

Ethics in Distance Education: Are we prepared to face the challenge?

**Proposed Workshop for the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning:
Transforming Education for Development.**

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Abstract.

Distance education is widely, and correctly, viewed as an educational methodology that can expand capacity in developing countries efficiently and effectively. “First is its economy: school buildings are not required and teachers and administrators can be responsible for many times more students than they can accommodate in a school. Its second main advantage is its flexibility: people who have got jobs can study in their own time, in their own homes, without being removed from their work for long periods. Its third advantage is its seven-league boots: it can operate over long distances and cater for widely scattered student bodies. (Dodds et al. 1972: *One year’s work: The International Extension College 1971-1972*, Cambridge: International Extension College.)

The history of distance education in the post 2nd World War era is an inspiring, honorable, and successful one. Visionary developments were undertaken which expanded educational opportunities and access – possibly this success went beyond even the vision of the great altruistic pioneers of distance education.

In the twenty first century the revolutionary methods of distance education have now become common-place. They are institutionalized within education and training organizations – both private and public. Education and training using the methods of distance education can be a profitable business delivered by global corporations or educational foundations with no requirement to address national or local needs. Education is a commodity to be traded in a world market. Distance education can be exceedingly costly with the ICT developments of recent years – e.g. costs of “set up”, management and servicing of ICT infrastructure. Thus the cost structure of distance education has changed with all the ensuing critical management issues this leads to.

This workshop will explore the changing environment within which distance education is practiced and will argue that this is a more complex and diverse environment than the one experienced in the early post 2nd World War period. We will argue that for those distance educators committed to social development this context is critical, and that we need to revisit the early goals and aspirations of distance educators and the underpinning ethics of distance education in order to inform and guide our practice.