

# The Poor Relation of the Education System? Aspects of Distance Education and Open and Distance Learning

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The purpose of this article is to analyse and to explicate the subtle differences between some of the basic concepts related to what used to be called rather unanimously 'distance education'. What these different concepts have in common is a shared comprehension of a growing number of learning experiences meaningful to human beings taking place outside of the institutionalised educational systems. In distance education, and especially in the different variations now available, there has been a progressive increase in learner control of and widened access to resources, as well as in the emphasis placed on thinking skills and on metacognitive skills related to learning strategies.

More and more teachers and teacher educators are becoming cognisant of the fact that these variations of distance education are constantly gaining ground as they are becoming located more centrally in the mainstream educational systems.

*Keywords:* Distance education; distance teaching and learning; open learning; open and distance learning; flexible learning; distributed learning; flexi-mode learning; mixed-mode learning.

## BACKGROUND

Several researchers have compared distance education to a poor and poorly thought of relative of a much more appreciated mainstream educational system. Lowe (1997), for instance, writes that “[d]istance education has always been the poor relation of the education system. ... At every level it has been given inadequate resources. It has often been staffed by conscripts rather than volunteers and as a consequence it has often not been targeted effectively at the particular needs of the distant learner” (Lowe 1997, 256).

In this article, we argue that it is high time to recognise the values of distance education and, at the same time, to familiarise ourselves with different directions in which distance education has advanced during the past few years. The main argument is that in addition to and in harmony with the developments of distance education, we have witnessed the emergence of a number of other concepts whose significance, role, and future status will be important to the development of educational systems. Some of these recent developments and terms will be briefly discussed in this article. Our examples will employ such concepts as distance teaching, open learning, open and distance learning, flexible learning, distributed learning, and flexi-mode and mixed-mode learning. All of these concepts can be said to represent non-traditional learning approaches.

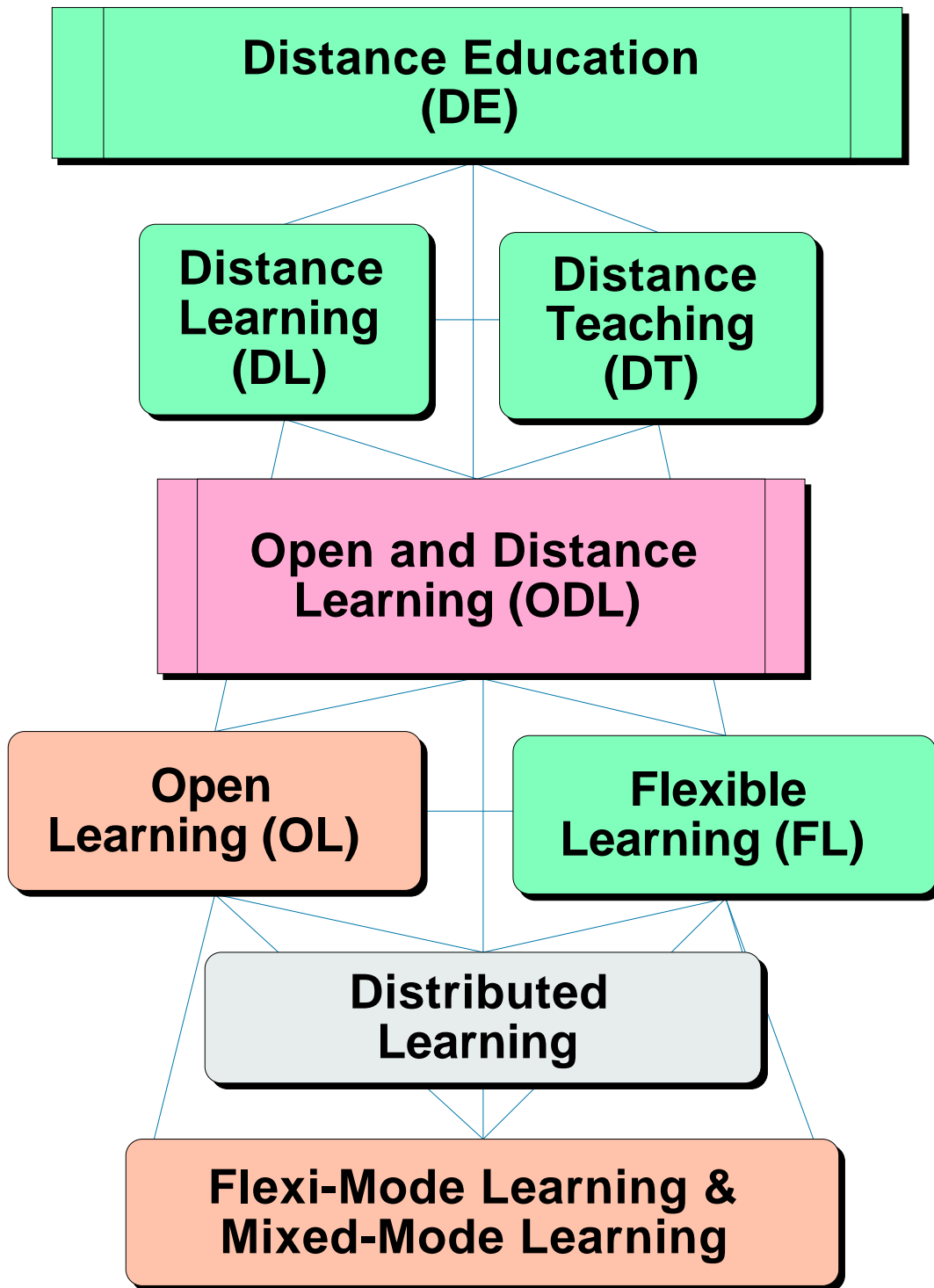


FIGURE 1. SOME CHANGES FROM DISTANCE EDUCATION TO OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (BASED ON TELLA 1997, 15, BUT SLIGHTLY MODIFIED).

## CHANGES IN FOCUS AND EMPHASIS

As explained in Tella (1997, 14–17), distance education (DE) used to be the main concept till the early-to-mid 1990s. Over the years, the concepts ‘distance teaching’ (DT) and ‘distance learning’<sup>1</sup> (DL) have increasingly replaced distance education and even questioned some of its fundamental principles. Some of the key concepts are indicated in Figure 1 (cf. also e.g., Thombs, Sails & Alcott 1989; Chacon 1992; Henri 1992; Rowntree 1992; Farr & Shaeffer 1993; LeBaron & Bragg 1993; Paquette, Bergeron & Bourdeau 1993; Wagner 1993; Husu et al. 1994; Comeaux 1995; Jonassen et al. 1995; McHenry & Bozik 1995; Bates 1995; Bates 1996; Meisalo 1996; Moore & Kearsley 1996; Salminen 1996; Salminen 1997; Tella 1997).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF DIFFERENT CONCEPTS

In the following, the main concepts will be described by citing several well-known theorists of the field. One way to analyse these concepts is to first compare distance education with “normal” education and, second, to compare distance education with a number of other concepts that are at present in frequent use and that focus on one or several aspects of the teaching/learning process. After this initial analysis, a summary will be constructed based on some commonalities between the concepts.

### Distance Education

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<sup>1</sup> Both ‘distance education’ and ‘distance teaching’ can be translated into Finnish as *etäopetus*, while ‘distance learning’ should, perhaps, best be rendered as *etäoppiminen*, instead of *etäoppiminen*.

Distance education has often been contrasted with “normal” education, but, as Lowe (1997, 257) puts it, “[d]escribing something as ‘normal’ does not mean that it is ideal, or even adequate; it just means it is the practice of the greatest number”. And as far as school is concerned, these practices are generally regarded as most durable and hard to change. Tiffin & Rajasingham (1995) use a vivid metaphor to describe the slowness of change:

“Two by four by six education, where learning is contained between the two covers of a book, the four walls of a classroom, for six hours a day may be in trouble but it has proved remarkably durable.” (Tiffin & Rajasingham 1995, 87)

Perhaps there has been some cause for pessimism, but we argue that changes have taken place in school attendance patterns as well as in teaching and learning practices. From the point of view of this article, it can certainly be said that over the last twenty years, distance education has gradually become more and more common in several technologically advanced countries, including Finland, Norway, Canada, the USA and Australia. Therefore one could argue that it has also become less “abnormal”, less non-traditional, in its character or even that it already has certain features that may become a mainstream trend in the near future.

What might prove a slight concern to distance educators is that according to some literature (e.g., McHenry & Bozik 1995, 363), “especially in the United States, technological advances and new philosophies of distance education have resulted in a new paradigm of distance education, its goal to offer to the distance student an experience as much like that of traditional face-to-face instruction as possible”. It might be much better if the assets of distance education were not neutralised and done away with but rather encouraged and elaborated upon in order to significantly enrich the educational system.

In Lowe's analysis (1997), distance education has gone through two trends that have not only changed its role *vis-à-vis* mainstream education but also contributed to its gaining ground to a considerable extent. First, there has been a "discernible improvement in the sophistication of the process, with more use made of advanced technology and more programs being expressly designed for the learner" (Lowe 1997, 257). Second, Lowe (1997, 257) continues, "the term 'distance' has become increasingly inappropriate; each year, more of the learners using this mode of education are not geographically remote from our urban areas."

Distance education has often been divided into *three generations* (e.g., Bates 1995; Moore & Kearsley 1996). *The first generation* is characterised by a single technology, which often did not enable direct student interaction with the teacher. The best-known example is correspondence education.

*The second generation* of distance education consists of a consciously integrated multiple-media approach. This generation also contains specifically designed materials for study at a distance with a two-way communication facility between the learner and a tutor. Bates (1995, 23) cites autonomous distance teaching universities as examples of second generation distance education. Moore & Kearsley (1996, 20) cite open universities, broadcast and teleconferencing.

*At the third stage, distance education takes advantage of two-way or even multidimensional communications media, enabling direct and often synchronous interaction between the teacher and the learner. Bates (1995, 23), for instance, emphasises the fact that third generation distance education guarantees a much more equal distribution of communication between students (or groups of students) and teachers. Moore & Kearsley (1996, 20) refer to networks and multimedia.*

Lowe's slightly ironical analysis (1997) of the progress of distance education is worth citing, as it questions the unfounded optimism of sheer technology being used if it does not relate properly to pedagogically relevant learning contexts:

"When such institutions as the UK Open University succeeded in harnessing more modern technology to the needs of distant learners, it raised the entire profile of distance education. The media saw the Open University as an institution of the late twentieth century because it used television and radio as part of its learning packages. I argued that its advance was more modest, though still significant. The Open University was *the first sixteenth century university* [italics added], as it was the first one to recognise the invention of the printing press; most student learning occurred by interaction with the printed course materials. This was no small advance in time, as *most other universities are still back a couple of thousand years in the mode of assuming that wisdom is transmitted orally* [italics added]. Many universities simply arrange for students to be ushered at regular intervals into the presence of an academic who can deliver a long [and preferably audible] monologue in the general direction of the multitude. A visitor from another galaxy who happened on a typical lecture in the sciences or most fields of technology would conclude that the purpose was to give the students a *verbatim* transcript of an inaccessible manuscript! The Open University played an important role in directing attention toward the needs of the learner, thereby raising questions about the educational effectiveness of most traditional programmes of higher education." (Lowe 1997, 257)

This kind of criticism towards traditionally delivered academic lectures and seminars gives a good springboard to distance education delivery systems. Maxwell (1995, 43), for instance, defines distance education as “a mode of delivering a course of study in which the majority of communication between teachers and students occurs noncontiguously, and the two-way communication between teacher and student necessary for the educational process is technologically mediated.”

On the whole, Maxwell (1995) regards distance education as a non-traditional learning approach that might provide an option for reaching non-traditional students. He further argues that distance education refers to a mode of delivery with certain characteristics that distinguish it from the campus-based mode of learning. (Maxwell 1995, 46)

Even if distance education is often thought of as a delivery system by means of (tele)communications, some definitions emphasise the flexibility of study enabled through its use. Bates (1995, 27), for instance, contends that distance education is one way “by which learners can study in a flexible manner, by studying at a distance from the originator of the teaching material; students can study at their own time, at the place of their choice (home, work or learning centre), and without face-to-face contact with the teacher.” Moore & Kearsley (1996) share this view when they define distance education as

“planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements”. (Moore & Kearsley 1996, 2)

Moore & Kearsley (1996, 3) further underline the learners’ point of view when they write that “[d]istance education aims to provide instruction in places and times that are

convenient for learners rather than teachers or teaching institutions”.

As mentioned above, in addition to distance education, several other terms have started to gain ground. In the following, some of these will be briefly characterised.

## **Distance Teaching and Distance Learning**

The main difference between distance education and distance teaching is in the focus of interest as well as in the scope of reference. Distance education can be seen *a priori* from the perspective of educational systems. It is often thought of as an educational delivery system made possible by different forms of technology. Distance teaching, on the other hand, implies a more direct approach to the teaching process, either at a distance (usually the student’s interpretation) or through distance (the teacher’s interpretation).

Distance learning, again, underscores the learner’s point of view, whether seen by himself or herself or by an institute that organises and delivers the materials. However, implicitly, distance learning puts an emphasis on the learner’s side, making him or her more responsible for the latter part of the teaching/learning process. In Kay’s (1997, 229) view, in distance learning, the learner “receives learning materials in printed form or via another media, such as the Internet and returns assignment work for correction by a teacher.”

Distance education may, implicitly at least, accommodate both distance teaching and distance learning, as everything in a broader sense is education. Teaching can be defined to include various kinds of studying and learning processes. Recently, a strong shift of emphasis has taken place from teaching-based approaches towards

learner-centred or learner-sponsored approaches, which partly explains why 'learning' is so often employed instead of 'teaching'<sup>2</sup>. All in all, the importance of education might still be recognised as an overall term.

## Open Learning

Another popular term is open learning (OL). When contrasted with distance education (DE) or distance teaching, it seems obvious that the differences between OL and DE are much bigger than differences between DE and distance teaching or distance learning. When defining OL, many researchers (e.g., Bates 1995; Maxwell 1995; Kay 1997) stress three things: openness, student-centredness, and the fact that open learning is rather a philosophy or an attitude towards organising the teaching/learning process in a flexible manner. Other issues often encompassed with open learning include access, equity, independent learning, learning styles, instructional design and student learner support (e.g., Kay 1997, 229). In his open learning model, Kember (1995) argues that open learning is a more general conceptualisation than distance education but that it can therefore also include distance learning as one form.

Maxwell (1995) defines open learning as "a student-centered approach to education that removes all barriers to access while providing a high degree of learner autonomy." He further argues that

"... [d]istance education and open learning should be recognized as two distinct concepts. Distance education

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<sup>2</sup> Distance learning = *etäopiskelu* in Finnish. It may be worth pointing out that the term 'learning' in English also refers to studying, while in Finnish it mostly refers to the product of studying. Cf. 'learn = gain knowledge of or skill in, *by study* [emphasis added], practice or being taught' (Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English).

refers to a mode of delivery with certain characteristics that distinguish it from the campus-based mode of learning. Open learning refers to a philosophy of education providing students with as much choice and control as possible over content and learning strategies. A distance-education institution could be open or closed. An open learning course could be offered on campus or at a distance.” (Maxwell 1995, 46)

Bates (1995) sees open learning primarily as a goal, or as an educational policy, “the provision of learning in a flexible manner, built around the geographical, social and time constraints of individual learners, rather than those of an educational institution” (Bates 1995, 27). He further argues that “[o]pen learning may include distance education, or it may depend on other flexible forms of learning, including a mix of independent study and face-to-face-teaching. It may also include other concepts, such as open access without prior requisite qualifications. Both open-ness [hyphenated in the original] and distance education are never found in their purest forms. No teaching system is completely open, and few students ever study in complete isolation. Thus there are degrees of open-ness and ‘distance’—indeed, distance is more likely to be psychological or social, rather than geographical, in most cases”. (Bates 1995, 27)

Open learning can also be circumscribed by referring to Wylie (1996), whose questions and answers have been slightly elaborated for the purpose of this publication.

1) Whom does open learning serve?

It serves learners who look for flexible entry provision of learning materials.

2) Why is open learning needed?

Because it is responsive to learner needs.

3) What does open learning enable?

It enables the learner to negotiate content on a more individualised basis.

4) How does open learning serve the learners?

It is basically resource-based and offers alternative strategies.

5) Where is open learning possible?

In quite a few places, such as in homes, in workplaces, and in study centres.

6) When is open learning perhaps more effective than distance education?

Timewise, open learning enables a flexible start, it gives the learners a choice of individual pace, and gives them an opportunity to decide the completion times.

7) How effective is open learning?

At least it enables the learner to participate in assessment in various ways.

8) Who helps a learner who uses open learning?

A large variety of advice and support should be available to the learner, especially through telecommunications.

(Wylie, 1996, 288)

The last point is directly related to the teacher–learner interaction, which is obviously a crucial issue. It is, however, questionable, as Gell & Cochrane (1996, 252) argue, whether “[on]line self-learning packages fundamentally question the traditional role of the educator by giving students greater individual control. Effective learning can be realized by providing a student with a computer, loading the educational software, and walking away.” Another approach is to see the teacher’s role change in a new direction. This has led Tiffin & Rajasingham (1995, 154) to introduce, though half-jokingly perhaps, the idea of a “just-in-time teacher” whom the learner could consult when he or she needs one. They develop their idea as follows:

“One of the great strengths of the classroom system is that a learner has only to put their hand up to get a teacher’s attention. ... What is [now] needed is a network of teachers that makes it possible for learners to find the teachers they need when they need them. ... There need be no restrictions on the distance to be travelled to meet a teacher. A learner can have a teacher in telepresence from anywhere in the world. Just as learners can be anywhere, so too can teleteachers.” (Tiffin & Rajasingham 1995, 154)

## Open and Distance Learning

Open learning (OL), together with flexible learning (FL) and distance learning (DL) seem to have formed the concept of open and distance learning (ODL). The role of the European Union, and especially the influence of its ODL programme, has been rather central in the genesis of this term. According to the Socrates & Youth Technical Assistance Office (1995), open and distance learning (ODL) involves the use of new methods—technical and/or non-technical—to improve the flexibility and feasibility of learning in terms of space, time, choice of content, or teaching resources and/or to improve access to educational systems from a distance.

The tools and software used in ODL are often quite the same as in distance education, but there is a shift in emphasis from a more teacher-centred environment towards an open learner-centred and virtual learning environment with a focus on distributed expertise and cognitive tools and groupware.

Bates (1995, 27) contends that “[a]lthough open learning and distance education can mean different things, the one thing they both have in common is an attempt to provide alternative means of high quality education and training for those who either cannot go to conventional, campus-based institutions, or do not want so.” He also argues that by removing the barriers of access to higher education, open and distance learning give a second chance to people who, for academic, personal or social reasons, are unable to enter or complete higher education on leaving the school system (Bates 1995, 27).

For the time being, we regard ODL as the main concept, or as a provisional stage to which distance education has advanced. First, it combines the key concept of openness with the traditional idea of overcoming ‘distances’. Second, it appears wide enough to embrace most of the

present interests and emphases in the field, and third, it is relatively widely used in Europe at the moment. However, it might be so that ODL will change into something else in a few years' time, depending on future developments. Yet it seems probable that the concept of openness will remain as one of the central constructs in educational parlance, and even more if the emerging concept of constructivism continues to gain ground.

## Flexible Learning

In most literature, flexible learning is not often used independently; rather, it is frequently associated with open learning. Szewcow (1997) is aptly ironical when citing a non-educational colleague who seems to be at a loss when facing all the different terms and concepts of distance education:

“Flexible learning? For a non-educationalist coming to terms with this concept and its implications is daunting. At one extreme, which I prefer most, is the (private) comment from a nameless expert in education: ‘If you define it, it is no longer flexible’.” (Szewcow 1997, 441)

Flexible learning is also related to the term ‘flexible delivery’, i.e., to an approach to vocational education and training that focuses on how clients (often from industry) want to learn. In this interpretation, flexible learning or delivery emphasises the demand side of training, rather than the supply side. Kay (1997) argues that “[o]pen learning is sometimes differentiated from flexible delivery by describing it as a philosophy and flexible delivery as a strategy to implement the philosophy.” (Kay 1997, 229)

Most researchers contrast flexibility with openness. Atkinson (1996), for instance, argues that ‘open learning’ carries connotations of learning not being closed or blocked off, and so able to be more readily accessed with the opportunity to participate and succeed, while ‘flexible

learning' carries connotations of learning being more adaptable and versatile, thus enhancing opportunities to participate and to be successful. In her opinion, openness can be seen as relating more to an outcome and flexibility to the means of achieving this outcome. The two terms appear to be two sides of the same coin. Flexibility contains dimensions of access (the opportunity to participate), timing and duration, location of study, curriculum factors, and learning support. (Atkinson 1996, 45–46)

Nunan (1996) underlines the importance of user-centredness: “Philosophically, flexible learning represents a user-centred approach to learning. Practically, flexible learning has the capacity to cater for a wider variety of learning styles and patterns that conventional learning styles” (Nunan 1996, 1).

## Distributed Learning

One more term used in the literature is ‘distributed learning’. Bates (1996) characterises it as

“... a learner-centred approach to education, which integrates a number of technologies to enable opportunities for activities and interaction in both asynchronous and real-time modes. The model is based on blending a choice of appropriate technologies with aspects of campus-based delivery, open learning systems and distance education. The approach gives instructors the flexibility to customize learning environments to meet the needs of diverse student populations, while providing both high quality and cost-effective learning.” (Bates 1996, 9)

In Bates’ view, the terms ‘distributed learning’ and ‘distance education’ do not mean the same, though many people use them interchangeably. As an example, Bates describes university-level courses for fully registered, on-campus students to whom a substantial part of the material to be learnt is available on the Web or on CD-ROM. This material is accessible to the students at any time, from the campus or from home. However, Bates remarks that these students have to be ‘resident’, i.e., available for lectures. In this case, this is distributed learning but not distance learning nor open learning since students have to meet all the stringent entrance requirements to be registered as university students. (Bates 1996, 9–10)

## Flexi-Mode and Mixed-Mode Learning

This section is intended to highlight two other terms being used quite frequently. These terms correspond to the Finnish *monimuoto-opetus*, launched in Finland in the late-1980s and early 1990s, combining face-to-face teaching and distance education periods. In Finnish educational parlance, *monimuoto-opetus* was often translated into English as 'multi-form' or 'multi-mode' teaching. One of the earliest translations, 'multimedia education', is not referred to here, as it now implies a different concept.

Both flexi-mode learning and mixed-mode learning are being used to refer to various forms of distance and face-to-face learning. Kay (1997, 229), for instance, defines flexi-mode as "a combination of distance and face-to-face learning [which] can utilise both print or electronic learning materials."

Bates (1995) also speaks of mixed-mode learning and bases his definition on some British Columbia Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour documents. He also makes an important remark on the ratio between full-time and part-time students:

"While schools, colleges and universities will still have reason to provide campus-based learning to groups of learners over set terms or semesters, for social and for some instructional reasons, a great deal of learning will take place outside of this context. Full-time students are *already* a minority in Canadian universities and colleges." (Bates 1995, 242)

Bates's last comment on the situation in Canadian universities is of interest, as it clearly highlights one of the tendencies we are about to witness, i.e., the poor relatives of the mainstream educational system, whether we call them distance education, open and distance learning or flexi-mode learning, will gradually come to the centre stage, and more and more high-profile teachers as well as

students will come to realise their intrinsic value and start using their potential, physically and virtually.

## THE LIVE PROJECT REVISITED

This article belongs to a series of other articles, all of which are connected to the LIVE Project of the Media Education Centre of the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Helsinki. The project is described in greater detail elsewhere in this publication; however, this is the place to think of how to describe the project in terms of what has been said above.

The project has been created and established on two slightly differing cornerstones. First, it makes full use of an ISDN-based videoconference network between four schools and the Media Education Centre. This basis is partly grounded on an earlier project carried out at the Department of Teacher Education, together with the Second Normal School (the Kilpisjärvi project, 1994–1997; cf. e.g., Husu et al. 1994; Meisalo 1996; Salminen 1997).

Second, it takes advantage of two concepts that are interlinked at present. One is the concept of the virtual school, which was launched in the late 1980s and which became a topical issue by the early-to-mid 1990s (e.g., Tella 1995a; Tiffin & Rajasingham 1995). The second concept is mobility, which is associated with nomadism (Attali 1990), removal of the constraints of distance, time, and location (Giddens 1990; Negroponte 1995; Gell & Cochrane 1996). Mobility in the LIVE project is grounded on the context of mobile telecommunications.

It is mainly thanks to this latter concept, mobility, that the project gains a lot of openness, flexibility, and immediacy. Distance is still there, but not as a restricting element; rather, it gives more scope to the topography of the project. It is also a hidden asset, making it possible to link other partners to the project if need be.

In the LIVE project, the teacher–learner interaction is still essential. The teachers and the researchers work together, and together with the learners, who enjoy a great amount of freedom to have their say about the contents, the procedures and the general ways in which the project is being conducted. Collaboration via modern telecommunications is central.

If the concepts presented earlier in this article were to be adapted to the LIVE project, we would be inclined to say that it is mostly an open and distance learning (ODL) project with some elements borrowed from the distance education (DE) tradition. These elements are easier to understand when we are reminded of the fact that the project is carried out at the primary and lower secondary levels of the Finnish comprehensive school, meaning that the majority of the learners involved are between seven and fifteen years of age.

Nummi, Rönkä & Sariola (1998) speak in their own article of open and flexible learning environments, which is not a term used in this article, but which describes the nature of the LIVE project to the point. The project is still at its initial stage, so it remains to be seen in which direction it will move and develop.

## SUMMARY

Rudyard Kipling once wrote, "I keep six honest serving-men. They taught me all I knew. Their names are What and Why and When. And How and Where and Who." Wylie (1996) already took the opportunity to profit from these servants but we feel the same questions will have to be asked again and again in order to understand the bewildering terminology in this field.

Fundamentally, the chaos concerns the terms being used, not the concepts or the constructs themselves. The latter can clearly be circumscribed by a progressive increase in learner control and in widened access to resources, in emphasis on thinking skills as well as on metacognitive skills related to learning strategies. 'Distance' is disappearing, both physically and psychologically. The latest human/machine interfaces make the use of new technology more user-friendly. Bates (1995, 242) even questions the role of distance education in his polemic title "Hello, technology; goodbye, distance education?". Perraton (1993, 3) argues that the term 'distance education' is a misnomer, as the most effective programmes include an element of face-to-face teaching as well as using correspondence and mass media, or, if we update Perraton's argument, using telecommunications and small group or target group telematic communication.

Conceptually, the terminology presented in this article can be analysed from the point of view of the learner, the teacher, or the institute. Any of the terms can be regarded from these three perspectives, leading to slightly diverging interpretations. Take distance education or distance teaching as an example. Institutionally, students are somewhere else, not in the institute, or at least not all the time. Teachers may or may not be institutionally-based, most often they probably are. Yet it could be argued that in distance education also teachers can be

physically independent from the institute they represent. This can be done quite easily through telecommunications, for instance.

From the teacher's point of view, education or teaching is being distributed or delivered to a distant point where the students are. From the student's point of view, the teacher is at a distance, while there's no point in arguing that his or her own studying process is further off than in any other learning situation. And if the student is called a learner, then the learning process naturally takes place very close to the learner himself or herself, i.e., in his or her own head. At any time, the learner is face-to-face to his or her own learning strategies and processes. All this makes the task of learning very intensive and each learner must also assume a great deal of responsibility for the learning process. From the student's point of view, access to the information sources, access to help and support as well as access to the telecommunications resources become indispensable.

All in all, it seems that the different approaches to distance education can be seen from a number of perspectives. Some approaches have been called methods (like distance education), others philosophies or even ideologies (like open learning). Some of them rely more heavily on an intensified use of modern information and communication technologies. Some are named after the institute's point of view, while others underscore the learner's idea of distance. What these different terms and definitions have in common is a shared comprehension of the fact that an increasingly growing number of learning experiences meaningful to human beings are taking place outside of the institutionalised educational systems. In addition, life-long learning (or lifetime learning) has become a necessity, leading, perhaps, to meltdown in education, as Gell & Cochrane (1996, 252) have put it, encompassing all ages and bringing remote capabilities into the home.

This realisation has already resulted in many countries in the genesis of so-called dual-mode institutes, i.e., institutions that organise both face-to-face and distance education, whose levels of formality equally represent various layers of reality as sensed by those taking part in these educational implementations. Perhaps all this can be epitomised in Thomas' (1991, 16–17) remark that learning is something man has to do himself, while education is done by somebody else. This golden rule still holds whether we speak of distance education, open learning or flexible learning.