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The History of Distance Education Through the Eyes of the International Council for Distance Education

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The International Council for Open and Distance Learning (ICDE), perhaps the largest and best known of distance education associations, had its beginnings in the second quarter of the 20th century, inspired by visionary educators using correspondence education. ICDE began as a one-time conference in 1938, but conveners and participants, cheered by the success of this first conference, voted to hold a second and possibly a third conference. At the second conference, the delegates voted to form a permanent association and selected the International Council on Correspondence Education (ICCE) as the name. The association retained this name until the 1982 conference, at which the delegates voted to change the name to the International Council for Distance Education.

The idea for holding an international conference came from J. W. Gibson, a visitor from Canada, who attended the National Conference on Supervised Correspondence Study in New York in 1936. Gibson, the director of high school correspondence instruction for the province of British Columbia, shared with other delegates knowledge he had about correspondence education in several countries and then suggested that an international conference be held. Delegates at the New York conference were enthusiastic about the idea (Broady, 1938). Rex Haight, chair of the New York conference, supported the idea and later served as president for the first conference. Gibson served as chairman of the program committee, assisted by Earl T. Platt from Nebraska and Haight from Montana (Broady, 1948b). The work of planning the conference fell to Gibson and the Department of Education of British Columbia, and it was, in Knute O. Broady's words, "bravely conceived and magnificently carried out" (Broady, 1948b, p. 89). William R. Young, president for the fourth conference, proposed for Gibson the title of "Father of the International Conference on Correspondence Education," earned through his "perseverance, industriousness, and ability" (Young, 1953, p. 15).

At the second conference, held in 1948, the delegates voted unanimously to establish a more permanent international council (Broady, 1948a). At the third conference, held in 1953

in Christchurch, New Zealand, a committee presented a proposed “Constitution and Rules” for the council that was adopted by the delegates. As these rules helped the council become more established, conferences began to follow a more regular schedule (Table 4.1).

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON ICDE HISTORY

If we are to look at the history of distance education through the eyes of ICDE, we must have some understanding of previous research in this area. “Doing history,” which is a “process of selecting and arranging evidence in order to interpret and explain human actions” (Johnson, n.d.), is a way of understanding the past, of taking a series of events and human actions and bringing them into a focus that helps us to appreciate and understand where we are now and to guide us as we plan where we will go in the future.

In looking at the history of ICDE, we find the evidence of “events” and “actions” recorded in conference proceedings, reports, and official statements of policy. However, since many of the conference proceedings, like much of the foundational literature in distance education, are difficult for most distance educators to find, it is also difficult for current educators to “do history,” to understand the ideas, practices, and efforts of early distance educators. In addition, many distance education practitioners and researchers today are new to distance education, having come to this area of education from various backgrounds. They may bring a “professional self-knowledge” from these backgrounds (Johnson, n.d.), but have little knowledge of the longer historical presence of correspondence and distance education and of the work and ideas of the many distance educators throughout the world. Therefore, research is needed to bring together some of the foundational work of these educators and to organize the findings in a way that will help the distance educators of today gain guidance from the work of those of the past.

Previous historical studies on correspondence and distance education have made some information available (see, e.g., Bittner and Mallory, 1933; Bunker, 1998b; MacKenzie, Christensen, and Rigby, 1968; Marriott, 1981; Moore, 1991; Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Noffsinger, 1926; Perry, 1977; Pittman, 1996 and 1998; Sherow and Wedemeyer, 1990; Watkins and Wright, 1991). The amount that has been done, however, is small in relation to the size of the field of study, as Pittman aptly points out in Chapter 2 of this volume. Likewise, very little work has been done on preserving the history of ICDE (see, e.g., Bunker, 1998a and Young, 1953). Also, few studies have focused on professional conferences, even in other fields. Such research, notes Amy Rose (1992, p. 10) is “amazingly sparse” (see, e.g., Drolet, 1982; Elton, 1983; Garvey, Lin, Nelson, and Tomita, 1979; Griffith and Garvey, 1966; Petry, 1981; Rosenfeld, Stacks and Hickson, 1990; Thrush, 1996; Tootelian, Bush, and Stern, 1992; Tritsch, 1991).

Bunker (1998a), analyzing the ICDE conferences from 1938 to 1995 and using an analysis tool from rhetoric (Porter, 1986, 1992), studied ICDE as a group of individuals and institutions “bound by a common interest”—correspondence or distance education—in order to find shared assumptions, practices, and aims that characterize that community as well as to document changes over time. Since such groups change frequently and are, therefore, hard to study, the analysis tool looks at data collected from official publications (“forums” of the group) and assesses “approved communication” to identify rules, standards, beliefs, and practices of the group. Within this framework, the Bunker study searches for themes and patterns that are recorded in the forum of conference proceedings.

As shown in Table 4.1 above, ICDE has held 20 conferences. The first section below contains a brief general description of each conference. Following the general description is a discussion of trends and patterns revealed in Bunker’s analysis of the ICDE conference proceedings.

TABLE 4.1
ICDE Conferences

<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Leadership</i>
1	1938	Victoria, British Columbia, Canada	Rex Haight, president; J. W. Gibson, organizing secretary; Earl Platt, program committee chair; Frank Cyr, program committee member; Knute Broady, conference executive
2	1948	Lincoln, Nebraska, USA	Knute Broady, president; J. W. Gibson, vice-president; H. C. Etter, secretary; N. F. Thorpe, organizing secretary; G. J. Buck, program committee chair
3	1950	Christchurch, New Zealand	A. G. Butchers, president; G. J. Buck, vice-president; K. O. Broady, past president; N. F. Thorpe, secretary
4	1953	State College, Pennsylvania, USA	W. R. Young, president; Eric N. LePetit, G. J. Buck, Edith Lucas, Sylvia Haight, Nancy Fitch, R. W. Cumberworth, and N. F. Thorpe, vice-presidents
5	1958	Banff, Alberta, Canada	G. J. Buck, president and organizing secretary-treasurer; Eric LePetit, Edith E. Lucas, Sylvia Haight, A. J. Betheras, Elizabeth Powell, Norman Braden, and Homer Kempfer, vice-presidents; William Young, past president; G. F. Bruce, arrangements and entertainment committee chair
6	1961	Gearhart, Oregon, USA	G. J. Buck, past president; Knute Broady, honorary president; Donald Cameron, Norinne Tempest, Sven Hartman, Lloyd Jamieson, John Villaume, and G. J. Buck, vice-presidents; Chas Dean, program committee chair
7	1965	Stockholm, Sweden	Donald Cameron, president; Sven Hartman, first vice-president and program committee chair; Renée Erdos, F. Lloyd Hansen, Mitoji Nishimoto, and John Villaume, vice-presidents
8	1969	Paris, France	Renée Erdos, president; Donald Cameron, past president; Knute Broady, honorary president; Börje Holmberg, Mitoji Nishimoto, I. J. Sloos, Charles Wedemeyer, and Solomon Inquai, vice-presidents
9	1972	Warrenton, Virginia, USA	Charles Wedemeyer, president; Börje Holmberg, Edward Estabrooke, Einar Rørstad, Elias Pereira, and M. Kaunda, vice-presidents; Renée Erdos, past president; Robert Allen and Ripley Sims, program committee co-chairs
10	1975	Brighton, United Kingdom	Börje Holmberg, president; William Fowler, Peter Kinyanjui, Tadashi Koretsuné, Horst Mohle, Ripley Sims, and Charles Wedemeyer, assistants; Gunnar Granholm, program committee chair; Erling Ljoså, proceedings editor
11	1978	New Delhi, India	David Young, president; Mary L. McPartlin, Otto Peters, Bakhshish Singh, Kevin Smith, and Hafiz Wali, vice-presidents; Robert Wentworth, program chair
12	1982	Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada	Bakhshish Singh, president; Audrey Campbell, Michael Carbery, Erling Ljoså, Otto Peters, and Kevin Smith, vice-presidents; Audrey Campbell, conference host; John Daniel, program committee chair
13	1985	Melbourne, Queensland, Australia	John Daniel, president; Bakhshish Singh, past president; Joseph Ansere, John A. Bååth, Janet Jenkins, David Sewart, and Kevin Smith, vice-presidents; Barry Snowden, treasurer; Jerry Grimwade, conference manager; David Sewart, editor; John Thompson, publications secretary
14	1988	Oslo, Norway	Kevin Smith, president; John Daniel, past president; Liz Burge, Ben Gitau, Gisela Pravda, David Sewart, and Maureen Smith, vice-presidents; Barry Snowden, secretary/treasurer; Reidar Roll, conference manager; David Sewart, program committee chair
15	1990	Caracas, Venezuela	David Sewart, president; Kevin Smith, past president; Reidar Roll, secretary general; Marian Croft, Michael Moore, Ronnie Carr, Barbara Matiru, Bruce Scriven, and Raj Dhanarajan, vice-presidents; Armando Villarroel, conference manager; Marian Croft, program chair
16	1992	Bangkok, Thailand	Executive committee same as 1990 conference; Bruce Scriven, program chair and editor; Roy Lundin and Yoni Ryan, editors
17	1995	Birmingham, United Kingdom	Marian Croft, president; David Sewart, past president; Reidar Roll, secretary general; David Sewart, program chair

(Continued)

TABLE 4.1 (Continued)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Leadership</i>
18	1997	State College, Pennsylvania, USA	Armando Rocha Trindade, president; Reidar Roll, secretary general; Bernard Loing, Ross H. Paul, Armando Villarroel, John Samuel, James C. Taylor, Marmar Mukhopadhyay, and Gary Miller; vice-presidents; Marian Croft, past president
19	1999	Vienna, Austria	Armando Rocha Trindade, president (until June 24, 1999); Molly Corbett Broad, president (from June 25, 1999); Reidar Roll, secretary general; Hugh Africa, Gary Miller, Bernard Loing, David Hardy, Marta Mena, Marmar Mukhopadhyay, Abdul Khan, Jim Taylor, Alexander Ivannikov, Anne Auban, Helmut Hoyer, Arief Sukadi Sadiman, and Tam Sheung Wai, vice-presidents; Marian Croft, past president
20	2001	Düsseldorf, Germany	Molly Corbett Broad, president; Reidar Roll, secretary general; Hugh Africa, Gary Miller, David Hardy, Marta Mena, Abdul Khan, Jim Taylor, Alexander Ivannikov, Anne Auban, Helmut Hoyer, Arief Sukadi Sadiman, and Tam Sheung Wai, vice-presidents; Helmut Hoyer, program chair

Source: Department of Education, Victoria, British Columbia.

ICDE WORLD CONFERENCES 1938–2001

Conference 1: Victoria, British Columbia

As noted above, the first conference was held in August 1938 in Canada, hosted by the Department of Education for British Columbia. No clearly stated theme was given for this first conference, although the purposes of the conference were listed in the pre-conference literature and quoted by Haight in his foreword to the proceedings. These purposes included the exchange of experience, the examination of different points of view, the evaluation of results, the consideration of unsolved and difficult problems, the examination of different techniques, the standardization of procedures, and the planning for further critical study of technical research problems involved in correspondence education (Haight, 1938).

In addition, conference sessions were organized around three different section meetings:

Section I: The Organization, Promotion and Accreditation of Correspondence Instruction.

Section II: The Preparation of Correspondence Courses.

Section III: The Work of the Correspondence Instructor—Teaching, Evaluating and Recording of Results.

These section meetings were the “peak” of the conference and focused on “numerous and . . . practical” matters (Gibson, 1938, p. 43). Delegates interested in correspondence study at the elementary level asked for an addition to the program schedule to allow them to meet together, and so another section was formed during the conference.

Conference 2: Lincoln, Nebraska

The second conference was held at the University of Nebraska, October 11–15, 1948. Knute O. Broady had been elected at the first conference in 1938 to serve as president of the second conference. The second conference, originally planned for 1940, was delayed until 1948 by the onset of World War II. The members of the conference planning committee collected documents about correspondence education from different institutions and prepared a pre-conference bulletin featuring these reports. These descriptive reports regarding correspondence

education included 26 reports from the United States, 7 each from Australia and Canada, and 1 each from Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Merwin & Lowdon, 1948).

As in the case of the first conference, no explicit theme was stated. However, the conference was planned in “compliance with the wishes of the delegates from the 1938 Conference”—that is, that another conference be held and that “an organized group . . . study the question as to whether or not present correspondence services are adequately meeting the need for this form of education” (Buck, 1948, p. 97). Further, one of the purposes of the conference was to examine “ways and means of improving services given by correspondence educational organizations” (p. 97).

The conference committee selected nine topics for consideration, assigning delegates to do advance work on these topics and come prepared for discussions with other conference delegates. The topics included the following:

- The instructional staff of correspondence schools.
- The preparation of correspondence courses.
- Instruction.
- Methods of study and their effectiveness.
- Armed services courses: implications for adult education.
- Methods of evaluating students’ work.
- Libraries, traveling laboratories, and other mobile units; school bulletins and magazines; auxiliary organizations; and publicity.
- Guidance in relation to correspondence instruction.
- Organization and administration of correspondence schools.

Nearly all the addresses in this conference focused on experiences from different countries—Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Sweden, and the United States—although one dealt with basic concepts in correspondence instruction, one focused on correspondence education in the military, and one discussed correspondence education’s relationship to overall curriculum planning.

Conference 3: Christchurch, New Zealand

The third conference was held in New Zealand, in April 1950. The preface pages, titles, and program listings in the proceedings make no mention of specific objectives, themes, or purposes for this conference. However, the delegates at this conference prepared the first draft of the constitution and the general objectives of the council. It can be assumed that the objectives written for the constitution also served as the objectives for this conference.

The primary objectives of the council, as given in the first constitution, included the promotion of knowledge and improvement of correspondence education throughout the world, the fostering of good fellowship among correspondence educators, the exchange of materials and information, the convening of conferences, and the publishing the conference proceedings.

The conference was organized primarily by sections, with only a few addresses and papers. The subject matter for these sections included 1) primary education by correspondence; 2) correspondence methods for handicapped pupils; 3) post-primary education by correspondence (focusing on language, libraries, and social sciences); 4) post-primary education by correspondence (focusing on math, science, and commercial subjects); 5 and 6) technical education by correspondence (comprising two sections); 7) organization and administration; 8) associated services; 9) course production; 10) radio in correspondence education; 11) education in special fields (with reports focusing on teacher training, religious education, leadership training for the blind, and staff training); and 12) developments and future research.

Conference 4: State College, Pennsylvania

The fourth conference was held in August 1953, with The Pennsylvania State College serving as host. Again no specific conference theme was chosen by the conference program planning committee or by the executive committee. However, in his opening address relating the history of the council's conferences, Young (1953) noted that the delegates had come to this conference to "promote the knowledge of correspondence education throughout the world" (p. 17), the first of the objectives of the constitution drafted at the third conference. The addresses and papers were not categorized into subsections and covered a variety of topics and levels of correspondence education. Of the 31 papers, 6 were country reports, 9 related to specific methods of correspondence education (e.g., administration or teaching in supervised correspondence study or the use of television in courses), and 5 discussed course or curriculum development. The remaining addresses and papers discussed a wide variety of administrative issues—learner characteristics, specific subject areas, and correspondence education's relationships with other educational areas. This conference did contain several reports based on research, including a report on completion rates from the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) and one on factors influencing the examination performance of external students at the University of Queensland in Australia.

Conference 5: Banff, Alberta

The fifth conference returned to Canada, hosted by the Banff School of Fine Arts in June 1957. This conference was the first to have an explicitly announced theme. Although neither the title of the conference proceedings nor the conference program gave the theme, Buck (1957) stated in his president's report, "In coming to a decision with regard to a central idea about which the Conference could be organized, it soon became apparent that the title 'What the Correspondence Method Can, and Does, Contribute Towards Meeting the Modern Demands Made on Education' was appropriate" (p. 31). Buck also listed six objectives for the conference:

1. Obtain the participation of delegates.
2. Develop a broad understanding of the uses of correspondence education.
3. Learn about the work of contemporary correspondence education institutions.
4. Suggest and discover improved methods for correlating correspondence instruction with resident instruction.
5. Give information for those establishing correspondence education services.
6. Enhance the educational status of correspondence education students.

The conference was divided between general sessions and sectional meetings. Ten categories were established for the sectional meetings: elementary, use of television, university, development of uniform statistics, technical education by correspondence, use of supplementary materials for children studying by correspondence, high school, a question box, effective psychological motivation, and useful criteria for text selection. Buck (1975) noted that the conference was planned from the suggestions of the participants and was based on a series of five letters sent to members soliciting their help in developing the conference.

Conference 6: Gearhart-by-the-Sea, Oregon

The sixth conference convened at Gearhart-by-the-Sea, in Oregon, October 22–27, 1961. This conference did not have an announced theme; however, the ideas for the conference were collected from the membership by the planning committee and, as Viron Moore (1961) states in his report as the president, the conference was planned "in accordance with the majority

of suggestions that were made.” Moore noted that the assistance from the members reflected a “cooperative professional spirit” and the common good as expressed in the constitution: “to promote knowledge of correspondence education throughout the world and to foster good fellowship and better understanding among correspondence educators of all nations” (Moore, 1961, p. 29). The conference sessions focused on reports of correspondence education from around the world (e.g., in sessions such as “Japan Tells Her Story”) and sectional meetings dealing with elementary-, secondary-, technical-, and university-level issues. Three specialized sectional meetings were held to discuss publicity and promotion, learning machines, and supervised correspondence study.

Conference 7: Stockholm

The seventh conference marked a change in the number of delegates attending and the number of countries represented by the delegates. The conference, the first to be held in Europe, convened in Stockholm, June 13–17, 1965. Donald Cameron was president for this conference. His selection also represented a change; in previous conferences, the president was from an institution at or near the host site of the conference. During the elections for officers at the sixth conference, this situation was discussed, and a delegate recommended that a member from Europe, Sven Hartman, be chosen as the president for the next conference. Hartman, however, declined the nomination, and Cameron was elected. Hartman served as first vice-president and program and arrangements committee chair.

The themes for this conference, although not clearly stated in the title or introductory pages, emerged from a survey conducted by Charles Wedemeyer that he reported on during his keynote address at the conference. His survey (Wedemeyer, 1965) looked at trends in correspondence education around the world, and the results formed the six themes for the conference:

1. New methods, and technologies and their uses in correspondence education, the integration of mass media into correspondence education, and the improvement of instruction by correspondence.
2. The linking of correspondence education with formal school instruction.
3. The use of correspondence education in the continuing education of adults.
4. Research and experimentation in correspondence education.
5. Correspondence education in developing countries.
6. Improving the qualifications and acceptance of correspondence education.

The conference primarily consisted of presentations and discussion in panels designed to focus on the themes, although four addresses were given on ideas and trends in various parts of the world (Australia, India, Japan, and Europe).

Conference 8: Paris

The eighth conference was again held in Europe, this time at UNESCO House to commemorate the council’s affiliation with UNESCO. The conference extended from May 10 to May 23, 1969. To assist with the planning of the conference, Renée Erdos, president, sent letters two years before the conference soliciting suggestions for subjects and speakers from the council’s members. Over 40 members responded, and subjects for the conference were chosen in accordance with the number of people interested in them (Erdos, 1969).

In order to place no restriction on member suggestions, a theme was chosen after the suggestions had been made. Erdos (1969) notes that as “the programme took shape, however, it so clearly expressed the interest of members in future developments, both in education and administration, that a theme emerged: ‘Correspondence Education Looks to the Future.’”(p. 16).

Balbir (1969), in his welcoming address, listed subthemes of the conference as “1) educational technology in correspondence education; 2) external studies at the university level; 3) the place of correspondence instruction in technical education and training; 4) the training of manpower by correspondence education in African countries; and 5) correspondence education in UNESCO activities” (p. 4).

Conference 9: Warrenton, Virginia

Charles Wedemeyer served as president for the ninth conference, held in May 1972. This conference featured the following theme: “Between Evolution and Revolution . . . Correspondence Study Lost or Found?” In discussing the conference theme, Bakhshish Singh (1972) noted that the theme is “relevant not only to the development of correspondence study but also to the formulation of future educational policies the world over” (p. 2). Singh also listed theme-related subjects that were discussed at different sessions in the conference and that functioned as the topics for the summary analysis chapters in the proceedings:

1. Correspondence study in the perspective of rapidly expanding alternative learning opportunities.
2. The role of education technology in correspondence education.
3. Educational policy development and innovation at the national level.
4. “Education: Year 2000”—theoretical, technical, legal, or cultural problems.
5. Implication of three research studies on the improvement and spread of correspondence education.
6. Developmental trends by geographical areas—Europe; North, Central and South America; Asia; and Africa.

Conference 10: Brighton, England

The 10th conference, held in 1975, had been scheduled for Japan, but because the members from Japan were not able to garner sufficient support from institutions and the government to host the conference, the location was changed to Brighton. In their introduction to the conference papers, Gunnar W. Granholm, chair of the program committee, and Erling Ljoså, editor for the conference papers and the proceedings, described the variety in distance education (or correspondence or home study) programs worldwide as background for introducing the theme of the conference. The planning committee choose the theme to help identify the components of the “man-materials system with which we are working” in distance education (Granholm & Ljoså, 1975, p. 6). The wording of the theme appears as follows in Granholm and Ljoså’s introduction:

The System of Distance Education an analysis of educational and administrative sub-systems and components, with reference to their

- purposes
- significance
- characteristics
- interrelationship
- cost effectiveness

and the implications of these functions for the evaluation of distance education programmes with respect to

- information
- counselling

- student activities
- two-way communication

and, on the other hand,

- marketing
- management (p. 6)

The conference papers were grouped into four main sections:

1. The system of distance education.
2. Modes of teaching in distance education.
3. Distance education and the open learning trend.
4. Student service, student activity, and two-way communication.

Conference 11: New Delhi

The 11th conference convened in India, the first conference in Asia. Held November 8–15, 1978, it again had an explicitly stated theme: “Correspondence Education: Dynamic and Diversified.” In addition, it focused on four specific areas: administrative practices, teaching methods, student counseling, and applied research. David Young (1978), in writing the preface to volume 1 of the conference papers, quotes from the pre-conference literature for the first conference in 1938 and states that the aims are “still valid for ICCE’s Eleventh World Conference” (p. 7). Although there have been changes in the world, he claims that the “need for correspondence educators to consult with one another, to aid one another’s research, and to prove that they are an increasingly vital part of worldwide education, remains” (p. 7).

Conference proceedings published after 1978 are much more uniform in appearance. They contain mainly papers and addresses and no longer include minutes from meetings, committee reports, or descriptions of social activities or field trips. Consequently, they reveal less about the process of developing conference programs and more about the content of individual presentations.

Conference 12: Vancouver

In 1982, the conference “revisited its birthplace” (Daniel, Stroud, & Thompson, 1982a, p. 4), returning to British Columbia. This conference, as noted above, marked the “rebirth” of ICCE as ICDE, the International Council for Distance Education. A new form of publication emerged from the 1982 conference. The program committee decided to produce a “book” from the conference, entitled *Learning at a Distance: A World Perspective*. In addition, a report and handbook were published. No theme is mentioned in the book produced from the conference. The program committee used a version of the Delphi technique to collect topics of interest from members and to choose contributors to write about them.

The editors noted that the papers reflect a common theme: “distance education becoming a major shaping force in societies all over the world” (Daniel, Stroud, & Thompson, 1982b, p.5). The book is divided into seven sections, which together suggest a set of subthemes:

1. International trends.
2. Learning at a distance and national development.
3. The process of learning at a distance—recent research and development.

4. Student support and regional services.
5. Policymaking and management.
6. Diverse subjects, diverse approaches.
7. The contribution of media and technology to learning at a distance.

Conference 13: Melbourne

The conference in 1985 went to the southern hemisphere for the second time. As one innovation, the conference papers were not published on paper but were prepared on microforms. This allowed delegates to send papers of any length, and all were included in the collection of conference papers without editing by the conference planning committee. As a result, the collection totaled nearly 3,000 pages (48 microfiche cards). The microfiche cards included no information about the conference (e.g., table of contents, program schedule, list of delegates or officers, etc.).

However, a report was published for this conference (ICDE, 1985). In this publication, the conference theme is given as “Flexible Designs for Learning,” and the following sub-themes were listed: the learners, the social context, the disciplines, learning resources, and organisation. Writing for the conference committee, Kevin Smith (1985a) noted that the main theme “reflected . . . many imaginative presentations for which the Program Committee had appealed in an attempt to add variety to more traditional forms of delivery” (p. 1). Because of the number of responses to the call for conference participation, the focus was on parallel rather than plenary sessions. In addition, this conference featured 19 special interest group sessions—libraries in distance education, new institutions, new technologies, instructional design, distance education and developing societies, research, schools, technical education, women’s international network, disabled students, private proprietary colleges, counselling, study centers, continuing education, professional development, teaching history, teaching English as a second language, teaching business studies, and teaching mathematics (Smith, 1985b).

Conference 14: Oslo

The 1988 conference, held from August 9 to 16, took “Developing Distance Education” as its theme. Twelve subthemes were also listed: national development, specific target groups, economics of distance education, course design and creation, media and communications technology, collaboration and credit transfer, student support and counselling, continuing education, research, women in distance education, management and organisation, and distance education—a developing concept (ICDE, 1988).

Conference 15: Caracas

The 15th conference, held in November 4–10, 1990, was the first situated in Latin America. Its theme was “Distance Education: Development and Access.” Subthemes included distance education and development; strategies for developing distance education; distance education and developing countries; literacy—the challenge of the ’90s; research and development; producing materials for distance education; the students of the ’90s—new client, new needs; technology applications; and planning the future. Sewart (1990) identifies the theme of the conference book as “that of scholarship directly addressing and supporting practical needs and aiding the training of professionals” (p. 8).

The Caracas conference was bilingual, an innovation for ICDE. Each morning and afternoon session featured a keynote address followed by parallel sessions. Delegates could choose from

parallel sessions given either in Spanish or English. Two proceedings volumes were published, one with papers in English and one with papers in Spanish.

Conference 16: Bangkok

In 1992, the conference returned to Asia, hosted by the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. At this time, the conferences changed from being held every three or four years to convening every other year. The editors note that the overall theme of the conference, “Distance Education for the Twenty-First Century,” was “purposely chosen to be forward-looking, thereby encouraging presenters to concentrate on issues perceived to be of particular relevance to future developments” (Scriven, Lundin, & Ryan, 1993a, p. xi). The presentations from this conference were originally categorized under nine subthemes, but because not all presentations provided papers suitable for including in the book, the original subthemes were renamed and the papers reclassified to form seven chapters: distance education and development; development of materials; students in distance education; applications of technology; distance education—theory and research; case studies; and so, back to the future.

Conference 17: Birmingham, England

The theme of the 1995 conference was “One World, Many Voices: Quality in Open and Distance Learning.” The subthemes included developing human potential, developing the professional community, primary and secondary education, quality, student support, technology, and women’s issues. Because of the quantity of presentations, the proceedings were published in two volumes.

Conference 18: State College, Pennsylvania

In 1997, The Pennsylvania State University hosted the 18th conference, whose theme was “The New Learning Environment: A Global Perspective.” The conference focused on several daily themes, including the changing technological environment; the new education paradigm; technology, education, and sustainable development; and opportunities for international cooperation. The conference program also noted a rather long list of interest areas: primary through secondary school applications; technology applications and emerging technologies; research and evaluation in distance and open learning; distance education in developing countries; organizational issues (faculty, infrastructure, institutional, and regulatory policies); pedagogical issues; promotion and marketing strategies; partnerships and alliances; workplace training and education; and student/learner support. For the first time, the conference proceedings were published on CD-ROM rather than in print.

Conference 19: Vienna

The 19th conference, held in 1999, was titled “The New Educational Frontier: Teaching and Learning in a Networked World.” It featured university, school, and training strands, and within each strand a set of six tracks helped to focus the discussion and presentation. These tracks included open learning and distance education as a strategic tool for development; the new learning environments; globalization of education—benefits and constraints; policy and strategy development; breaking down barriers through education and training; and markets and marketing. Again, the proceedings were published on CD-ROM.

Conference 20: Düsseldorf

The ICDE scheduled the 20th conference for April 1–5, 2001. The main conference theme, “The Future of Learning—Learning for the Future: Shaping the Transition,” was designed to help conference participants “explore how open learning and distance education, virtual training and e-learning will find their positions in a perpetually changing world in the coming years” (ICDE, 2000, p. 4). Core events include plenary, parallel, and poster sessions.

TRENDS AND PATTERNS

Bunker (1998a) searched for themes and patterns recorded in the ICDE conference proceedings that could provide insight about alternatives facing distance educators today. Not only did shared assumptions, practices, and aims appear in the proceedings, but several trends were discovered, including the importance of access as a key value for distance educators, the commitment of distance educators to quality, the need for research to inform practices, the high value placed on international participation and representation in the membership of the council, and the role of educational technology in distance education and its place in the discourse of the conferences.

First, the discourse of the ICDE conferences reveals an unremitting allegiance to the belief in the value of providing *access* to education for all learners, no matter how dispersed or disadvantaged by economic, personal, or political situations. For example, in opening the conference in 1938, Knute Broady, chair of the first meeting, made a clear statement of the motivations and ideals that had brought the delegates together, claiming these values for all of the delegates:

Now, we are gathered here to-day to enlarge our ideas and to take stock. We are deciding on new steps, perhaps even upon a new direction, and in all of this, ladies and gentlemen, we are motivated by what we consider a very practical ideal which I believe is accepted in all parts of the world . . .

By equality of educational opportunity we mean extending education of equal quality to every one, no matter how humble his birth, no matter where he may live, and no matter what his reasonable aspirations may be. We think that is a very practical ideal—an ideal to which we can all subscribe, and I trust that everything that we do in this conference will be evaluated in terms of it. (Broady, 1938, p. 10)

Over the years, this general commitment to access remains undiminished. Wedemeyer (1965) reaffirmed it in a major keynote address in the 1965 conference in Stockholm, reminding delegates that although all types of education are directed toward the hopes and aspirations of learners, none do so “so openly, so nakedly, as correspondence education. The correspondence student is generally one who has not been able to satisfy hopes and aspirations in the ordinary, regular, easier way” (p. 9).

The proceedings also reveal a recognition of the need for interaction and communication with learners. Since the separation of learners from instructors necessitates the use of media to allow interaction, the discourse data show continual efforts by conference participants to enhance the development and promotion of interaction. Although the necessity of using some form of mediation was clearly acknowledged in the very first conferences, the media never became the principal theme of any of conference. In addition, data show that the need for flexibility and variation in meeting needs of the learners was a common discourse theme.

Second, the commitment to access was followed closely by a commitment to providing education *equal in value* to traditional education. In order to ensure this equality, distance educators constantly sought academic credibility for their educational offerings. Because distance education was an alternative to conventional education, distance educators were required to prove the efficacy of their efforts. The discourse in the proceedings contains continual references to quality, standards, accreditation, status, and credibility in both the teaching-learning and in management domains of distance education. The issue of credibility lead participants in the conferences to discuss means of improving instruction, interaction with learners, applications of communications technologies, and support for learners.

Concern for access and equity is present in many different forms in the data from the early years of the conference. However, because of the change in format of the conference proceedings in 1982, fewer data are available for use in analyzing the motives and values of the conference planners and officers from that year to the present. Do council members still hold to these primary values of access and quality? Further research is needed to determine whether the ICDE has moved away from a commitment to the values of access and quality and, if so, what values have replaced them. Knowing the answer could provide better guidance for all of us as we plan future programs across the nation and throughout the world.

Third, concerns for academic credibility lead ICDE practitioners to persistently call for more *research* into the methods and practices of distance education. References to the need for more research appear in the data from all conferences. At the first conference, the need for research was recognized and a research committee established. This committee became an ongoing part of the council's early organizational structure. In an effort to spur delegates on to more research, the proceedings of the first conference in 1938 included a list of needed research (Table 4.2) (Butchers, 1938). The delegates to the conference were encouraged to work on these research topics before the next conference.

TABLE 4.2
Summary of Topics Suitable for Research (From 1938 Conference)

What becomes of graduates of CI schools? How do they fare?
What classes of students, what specific needs should be served by CI?
Is CI more effective carried on in the home or in or through the nearest school?
How much supervision should be given?
What roles should be played by the supervisors?
What is the cost of CI? How does it compare with other types of education?
What should be the organization of the centre?
How can library facilities be organized for correspondence students?
How can one personalize CI?
Should there be co-ordination of various phases of CI?
What should be the length of a unit?
How far should we go in the use of itinerant teachers and mobile materials versus bringing students to the CI center?
What effect does each of these plans have on community life?
What use can be made of intelligence tests in CI?
What is the role of guidance and counsel?
What value has radio in experimental CI?
What is the place of vocational training and placement for CI students?
How can one teach sciences and technical subjects by correspondence?
How should health education, physical examinations be handled?
How will peculiar problems be met in teaching incapacitated students?
Can anything be done to provide parent education by correspondence?

Note: CI = Correspondence Instruction.

The discourse on research also shows a consistent acknowledgment that the amount of research and the dissemination of the results are inadequate. Statements to this effect are usually accompanied, however, by the concession that improvement has “recently” been made. For example, Buck stated in 1948 that a small amount of “objective research in this field has been done, but not nearly enough” (p. 99), and Wedemeyer made the same point in 1965, asserting that there has “never been sufficient scholarship poured into this field” (p. 16). In reporting as chair of the research committee in the 1969 conference, Childs wrote that there is a “substantial and growing worldwide body of literature relating to correspondence instruction. . . . It must be noted, however, that even though the volume of literature may be increasing this does not indicate any great upsurge in research activity. Evidences of carefully done research are still hard to come by” (p. 40). In the 1982 conference proceedings, the editors stated that research on distance learning had been characterized until recently by a wide gap between reality and rhetoric, but they expressed the hope “that future writing will give increasing importance to rigorous studies with properly defined variables and boundaries” (Daniel, Stroud, & Thompson, 1982c, p. 86). Again in 1992, research concerns merited a chapter in the proceedings. The editors noted that a historical analysis showed that research was a fairly recent phenomenon, but, in contrast to the past, reports at that conference contained research from around the world (Scriven, Lundin, & Ryan, 1993b).

Although research reports appear in most of the conferences, including reports from research committees, these reports never seemed to carry enough weight to convince the majority of conference speakers that sufficient research was being conducted. As complaints about lack of research still occur in meetings of distance educators, perhaps some effort needs to be made to analyze the findings and results from previous studies, such as those contained in the 60 years of ICDE conference proceedings.

Fourth, *international representation* is a distinctive feature of ICDE and emerges as a theme in the analysis. All discourse related to origin, policies and philosophies, conference planning, and conference themes exhibit a commitment to foster broad representation. The sense expressed in the discourse of “mutual esteem” for all distance educators from all countries providing all types of education is consistent and powerful.

Bunker’s (1998a) analysis shows that the early leaders viewed the conference as an international professional gathering and made a sustained effort to choose themes and topics consistent with its international character. In fact, support for wide international representation became even more pronounced in the 1960s and 1970s, when the number of countries represented at the conference jumped from the earlier core of four countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) to a much larger and more widely distributed group of countries. Topics directly related to international issues and concerns are part of nearly all conferences in the 1980s and 1990s.

This pattern is especially important for distance educators today, who face a nearly overwhelming growth in the possibilities for international distance education. Issues of collaboration and cooperation between countries confront distance educators working in many different sectors. The fact that ICDE has always been committed to international distance education suggests that its conference proceedings over the past 60 years could provide valuable guidance to those working today to establish distance education internationally.

Fifth, the amount of discourse devoted to *educational technology* in the ICDE conference proceedings is relatively small given that the emergence of new communications technologies is always cause for excitement and that distance education must rely on some form of media to provide interaction. Discourse about technology was present in every conference in some form, even when technology was not designated a conference subtheme. However, through all the conferences, educational technology remained only one topic in the total discourse about distance education. In most of the conferences, it was the focus of only one of 5 to 12 subsections.

This pattern has changed little over the years, even though more and more papers began appearing in the sections devoted to educational technology. The emphasis remained on distance education as a whole, with technology relegated to the role of mediator for that education. Overall, the ICDE conference has never become an “education technology” or “communications technology” conference but has stayed committed to the larger goal of providing access to education for nontraditional learners education. Learning from ICDE distance educators of the past, distance educators today would do well to keep the focus of their work on the educational elements of teaching and learning at a distance rather than letting the massive and rapid increase of new technologies drive the development, design, and purposes of their programs and courses.

CONCLUSION

Because the communications technologies that have helped to fuel the expansion of distance education in the last few years have been developed relatively recently, distance education is often viewed as a new field of study. Even the term *distance education* has not been popularly and widely used until lately (Moore, 1990). When distance educators believe they are using new media in a new field, important theories, research, and practices from the past are overlooked (Moore, personal conversation, February 2, 1997). As Pittman states in Chapter 2 of this volume, some current “practitioners and advocates seem anxious to leave the past behind,” with the result that the implementation of distance education programs reflects little professional self-knowledge. In addition much that was learned in the past becomes lost as the new replaces rather than joins the old.

Distance education has been a means of educating those who could not or would not make use of traditional forms of education for more than a century. To neglect “where we have been” hinders our understanding of “where we want to go” (Johnson, n.d.). For example, disregarding the decades of experience and knowledge represented in this handbook by the chapters contributed by Holmberg, Peters, and others will cause unnecessary missteps on our way to providing quality distance education.

Looking historically at global distance education will give us an appreciation of the present and a perspective on the future (Hinckley, 1984). In other words, it will help us construct, understand, and evaluate the choices that we make in planning new programs, adapting new technologies, and serving new learners as well as in evaluating and improving service to current learners.

If we, as distance educators today, are to have a rich knowledge base on which to construct, understand, and evaluate future choices, we must consider the important work done by distance educators from the last century. The fact that the literature may easily become fugitive does not excuse us from making an effort to learn from those in the past. Members and leaders of ICDE have, throughout its history, been committed to strong educational values and to the sharing of good practices in distance education. As stated by Thomas Mann (1965), the best response to the question of what to do in situations presenting many new choices is to “‘assist the new without sacrificing the old.’ The best servitors of the new . . . may be those who know and love the old and carry it over into the new.”

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