful process of advancing theory and practice. In *Distance Education in Essence* Börje Holmberg succinctly and readably sums up and evolves his distinguished life-long contributions to the field in the light of the electronic age.

The Editor of Open Learning deserves our gratitude for granting permission to reprint Börje Holmberg's *The Evolution of the Character and Practice of Distance Education* in the second part of this volume, which is the 1995 precursor on the essence of distance education, particularly as related to its historical background.

Christine Walti and Franziska Vondrlik provided editorial assistance to this second edition expanded by a subject index

The Editors

July, 2003

Preface

After many years of work in distance education I am somewhat puzzled to find that at the beginning of the twenty-first century there is on the one hand much talk about distance education, most of it favourable, on the other hand little understanding of its character, theory and practice. This booklet is meant to describe today's distance education, to elucidate the basic thinking behind it and to do so as briefly as possible.

Some work I have been doing since the end of the 1990s for a Master-of-Distance-Education programme of the universities of Maryland and Oldenburg has sharpened my awareness of the need for a succinct identification and explanation of the most important aspects of distance education as practised at the beginning of the new millennium. This to some extent lies behind the following ten short chapters. I owe the title of this book to one of initiators of this programme, my colleague Dr. Ulrich Bernath of the University of Oldenburg in Germany.

For my presentation I have drawn on much literature and research, that of others and my own. I constantly provide readers with full references to these sources and also in some cases refer to my personal experiences.

To elucidate the background and historical development of distance education an article on its evolution written by me and published in *Open Learning* in 1995 is added as an appendix. The permission of the publishers of that journal to reprint this paper is gratefully acknowledged.

Börje Holmberg

August 2001

INDEX

acceptability (appropriateness) of computerised educational services: 15, 28-30
affective domain: 51, 72
(the) American School: 16
American vs. European approaches: 14, 27-28, 37, 38
applications: 12, 20, 21, 25, 27, 39, 40, 49, 85, 86
artificial intelligence: 86
assignments: 11, 21, 57, 58, 59, 62, 63, 67, 78
a-synchronous computer seminars: 24, 57, 61, 86
audio (presentations and interaction): 14, 22, 24, 50, 54, 56, 71
autonomy: 77, 111; see further *independence*

behaviourism: 47

chat: 60, 68
class/es/: 12, 21, 38, 40, 56, 110-111
cognitive domain: 72
cognitivism: 47
commentary course/s/: 52
commercialisation: 15
computer technology: 15, 24, 28, 31, 39, 51, 86
computer conferences, seminars: 12, 24, 27, 28, 57, 60, 61, 63, 80, 86
concept of distance education: 11-15
constituent elements: 5, 9, 23, 32, 47, 89
constructivism: 48-49
consultation: 24, 43
contract learning: 54, 76, 80
convergence: 12
conversational approach 40, 43, 44, 46, 50, 53, 80, 83, 90
correspondence education: 9, 14, 71
costs: 52, 69, 74-75
counselling: 12, 16, 25, 41, 61-62, 63, 78, 79
course (subject-matter presentation): 9, 11, 23, 39, 41, 50, 51-52, 54, 60, 64, 68, 69, 89
course development: 41, 51-55, 64-67, 69, 70
course team: 64-66, 69
critical approaches: 82-83

deep learning: 43, 49-50
definitions of distance education: 11-15
delay (of tutor comments): 58, 67
development of distance education: 7, 9-11, 107-113
discipline of distance education: 85-86
distance-teaching universities: 10, 17-19, 57, 71, 82
distributed learning: 14
distribution (of course materials): 6-69, 12, 25, 63, 68,
drop out: 69, 73-74, 78
dual-mode: 19, 21, 69-70

educational theory: 36, 46- 47-50; see also *theory*
electronic mail, e-mail: 12, 21, 24, 43, 58, 60, 63, 68, 74, 80, 86
emotional involvement: 43, 46
empathy: 5, 23, 35, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 46, 59, 74, 77, 80, 90,
European vs. American approaches: 14, 27-28, 37, 38
evaluation: 71, 72, 73, 74, 85, 109
extended classroom: 14, 28
extra-paradigmatic innovation: 21, 39, 78

face to face: 11-14, 19, 24-25, 27, 40, 45, 55-57, 60, 63, 71, 89
falsification: 37, 44, 45
fax: 24, 56, 58
FernUniversität: 15, 17, 31, 73

group study: 12, 13, 21, 38, 86, 87

Hermods: 16, 21, 22, 72, 81, 109
hypertext, hypermedia: 33, 54-55

ideological purposes: 83
independence (autonomy): 28, 39, 41, 54, 75-80, 83, 90, 110, 111
individual learning: 12, 21, 38, 43, 83, 89, 110,111
industrialised teaching and learning: 22, 110
information: 6, 10 22, 23, 24, 31, 32, 49, 51, 55, 61, 63, 64, 85, 86
innovation: 21
inserted questions: 53
instructional design: 48interaction: 5, 9, 12, 16, 21, 22-24, 24-25, 29, 32-33, 39-41, 43, 45-48, 52, 55, 56-62, 64, 67-68, 80, 86, 89,
International Council for Open and Distance Education: 9

International Correspondence Schools: 16
internet, net :23, 24, 28-29, 31, 42, 50-52, 54, 56, 57, 60, 63, 68, 86
intervention: 62, 64, 77

journals on distance education: 10, 85-86

large-scale distance education: 19, 29, 43, 69, 109
learning: 5, 12-15, 19-22, 25, 27-33, 38, 39-46, 49-50*-57, 61, 66, 74-, 78, 80-81, 85-87, 89-90
learning materials: 12-13, 30, 41, 42, 57, 66, 68-69, 85, 86
learning situations: 48, 52

mass education: 21
media, mediated presentation and interaction: 5, 9, 12-13, 22-25, 27-28, 31, 39, 41, 43, 45-47, 50-52, 56-57, 63-64, 72, 74-75, 89, 107, 111
mega universities: 18, 20
motivation: 22, 40, 44, 58, 74, 78

net - see *internet*
NKS: 16

objectives: 47-48, 54, 65, 76, 80-81, 90
one-to-one relations between student and tutor: 14, 39, 58, 80, 89
one-way traffic: 9, 22-23, 39
online communication: 5, 25
open learning: 14-15, 82
(The) Open University, UK: 10, 16, 53, 61, 64-65, 109
(The) Open University of Israel: 56
organisation of distance education: 9, 12-13, 22-25, 39, 41, 44, 46-47, 57-58, 60-61, 63-70, 77-79

pacing (and self-paced learning): 11, 21, 79, 89
peer-group interaction: 9, 80; see *student-student interaction*
periodicals on distance education: 10
periods of study: 15, 79-80
personal relations, personal approaches: 39, 43-44, 46, 66
pioneering work: 107-108
print: 9, 12, 22, 47, 52, 54, 111
Private FernFachhochschule Darmstadt: 17, 19, 21
problem-oriented learning: 32, 40
professional organisations: 16
programmed learning: 29, 51
psychomotor domain: 72

rapport: 38, 46
readability: 53-54
reminders: 62

satellite communication: 56
search on the web: 32, 33, 86
self-contained course: 51
self-paced learning: 21, 79, 89
self-regulation: 75-80
simulation: 25, 31, 32
single-mode: 10, 19, 21, 69-70
small-scale: 69-70, 109
social objectives: 81, 107
students (target groups): 11-12, 15-16, 19-20, 21, 24, 35, 38-39, 43, 46-48, 56, 58-59, 72-78, 79-80, 82, 86, 90, 111
student-student interaction: 12, 25, 39, 47, 57, 64, 68, see *further peer-group interaction*
student support: 33, 39, 79; see further *counselling*
student-tutor interaction: 5, 9, 11, 12, 25, 39, 47, 57, 60
study centres: 57
study guide: 52
study skills: 59
submission frequency: 58
supervised distance learning: 12, 20, 90
supporting organisation: 23, 25, 39, 41, 44, 46-47, 57, 60-61, 76-79,
synchronous interaction: 57, 60; see further *synchronous seminars*

teaching: 5, 12, 19, 22, 27-28, 32, 35, 38-40, 42-43, 45-46, 47, 49, 51, 57, 65-66, 71, 83, 89
teaching activities: 31, 35
teaching organisations: 10, 15, 24, 30, 40, 57, 62, 64, 67, 69-70, 78-79, 90
teaching parties: 74, 77
teaching systems: 37, 60
target-groups: 85; see further *students*
technology: 6, 10, 12, 13-15, 22-25, 27-29, 31, 33, 41, 48, 50, 57, 60, 72, 86, 87, 89,
tele conferencing: 12, 24, 27
telefax: 12, 24, 56, 58
telephone: 12, 56, 57, 68, 78,
text: 51, 52, 54, 61, 66,
theory: 6-7, 22, 35-38, 40-41, 42-52, 45- 50, 85, 90
theory of distance education: 35-46,

transactional distance: 35, 77
tutorial service, tutoring system: 58
two-way traffic: 9, 22, 23, 39, 47, 56-62
typologies of distance education: 70

University of London: 17, 109
University of New England (Australia): 19, 70
University of South Africa (UNISA): 17, 109

video presentation: 22, 56
video recordings: 14, 50
video conferences: 24, 27
‘virtual’ communication: 28
'virtual' universities etc.: 28, 29-30
virtual reality, space: 31-32
voice mail: 56

witness learning: 61
WWW-the world-wide web: 23, 29, 32, 33, 86