
UNIT 2 SCHOOL EDUCATION

Editor's Note

Open schooling is a later entrant to the field of distance education, first being higher and other types of education. Today, many open schools in India, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Bangladesh, Africa, Latin America offer open schooling and open basic education. The present case is from Australia, and the book from which it is taken may be read for a full view of open schooling in the world.

An article on Open Learning Curriculum Development and the Open Access Support Centre in Queensland, Australia written by G. Postle and A. Higgins has been selected for this unit. The basic idea behind the selection of this article is that it discusses the development of learning material and teaching techniques for learning in non-traditional ways. It also discusses the school curriculum in the context of distance/open learning. The authors have expressed their views and advocated that school education be provided to isolated schools and students through distance learning. They have suggested a distance education model of curriculum according to the changing needs of society. This is based on their case study of seven schools in Queensland, in which the teacher student ratio is 1:15. The Brisbane School of Distance Education is the only large school which offers senior secondary school education. To provide education, different methods have been used for better results and the improved performance of school children.

For the designing and development of the curriculum, three major institutional arrangements were made and they were allocated different responsibilities. Regional Offices were responsible for managing the staff and resources for distance education schools, for the development of curriculum material for primary and secondary levels and for distributing the same to the schools. The Open Access Support Centre was responsible for the designing and development of primary and secondary curriculum material and for distributing the same to distance education schools. The Open Access Support Centre located at Brisbane provided experts for curriculum development. But for curriculum designing and development, it was necessary to obtain the expertise of teachers and to get them to work as course writers. For the use of this curriculum, school education expected a different approach to the performance of the distance education teacher, from that adopted by the traditional teacher. The centrally developed curriculum material was used by the teacher of distance education for structuring the programmes for the students. To modify and adopt this curriculum, course writers needed considerable knowledge about the designing of curricula and the field of distance education.

To change education at all levels, the Queensland government formed the Open Access Support Centre for the purpose of curriculum designing and development and the distribution of distance education material and curriculum resources, in order to provide educational opportunities to all learners who were unable to obtain or complete education. However, open access is only one aspect of open learning. Therefore the Government of Queensland also adopted a much broader social justice strategy to provide access, participation and equity which helped to move towards the concept of open learning. Further, the authors have suggested some factors for stimulating change. In this context, a concept of regionalisation was introduced by the Queensland Department of Education to take decisions on the devolution of curriculum and the concept of the self-managing school was promoted with support from the Government to bring about change. For this purpose the roles and responsibilities of course designers needed to be clearly defined to bring about a transition from the correspondence model to the distance education model. The fact is that the correspondence model was more centralised

in comparison, since a centrally located agency designed the material and the distance education teacher used this material to teach the students.

In the correspondence mode, text book material was the basic element for teaching in school which the writers selected. To meet this kind of problem, central level expertise was needed to develop new course material/study material for each school to use their own developed material and minimise the cost of material.

The authors have also emphasised the influence of mainstream school structure and practices on curriculum material. In this context, the first issue was concern with the centrally designed material which was organised on the conventional school structure.

The second related issue was how the same curriculum would be applicable to both the conventional and distance education schools, particularly for subject areas such as physical education, health science or even for teaching approaches. For this purpose, course designers/developers were required to identify the basic methods of teaching and techniques for different subject areas.

The third issue was related to the use of class-room experience in the designing and writing learning materials and the questions of who is to write the course materials. For writing the learning material on class-room practices, good teachers who were experienced in education theories and practices were selected. The development of class-room material is bound to affect the role of tutors of correspondence education who are already teaching a number of children. The question arises as to who would provide staff and resources for the professional development of teachers. It was necessary for this to involve the Open Access Support Centre, which was to provide resources for distance education schools. Not only this, it was required to identify proper approaches which would adopt, and help to modify, the newly developed curriculum for the use of school children. The Support Centre being a Regional Office, the responsibility of providing staff and resources should be taken care of by the school of distance education.

Lastly, the authors relate the emergence of the Open Access Support Centre to the transition from the correspondence mode to that of open learning. In this context they refer to the previous history of curriculum development at school level. For this purpose they have used Hughes, model of curriculum development (1966) to explain the process of curriculum development and transaction of school level activities as well as their major components. At the central level, the curriculum development committee required some documents, the data provided in which was needed for identifying the above mentioned components such as learning outcomes, scope and sequence of the programme, teaching strategies, learning experiences and evaluation requirements. It also needed the knowledge of community expectations and of the needs and interests of students, so as to use this curriculum at the school level. In the historical context, the reigning paradigm has been the use of three major elements to provide education to the remote areas of Queensland. These key elements of the paradigm were not fit to deliver education. In this context it was essential to find out about the teaching-learning environment and the role of the teacher in providing guidance from time to time, so as to enhance the student's learning.

On an experimental basis a survey was conducted to provide free, secular and compulsory education for school children. The problem of delivering such education could be solved by appointing more teachers to visit the families of remote areas. Education administration should be strong. There was also a need to appoint experienced persons in the field of education to look after the activities of teachers and schools.

The Queensland government also tried to open numerous small schools at suitable places in remote areas, and to provide these schools that with sufficient infrastructure to attract students to them.

The government in Victoria (another Australian state) adopted a different system that these schools of the itinerant teacher. The same scheme was followed by the government of Queensland. In theory, the role of the itinerant teacher is related to the use of existing text books which will further help in clarifying the need for learner support and discussing the problems of reading and study skills with the aim of improving the caliber of students and their potential for better achievement. In practice, these teachers would visit each family. For this purpose they needed transportation facilities and also a system for contacting students for providing information about their studies, syllabus and the progress of lessons.

In the correspondence paradigm, the authors have discussed the idea of the correspondence school saying that it was derived from New South Wales, also an Australian state. In this context, emphasis has been given to the contact system, based on the resources available in the state. Because effective human resources planning and policy for school development is needed and the quality of manpower which provides opportunity to develop the system, and to facilitate the coordination of all activities of school programmes. The authors have justified and establishment of the school. In this context, valuable and favourable comments were made by the minister for public instruction at the time, to describe the importance of the correspondence system to be used to promote educational facilities to the children of remote areas in different subjects. The impact of these instructive comments was to increase the student enrolment in these schools.

The authors have also highlighted the key elements included in the correspondence paradigm, and have stated that there is a need to change the curriculum framework since the system is unable to cope with the correspondence paradigm in providing education to the children of remote areas.

Now read the article carefully and attempt of reply to the questions given at the end.

OPEN LEARNING, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, AND THE OPEN ACCESS SUPPORT CENTRE IN QUEENSLAND

— *G. Postle and A. Higgins*

INTRODUCTION

The development of learning materials and teaching techniques for the students learning in non-traditional ways is affected by concepts of what schooling and curriculum development mean.

This case study uses the example of providing education for isolated students to show that as the ideas of what constitute schooling have changed for a teacher – school-fixed curriculum model towards a separation of these elements, to be defined as open learning, so the notions of what curriculum is provided and who provides it have changed.

The events described in the case study are set in Queensland, an Australian state that serves arguably the greatest number of school-age distance learners in Australia.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Methods used to deliver education to isolated areas of Queensland have included the following

- providing small, one or two teacher schools that are conveniently located for a few students;
- using itinerants, a scheme where young, inexperienced teachers visit homes in isolated areas at irregular intervals to provide some instruction in basic education;
- developing a system of correspondence education whereby papers containing instruction in the basics were mailed to homes; and
- the development of schools of distance education, strategically located across the state, to enhance the interaction between teacher, student, and parent.

Distance education schools currently provide education for students who have difficulty accessing conventional education.

Organizational structure of the Distance Education Model.

Seven schools of distance education operate in Queensland, each with a specific catchment area. Each school has a principal, deputy principal, and a number of teaching and administrative support staff. Teaching support is provided on 1:15 teacher-student ratio.

Direct contact with student is mainly through high-frequency radio, supplemented with a range of activities that include home visits, teleconferencing, activity days at the school, and computer links. Distance education schools offer both primary and secondary programmes. The Brisbane School of Distance Education is the largest distance education school in the state and the only one that offers senior secondary education (years 11 and 12).

The schools of distance education are administered through regional offices, which are responsible for staffing and resourcing the schools. Centrally designed and developed curriculum programmes provide the main link with the central office, the Open Access Support Centre, which is a state-wide support centre that

is responsible for designing and developing primary and secondary curriculum materials for distribution to each of the schools of distance education. The Centre is located in Brisbane, and is staffed with people who have expertise in education and instructional design, audiovisual production, computer software, and print and non-print production.

Central Model of Curriculum Development for Distance Education

The curriculum development model used by the Open Access Support Centre is similar to the “research-development-dissemination” model.

The curriculum materials are written by teachers seconded for the duration of the project. These teachers are selected because of their potential to contribute to the development of quality learning materials. Very few have had experience in teaching at a distance.

Considerable input is sought by the curriculum developers from parents, teachers, those responsible for the development of state syllabus guidelines, and educators who have worked in the area of distance education.

When the materials are complete, they are dispatched to the schools of distance education.

School of Distance Education Model of Curriculum Development

In most instances, teachers in schools of distance education use the centrally developed curriculum materials to structure the programmes they develop for their students. In some cases, however, teachers use the materials as prescriptive statements of what is to be taught. A different approach is expected: the centrally developed materials are meant to be used as exemplars of good practice. Teachers are expected to control the pace of learning and to provide feedback to students, to provide enrichment and remedial work where necessary and to assess student progress. More often than not, teachers are expected to modify and adapt the centrally developed materials. This level of curriculum development requires considerable knowledge of the designs employed by course developers in the Open Access Support Centre, as well as knowledge of principles underlying distance education.

Development of the Open Access Support Centre

In 1990, the Queensland government published *Focus on Schools*, which became the centre-piece of a government strategy to change education in Queensland at all levels. Key strategies in this document pointed to the formation of an open Access Support Centre, which would provide educational opportunities through programmes and services for all students who, because of disadvantage, were unable to access conventional education. The Centre was to be formed by bringing together a number of existing units, one of which was responsible for the design, development, and distribution of distance education materials. Another unit, a material production unit, had been responsible for the development of curriculum resources for all schools, particularly audiovisual materials.

One of the major challenges in establishing the Centre was to refocus the work of these units. *Focus on Schools* indicated that the major goal for the Centre was to facilitate greater access to educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of situation or circumstance. Open access education would achieve this goal. Open access is new phrase widely used in Australia, particularly in government circles, to imply a kind of “half way house” to open learning. Open access implies only one aspect of opening learning (ease of access) and not necessarily the flexibility and learner autonomy embraced by open learning. Since the Open Access Support Centre has been established, the Queensland government has adopted

a much broader social justice strategy that emphasises not only access but also participation and equity. This move is supported by open learning philosophy. The Open Access Support Centre responded to this move by carrying the debate past the “half way house” concept towards open learning, even though the appropriateness of this approach to compulsory schooling is still in question.

The dilemma facing the Open Access Support Centre is how to move the focus from distance education towards open learning in context where the dominant curriculum development and curriculum design frameworks are unsympathetic to the strengths of open learning, even though the system is sympathetic to social justice principles that embody an open learning philosophy.

FACTORS STIMULATING CHANGE

Although the Queensland Department of Education introduced the concept of regionalisation in 1949, it was not until quite recently that the devolution of curriculum decision-making has been taken seriously; The concept of the “self-managing school” has been promoted widely, and the government has provided considerable support in order to bring this about. However, even with support, some confusion surrounds the roles and responsibilities of participants in the curriculum development process. Any resolution of this confusion has been hindered by the debate focusing on “either-or” positions, advocates of either centralised models or school-based models taking the centre stage.

The absence of clearly defined roles and responsibilities has posed particular difficulties for a state-wide centre such as the Open Access Support Centre. For example, without clear roles, the transition from a correspondence model to distance education model has been hindered. The correspondence model was highly centralized; teachers located in the Correspondence School were totally responsible for the development of the learning materials; and they were also responsible for teaching the students for whom these materials were designed. In comparison, the distance education model was based on an idea that a centrally located agency designed the learning materials but the teachers in the schools of distance education used these materials to teach their students. Clearly, the intention was to have the teachers use the centrally designed learning materials as basis for the learning programmes they would use for their own students. The absence of policy and guidelines has led to a number of concerns about the curriculum materials developed at both the central and school levels and the processes used to develop them.

Continuation with Elements of the Correspondence Model

At the central level, there has been a tendency for too much prescription, a characteristic of the correspondence model. In the primary programme, for example, the writers selected all supplementary textbook material. Because the study material for student is written around these textbooks, a great deal of inflexibility resulted in the approach teachers use in the schools. It must be stressed that the scope and variety of this material is quite outstanding, but the fact that the materials are written around these textbooks has taken away from teachers the decisions about resources that should belong to them. The use of textbooks has also built into the design of the materials a currency that will be dictated by how long the textbooks are available. Without being told anything different, or in some cases of not wanting to believe anything different, some parents have persisted with an implementation of the new materials in much the same way as the correspondence model. For example, they tend to feel obliged to cover all the material supplied. The fact that the materials to be covered, have increased substantially and that the role of the home tutor has changed from supervisor to tutor has been a source of unrest among parents.

Much of the centrally designed materials have been organised around conventional school structures – the school term, the school day, and so on. This organisation is understandable, as the curriculum developers at the central level are keen to ensure that the distance education materials are perceived by teachers and parents as at least the equal of the curriculum provided in conventional schools. However, this organisation also leads to inflexibility, as teachers and home tutors interpret the provision of daily lessons as work to be covered regardless of what the situation warrants.

A related issue here is the failure of those responsible for the development of the state syllabus documents to consider the implication that what they suggest and expect for conventional schools should be the same for distance education, particularly for subject areas such as physical education, health, and science or for teaching approaches that deal with attitudes and values or assessment.

A further issue here concerns a tendency for writers to draw upon classroom experiences for the design of many of the student learning experiences. Again this approach is understandable, given the fact that many writers are selected because of their superior classroom teaching ability and most have limited experience, at least initially of the context for which they are writing. Because they are “good” teachers they are also well-versed in current educational theories and practices, at least in how they might apply to classroom practice. Materials developed around a classroom pose particular problems for the home tutor who is following the correspondence model; they impose ever greater problems for home tutors who have a number of children in the family across a number of year levels.

Confusion Over Who Provides Professional Development to Teachers

While a key responsibility for the development of curriculum materials at the central level has been assigned to the Open Access Support Centre, the Centre has no formal involvement in professional development for teachers in the schools of distance education. Because the centrally developed curriculum materials are provided as exemplars for the teachers, it would seem important for teachers to be introduced to approaches that would help modify and adapt these materials for their students. The difficulty in proposing some involvement system from the fact that the Open Access Support Centre is a state-wide centre, operating in a decentralised system, while the schools of distance education are administered regionally, where responsibility for staffing and resourcing clearly resides.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: FROM CORRESPONDENCE TO OPEN LEARNING

Hughes (1966) depicts a model in a flowchart he developed to explain curriculum development in schools in Australia. Figure 1 (next page) is an adaptation of Hughes’ model but captures the implications of its major components.

While Hughes’ model was created to explain the function of a syllabus committee in a centralised model of curriculum development, it can just as easily explain the function of curriculum development at the school level.

For example, at the central level (the Open Access Support Centre) the inputs considered by the curriculum development team would originate from research literature, government policy statements, mandates, and syllabus documents. Consideration of this data would result in a design that would identify key learning outcomes, detail the scope and sequence of the programme, outline suggested teaching strategies and learning experiences, and propose evaluation requirements.

At the school level, the same framework could be used, but the decisions made and the people making the decisions would be quite different. For example, the inputs would originate from what is known about community expectations and the centrally developed curriculum framework and programme, as well as what is known about student needs and interests.

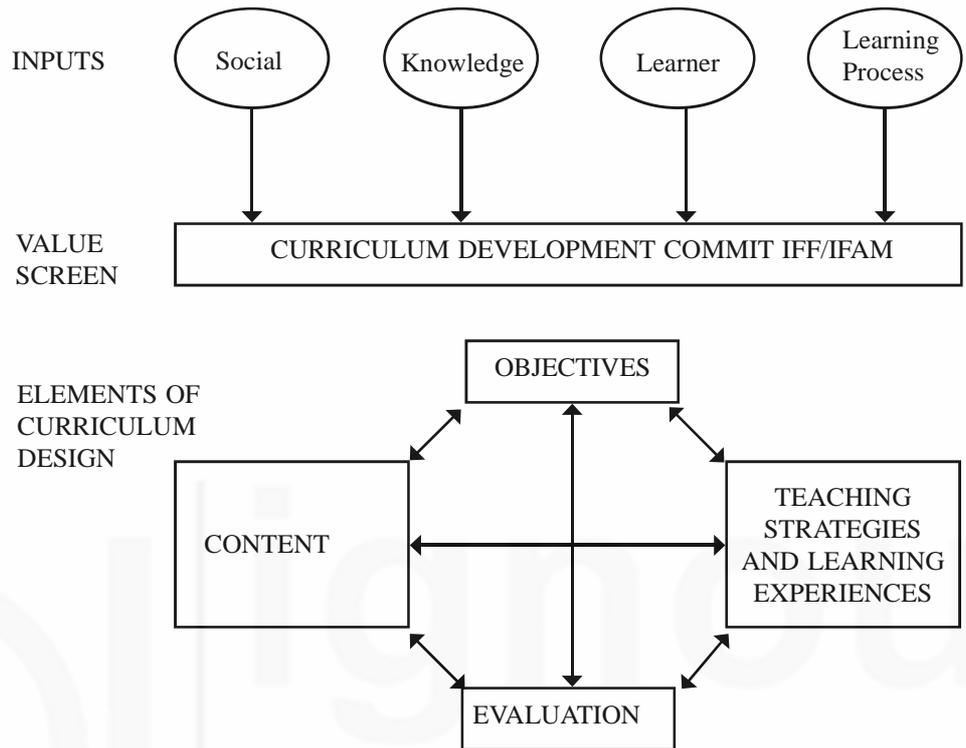


Fig. 1: An adaptation of Hughes' Curriculum Development Model

The lack of clear policies and guidelines for distance education curriculum development has led to much debate about the relative virtues of centralised curriculum development as opposed to school-based curriculum development. The Hughes' framework offers much in resolving any unproductive conflict in the process of curriculum development.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The Reigning Paradigm

Almost since the time of the ancient Greeks, education has been characterised by the gathering of a number of students with knowledgeable leader (teacher) in a place specified for the conduct of education (a school). Usually, the material to be taught existed within the community and had been accepted as “worthwhile” knowledge (curriculum) necessary for the functioning of neophytes in the community.

The key elements in this paradigm include:

- the teacher, who is central to the teaching-learning situation;
- the students, who gather in one place to participate in the same learning experiences, usually delivered at the same time, in the same manner, and in the same order; and
- a common curriculum, which is based on a general acceptance of what constitutes “worthwhile knowledge” that will allow student to function in a community.

This paradigm generally remains unchanged today, but in the early days of public education in Queensland, using the paradigm's key elements to guide action created what Imershein (1977) refers to as anomalous conditions. In particular, the circumstances associated with delivering education to the more remote parts of Queensland have not fit the paradigm during the last hundred years.

The passage of the Education Act of 1875 in Queensland, at a time when similar Acts were being contemplated or passed elsewhere in Australia, sought to make education "free, secular and compulsory". Under the Education Act, public servants were required to ensure that all children of the compulsory age of schooling (6 to 14 years) received some education.

But the reigning paradigm of educational provisions could not easily supply the method of achieving this goal, because it was impossible to provide a teacher to every remote family that had school-aged children; not only were too few teachers available, but too many families lived too far from each other to be gathered together in sufficiently large numbers to warrant the provisions of a school.

Educating children who live in isolated communities in Queensland has posed major problems for educational administrators ever since schooling began in the state. For example, in 1869, Randall McDonnell, an inspector of schools in Queensland, wrote that:

There are cases where the settlers are too few, too far apart or too recently established in their homes, to be able to comply with the regulation in regard to average attendance (at school) or the contribution to the costs of the school building. In some places the people sometimes contrive, by their united labour, to erect a rough structure... and if they succeed in obtaining the services of a person moderately competent as an instructor, the Board may recognise the school provisionally, and grant a small stipend to the teacher, 'till the time comes when the residents are in a position to contribute their quota of funding a permanent vested school.

The Queensland government persisted in its attempts to ensure that teachers and children were brought together in one place to learn. They used young, poorly trained teachers, mostly young women, to staff small and remote schools, all in an attempt to sustain the reigning paradigm.

However, it was clear to all involved in providing education to school-age children that the reigning paradigm was not able to do the job. Members of the educational community were only too aware of anomalies. But a long drought and rising costs forced the government to consider alternatives to the establishment of numerous small schools in remote areas. In 1875, the government in Victoria, another Australian state, adopted a system of itinerant teachers, whose tasks included visiting as many remote families as possible. As a way of sustaining the reigning paradigm, Queensland adopted this scheme in 1901.

The itinerant teachers used the existing curriculum and textbooks in their lessons. In theory, each teacher attempted to visit a family by horse and buggy at least four times a year. In practice, however, itinerant teachers rarely visited each family more than twice each year. The teacher left textbooks, library books, and exercise books for the children, along with detailed instructions about which lessons to cover before the next visit. Mothers usually supervised the children, even if they themselves had little, if any, more education than the children. The system of itinerant teachers maintained the personal contact existing between teacher and pupil, but substituted the home for the classroom, thus still sustaining a weaker version of the reigning paradigm.

While this system provided an education for all children, the poor educational outcomes achieved by many children because the visits were so infrequent provided the impetus to search for another way of doing things.

The following analysis of the reigning paradigm emerges when Hughes' curriculum framework is applied.

- **Social:** The aim of the curriculum is to ensure that all children conformed to a similar background (Aboriginal children were largely excluded from schooling at that time) and were able to function within a homogeneous society, comprised very much of Celts and Anglo-Saxons.
- **Knowledge:** The use of common texts and readers organised by set timetables proposed that the state could and should determine what knowledge would be valuable. The system of standards, grades, and common examination indicated a disregard for the influence of circumstance or location. Knowledge of a common content prevailed.
- **Learners:** It could be argued that the state believed in *tabula rasa* insofar as pupils were concerned. The teacher imparted knowledge to pupils, leading them from darkness to light. Very few, if any of the young, inexperienced, and poorly trained rural teachers would have been familiar with Plato's or Rousseau's views on education. Most lived in some fear of inspectorial visits should their pupils fail to recite the correct facts on examination?

Learning Process: Records of inspectors' visits to schools in the later part of the nineteenth century reveal that drill and repetition comprised the main teaching techniques. The repetition of factual content completely dominated other significant learning elements such as demonstrating manual and intellectual skills, or understanding by combining content and skills to make the outcomes not only useful but also valuable.

The Correspondence Paradigm

The challenging paradigm, contradicting the idea that education only occurred in schools, came from New South Wales, another Australian state, where the government established a correspondence system. Whereas Queensland had been intent on maintaining contact between teachers and students, the new system relied heavily on the availability of young, mobile, and independent teachers, particularly young women in rural schools and men as itinerants. First World War casualty rates for young Australian men dramatically reduced the availability of these men for teaching in remote areas. In addition, the "soldier settlement" schemes of the early 1920s added pressure on the Education Department to provide more schools and itinerant teachers. In 1921, B.J. (Barney) McKenna, the new Director-General of Education, established a "correspondence school" that commenced its operations in 1922. Staff from Queensland visited New South Wales and transplanted this system to Queensland.

The Minister for Public Instruction at the time, A. H. Barlow, described the correspondence system thus:

So that educational assistance may reach parents whose children are situated at a distance from permanent country schools and away from the tracks followed by itinerant teachers, typed copies of instructions, directions, explanations and illustrations, forming a series of lessons upon the most important subject included in the primary school curriculum, are posted each week from the Primary Correspondence School in Brisbane..... The work of each class is divided into weekly portions so as to cover a half year's work in twenty (20) lessons. Typed copies of weekly lessons carefully graded are transmitted with accompanying directions, some intended for the guidance of parents.

Written lessons are then returned to the home from where they have been received. Thus, there are three sets of work in circulation at one time, one on the way to pupil, one at home in the process of study, and one returning for correction.... The work is so well systematised and explanations so explicit, that except in the case of totally illiterate adult coadjutors, the pupil's progress may be assured.

Subjects studied by pupils included English (comprising reading, spelling, dictation, recitation, work-building, derivation, grammar, composition, and writing) and arithmetic and mensuration.

During 1922, the enrolment of the Primary Correspondence School rose to 730 students.

The key elements in the correspondence paradigm included:

- the “classroom”, which was located in the home where the parent (sometimes a governess) supervised the progress of one or a small number of students;
- the “curriculum”, which was centrally designed and delivered and, while it generally reflected an acceptance of what was “worthwhile knowledge”, was restricted to the availability of suitable textbooks with which parents could reasonably be expected to cope; and
- the teachers' interaction with students, which was based on written communication with the parent or governess who was acting as mediator in the learning process.

The introduction of the correspondence system resulted in subtle changes to the curriculum framework as it related to children living in most isolated places, unable to attend a school. Using Hughes' curriculum framework, the key inputs can be described as follows.

- **Social:** The continuing use of the learning materials common to school-based learning showed that the state continued with its intention to fully integrate students whose living conditions and circumstances varied significantly from the “norm”. As before, very few Aboriginal students attended school and their cultural understandings had no place in the dominant, white, Euro-centric society.
- **Knowledge:** The use of restricted materials, as in schools, continued with a belief that the state determined what worthwhile knowledge was. The redirection of this information into written notes to be transmitted to students by either parents or itinerant teachers inadvertently further narrowed the idea of worthwhile knowledge. Without newspapers, radio, or even visitors to remote homes, the world view of isolated families was reduced. Parents, many of whom had little schooling themselves, could pass even less on to their children. Certainly, the correspondence system produced basic literacy as a major outcome, but it tended to narrow the student's outlook on life more so than a school might have done, because opportunities to interact with even neighboring children were limited
- **Learners:** Students using the correspondence system communicated by mail with teachers in far-off Brisbane. Most students received two brief visits from the itinerant teacher each year. Otherwise, they interacted socially with siblings or parents and various farm workers. As learners, they were isolated within the correspondence system.;
- **Learning Process:** The correspondence materials prepared in the early years reflected classroom instruction written for parents to be applied in “study” setting at home, not unlike that found in school. The materials were

drawn from standard readers. Students first learned to read and, afterwards, they learned to follow the Instructions for themselves as they became less dependent on the mother, home tutor, or governess for direct tuition.

- **Value Screen:** Although not articulated as such, the value screen for both classroom and correspondence work assessed the same essential elements, including Anglo-centrism, Empire, nationhood, respect for family, and a puritan work ethic.

During the 1920s and 1930s, when broadcast radio was introduced, many isolated properties found themselves in contact with the wider world. They could hear about the world's events first-hand and also hear the views of world leaders or experts on a wide range of important issues. The Australian Broadcasting Commission adopted a view of schooling that was similar to that of the British Broadcasting Corporation during the 1930s. Both provided programmes that supplemented the educational curriculum. Radio engineers and teachers could have used the technology to teach directly, but this did not happen until the 1960s.

The School of the Air radio service commenced in Cloncurry in western Queensland in 1960. It provided regular contact between teachers and isolated students in that children could hear others discussing the same lessons on which they worked. Also, teachers provided on-air assistance to home tutors, arranged school camps, and held parents' meetings, generally creating a "school" atmosphere among the isolated. Unfortunately, the School of the Air activities did not coincide with activities in the correspondence lessons.

The chief advantages of the correspondence system lay in its administrative simplicity; the curriculum generally followed that used in conventional schools and a routine could be regularised in a way that ensured participants understood their well-defined roles.

However, those involved in the system identified a number of anomalies. The School of the Air demonstrated the importance of providing opportunities for students and teachers to interact directly. Although the School of the Air lessons and correspondence lessons did not coincide, those involved saw that the School of the Air lessons provided a way for up to 20 students of the same age to interact as they would in a classroom.

The correspondence system relied on fixed textbooks, often purchased at great cost, which ensured that the curriculum was rarely upgraded. Curriculum changes came about only when the required textbooks were no longer available from the publishers. Sometimes this meant that the learning materials and the skills, values, and attitudes being taught through them did not reflect the reality of the world in which the children would live. The parents also found that they could cope only with a limited range of subjects because they had no training for their role and had to rely upon their own, often limited, rural life experiences. The teaching methods tended to limit the education of the children. The centrally developed and delivered curriculum provided little opportunity for the materials to be modified or adapted to suit local conditions. Teachers located in Brisbane could not respond to the diversity dictated by local contexts, nor could the parents with their limited training in using the materials.

The Distance Education Paradigm

The Queensland government established a ministerial committee in the early 1980s to study the question of education by correspondence. This committee acknowledged the concerns many of the participants expressed. One of the major changes the committee recommended was to establish schools of distance education that would be strategically located throughout the state. The schools of

distance education would improve the interaction between teachers and students and provide greater opportunities for the curriculum to be modified or adapted to suit local conditions and the individual needs of the students.... The construction of the first schools at Long reach and Charters Towers in the late 1980s saw the first regionalisation of distance education.

The key elements of the distance education paradigm included:

- *the classroom*, which is located in the home where the parent (or governess) supervised the progress of one student or a small group of students; links with teachers in schools were provided by technology (for example, print and radio);.
- *the curriculum*, which was centrally designed and delivered and provided opportunities for students to cover all subject areas. The curriculum reflected the same expectations of what is “worthwhile knowledge” as for students in face-to-face situations. It provided exemplars around which the teachers in schools of distance education could plan their own programmes; and
- *the teacher*, who assumed the role of manager of student learning using both a centrally designed curriculum as a guide and the parent (or governess) as a tutor in the full sense of the word.

These changes constituted a fundamental change in the way in which isolated students received their education. No longer did they rely on “the papers” but could now see their teachers, hear them daily through high-frequency radio, and link each lesson to the learning materials in a more individualized way. On the surface, the role of the parent or governess had changed little with the introduction of the schools of distance education, but significant, more subtle differences had taken place. For example, because teachers had daily contact through the learning materials, they were able to adopt the role of guide and manager of teaching and learning. Teachers could offer a greater degree of individualised support for the home tutor as they got to know the needs and interests of their students.

One of the most important changes with the introduction of schools of distance education concerned the actual design of the centrally developed primary curriculum materials. No longer were they organised in a tight linear sequence. The new programme provided an integrated programme covering all subject areas, using a “whole language” and literature-based approach, including a wide selection of supporting texts to accompany the print materials. A range of audiovisual materials support the print materials. This change in the design of materials assumed a wider role for the parent. Where the parent or governess had been previously asked to supervise the work of students, the new materials required a greater tutoring role. This change placed an extra burden on teachers in the schools of distance education, who were required to direct both the student and the home tutor.

Not a great deal has been said of secondary distance education at this stage. To this point it was not an option taken up by isolated families because many parents felt they could not supervise students at the secondary level. Other families had preferred to send their children to urban boarding schools outside the state-funded system. Recently, because of the downturn in the rural economy and drought, more parents seem to be turning to secondary distance education programmes, which are offered by one school of distance education located in Brisbane. However, secondary enrolments in the other schools of distance education have also increased recently. The main concern with this development has been the difficulty in using the same delivery model (using home tutors) for secondary students.

The distance education paradigm includes a much wider range of students, from pre-school to adult, than did the correspondence model. It also provides some assistance to the few isolated students whose special needs allow them to remain in their homes without seeking continuous special attention in larger urban centres. Assistance is provided in two ways. A small, centrally located unit develops individual programmes for children who have been assessed as having moderate to severe learning disabilities. As well, each of the schools of distance education is staffed with “learning support” teachers who are responsible for assisting teachers and parents with programmes for students with learning disabilities.

Despite these developments, the members of the distance education paradigm have identified issues that suggest the presence of anomalous conditions. Perhaps a challenging paradigm is emerging.

In terms of Hughes’ curriculum framework the distance education paradigm recognises the social and epistemological changes occurring in Australia, but fails to address issues that concern the learner and the learning process, as follows.

- *Social*: Before 1950, Australia and particularly rural Queensland saw few migrants other than Anglo-Saxons. Only the Chinese miners made an impact in the bush, but most returned to China. People from the Pacific Islands who came to Queensland in the nineteenth century worked on coastal farms and did not penetrate the western Queensland towns.
- After 1950, Australia adopted large numbers of European migrants, who moved into the “outback”. By the 1980s, Asians came to Australia in increasing numbers and they, too, have had a major social impact.
- These social changes were not reflected in the updating of the Queensland correspondence materials of the 1950s and 1960s.
- The revision of distance education materials in the late 1980s recognised the multicultural factor in Australia and Queensland’s recent history. The recognition of other cultural values, including Aboriginal values, brought a modern view of the world to isolated students. The spread of television to the outback in the 1970s reinforced a new era in Queensland’s education system.
- *Knowledge*: Television, satellite communications, efficient news gathering, and broadcasting exponentially expanded the knowledge accessibly by children. Teaching became no longer a matter of drill and reciting known facts, but more an issue of how to find and manipulate relevant facts. Distance education recognised this complexity by adopting the literature-based, “whole language” approach. This move away from the certainties of knowledge in the correspondence system is a major source of concern to families accustomed to the former ways.
- *Learner*: Teacher who were preparing distance education materials in the late 1980s and early 1990s considered social and epistemological concerns, because they had been dealing with them in the everyday classroom settings from which they came.

Yet isolated learners brought pressure on these teachers to prepare materials in the “correspondence” mode, assuming the following:

- the dominance of the home tutor or governess role;
- infrequent contact with teachers; and
- a need for excessive and detailed instructions about using the materials.

- These “correspondence” assumptions depended on a stable environment of social and learning factors, but both had become fluid in the 1990s. As a result, the translation of 1990s classroom practice and social and epistemological understandings did not match the understanding of isolated learners.
- *Learning Process*: With a move away from the idea that students needed only a fixed *corpus* of knowledge came a range of “open” teaching techniques that emphasised recognising and classifying important content from the whole range of available information; data would then be manipulated to address the tasks to hand. This range of teaching techniques made the learning process much more complex than could be put into practice easily by unskilled home tutors of government.

The schools of distance education link the “on-air” lessons and personal visits very closely to the written and audiovisual learning materials. Skilled teachers now play as great a role in the education of isolated students as teachers in the small schools that began to close in the early part of the twentieth century. It is unsurprising to find that parents and home tutors believe that modern distance education materials are too complex while, on the other hand, teachers find them too prescriptive.

The Open Learning Paradigm

Open learning at the school level has its origins in correspondence and distance education paradigms and to some extent, is an adaptation from tertiary and further education sectors. However, at the school level, the roots of open learning also extend back to the 1960s in the teaching and learning approaches associated with open education. Unfortunately, the development of any useful concepts from open education were lost as the idea, became confused with school architecture and classroom organisation.

Open learning is generally characterised as learner-centered education, with a focus on meeting the needs of the individual rather than accommodating the individual to the requirements of system or institution. It has been defined as a system “in which the restrictions placed on students are under constant review and removed wherever possible, it incorporates the widest range of teaching strategies in particular those using independent and individualised learning”.

In adopting this definition, a tentative list of “rules” can be offered around which it may be possible to develop concrete exemplars. These rules include the following:

- Open learning negates the constraints of place, time, and method.
- Open learning allows meaningful student choice.
- Open learning produces flexibility in materials and delivery.
- Open learning enables students to achieve their potential.
- Open learning provides ready access to a range of curriculum information and resources.

A paradigm emerges from these rules, but whether they are sufficiently strong enough to guide the practice of its members is debatable. A possible list of key elements could include:

- the “classroom”, which is generally located in the home, but links to “schools” are provided by communications technology (computer, fax, telephone);

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- the curriculum, which is centrally designed and based on curriculum frameworks that reflect system-wide guidelines and expectations. The curriculum offers models of good practice around which teachers can plan their own programmes. Desirable characteristics of curriculum design will include the removal of barriers imposed by administrative convenience (for example, fixed duration courses and rigid divisions between levels of subjects) and the creation of multiple options (including recognising prior learning and matching delivery to the mode the learner prefers);
- the teacher, who manages the curriculum at the school level and decided on student needs, teaching methods, resources, and assessment; and
- “schools”, which are accessible all year round.

The open learning paradigm originated from elements of the correspondence and distance education models. The factors that caused the correspondence model to prove inadequate were a more fluid and multicultural society, the impact of the rate of change of knowledge, improved communications technologies, and better understanding of the learning process.

The distance education model is changing and moving towards an open learning approach because of the effect of factors that include the Education Department's acceptance of a social justice framework, demands by small schools for access to distance materials, the benefit that must be derived from distance materials that justify their high development costs, and a desire among parents for a more flexible learning model. As well, the education community's greater understanding of the meaning of *open learning* contributes to its greater acceptance.

Open learning has subsumed the simpler elements of correspondence learning such as the presentation of printed materials and has added a wide range of technological elements such as audio, video, and computer-based learning designed for isolated learners. The subsumption of distance education elements, including a more sophisticated understanding of the learning process and a more flexible approach to learning materials, are adding to open learning's capacity to respond to a wider range of teaching and learning situations.

The Open Access Support Centre is preparing its materials on the cusp of the change from distance education to open learning. It is because the Open Access Support Centre is pioneering this change that it is finding difficulty in coming to terms with a new way of “doing business” that not even educators and curriculum specialists within the broader Departmental community are able to provide insight or assistance.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS

The preceding historical analysis shows that while the way education is offered to geographically isolated students has changed in several ways, one major paradigm of educational delivery in Queensland remains: it is that of the known curriculum delivered by trained teachers to students of similar age in a fixed place, the school.

The paradigm has within it some significant weaknesses in its basic assumptions, including the following:

- The presence of a teacher is necessary for the conduct of education.
- Students should be gathered together for purposes of learning.
- Students should follow a common curriculum..

- Students should be of similar age.

The historical analysis of the provision of education to students of all ages living in remote places has challenged some of the major assumptions of the dominant educational paradigm in the following ways.

- The removal of a teacher from the learning process in the correspondence school model showed that, under restricted circumstances, untrained parents and home tutors could successfully lead completely dependent (non-reading) students to become full independent learners, capable of digesting a whole range of syllabus material by reading and writing alone.
- The closure of small schools and the introduction of an itinerant teacher service, with very limited student contact time, showed that large education systems could successfully teach even one student in complete isolation from any other students, albeit with negative effects for the students socialisation.
- The tertiary open learning system has demonstrated that education, even in the regular absence of teachers, can prepare, produce, and deliver a very flexible curriculum to meet a wide range of student needs, particularly those of the independent learner.
- The significance of each point should not be lost on the dominant paradigm because either by acting singly or together, they have the capacity to change how schools operate. The following working examples elucidate these points:
 - A wide range of subjects can be taught in schools where there is no teacher with the requisite training. For secondary education, this means that all students in the state have access to all subjects at any suitable time. Only a teacher or supervisor capable of giving general supervision to students is needed. Consequently, access to all subjects that suit a student's life goals need not be denied.
 - It is possible to introduce the "home schooling" concept to almost any family that is willing to meet the necessary conditions, even if they suffer no disadvantage of isolation or distance.
 - It is possible to allow adults of any age access to the normal curriculum to study subjects that they believe are necessary for their life goals using teaching techniques and materials prepared in a highly professional manner.
 - The materials prepared in the open learning mode can be made commercially available to any person, system, or country that wishes to use them, provided they are constructed on themes and concepts, rather than around commercially prepared textbooks.
 - Among the other significant factors to be managed during the period of change were:
 - the inclusion of the social justice issues that themselves provide a synthesis of elements within the open learning paradigm;
 - preparing parents, home tutors, and governance for a new approach, not only in the provision of learning materials, but also in new ways to tutor students;
 - incorporating features of suitable conventional school practices into the curriculum materials to make them useful in small schools, but without ignoring the role of the home tutor; and
 - complying with the industrial relations demands associated with restructuring a large educational unit of up to 250 staff.

SYNTHESIS OF ISSUES

Equity

Australian education systems subscribe to the principle that, in a society in which some groups are manifestly disadvantaged when it comes to enjoying the benefits education can bring, the disadvantage must be addressed. Queensland's schools strive to ensure equal opportunities for all students and equitable outcomes for identified groups of students. Special programmes exist for groups, including girls, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students with disabilities, students living in remote areas, and those in low socio-economic places. Also the Queensland teacher transfer system ensures fairness not only for teachers but also for students in its methods of ensuring that all schools are staffed equitably. However, it is still the young and inexperienced who find themselves in remote or small schools.

Queensland is moving towards a schooling system that is based on self-managing principles. Within this approach there is significant scope for:

- a more sophisticated funding arrangement that allows schools to fund alternative forms of education to increase access; and
- a greater latitude for principals to access open learning techniques.

Where schools would be required to be more responsive to community needs, they must also have the capacity to access a greater range of learning options but, at the same time, be held more accountable for learning outcomes.

Participation

The principle of participation in schooling is universally accepted in Queensland schools. Rising retention rates, although affected by youth unemployment conditions, demonstrate the strength of participation in schooling. Schools may not always be able to respond to parent and community pressures to enhance subject offerings because of size, teacher mix, or experience and will, therefore, need to be more flexible in the approaches they use. Open learning is a strategy allowing for this type of flexibility.

The issue of participation is of particular significance to rural and remote schools because students have fewer employment opportunities and fewer role models on which to base their future employment or life options. Although the Department of Education does provide information to students on careers and, through its various policies, widens student horizons, some students are unable to study in areas they deem necessary for their futures.

Access

A key feature of Australian educational history is the states' provision of access to education for all children within designated age ranges, regardless of their background, location within the state, and any disability they may have. In other words, state schools are non-selective and attempt to provide a guarantee of access to any local school.

This principle of access subsumes the long-held Queensland belief that public education should be free, secular, and compulsory, since an education system that is neither free nor secular can deny access on financial and religious grounds.

These values are significantly different from the values that pertained during the correspondence school era. They recognise, as do the distance education materials, that people have different views of society and the place of knowledge within it.

Similarly, the learning process used in schools has changed to include greater curriculum flexibility, designed to serve the much wider range of career and learning choices now open to students.

At this time it is possible to detect the presence of anomalous conditions, a prerequisite, according to Immersion (1977), for a paradigm shift. This is evidenced by;

- the Department of Education's concern to extend ideas about social justice;
- requests from many conventional schools for access to the curriculum materials supplied to schools of distance education;
- difficulties experienced by some schools of distance education in using the materials for a more diverse student group (for example, students of travelling families);
- concerns expressed by some teachers about the level of prescription contained in curriculum materials; and
- an emerging issue being argued in the wider community is that the fundamental assumptions about the contemporary content of schooling (for example, a need for repeated retraining and increased personal responsibility for learning) call for a different mode of schooling that empowers learners and reduces dependency rather than the opposite.

The rigid curriculum framework associated with correspondence and distance education has been dissolved by open learning to serve a very wide range of student interests. Although a tertiary model might include almost any subject, a similar provision within a state-based primary and secondary model would operate within broad state guidelines or those established by relevant boards of studies.

CONCLUSION

In the analysis of the historical context, an attempt was made to show that the concept of open learning arose out of concerns and difficulties with the provision of education using correspondence or distance education modes. The formation of the Open Access Support Centre coincided with a proliferation of debate about distance education and open learning. At the same time, the Centre was completing curriculum projects spawned in different contexts.

It was at the Education Department's insistence the outdated materials were replaced. The Department accepted the distance education paradigm as an appropriate model to follow, because it improved access to modern learning by remote students. The distance education model fitted well within the overall Departmental position on curriculum development, which tended to be highly centralised at that time (1989).

Since 1989, with the adoption of the social justice principles of access, equity, and participation, the Open Access Support Centre has found itself caught between the distance education model and an open learning approach.

In essence, the difficulties that staff face in preparing curriculum materials (as opposed to creating administrative structures in times of difficult funding) arose from their role as pioneers of the open learning approach to curriculum development.

When the curriculum staff began to develop the learning materials without suitable exemplars for primary students, they found themselves being pulled in two directions:

- i) backward, towards the known methods associated with correspondence education; and
- ii) forward, towards the flexibilities of the open learning paradigm.

In terms of the curriculum model bring used here, the strengths of the open learning system's social and epistemological concepts pulled against the correspondence model of the isolated learner and the learner's context.

With 20/20 vision in hindsight, it would have been better to develop a fully coherent curriculum theory and philosophy for preparing learning materials in the open learning mode before starting the task. Political and administrative realities combined with a naive approach ensured that while the Open Access Support Centre has delivered its goods on time, the exercise will have to be done again (in a more orderly way) to capture the realities of living and learning in the late twentieth century.

Clearly, the philosophy from which curriculum positions emanate must be understood before learning materials and teaching strategies are developed for non-traditional school-aged students. Because political and administrative demands have compelled the Open Access Support Centre to progress in advance of establishing its philosophical and curriculum positions, the Centre's materials, while of very high quality in themselves, reflect an outmoded curriculum model.

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QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the teaching support ratio in distance education schools in Queensland?
- 2) How is direct contact with the students possible?
- 3) What is the responsibility of the Regional Office?
- 4) What is the role of the teacher?
- 5) Explain the phrase 'open access'.
- 6) "The curriculum developers at the central level are keen to ensure that ..
- 7) What was the aim of the Hughes model?
- 8) Mention the key elements of the reigning paradigm of curriculum development.
- 9) Name the key elements of the correspondence paradigm of curriculum development.
- 10) According to the Hughes curriculum framework, what are the key inputs while introducing the correspondence system:
- 11) "In terms of Hughes' curriculum framework the distance education paradigm recognises the social and epistemological changes occurring in Australia but fails to address issues that concern the learner and the learning process"... name these issues.
- 12) Define open learning.
- 13) The open learning paradigm originated from elements of the _____ and _____.
- 14) Why did the education department accept the distance education paradigm as an appropriate model?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

- 1) The ratio is 1:15
- 2) Direct contact with the students is possible through high-frequency radio, home visits, teleconferencing and computer links.
- 3) to provide staff and resources.
- 4) to control the pace of learning, to provide feedback to the students, to provide enrichment and remedial work, to assess the student progress.
- 5) 'Open access' does not imply the flexibility and autonomy of the learner as it is embraced by 'open learning'.
- 6) "...the distance education materials are perceived by teachers and parents as at least the equal of the curriculum provided in conventional schools."
- 7) Hughes developed a model to explain curriculum as developed in schools in Australia.
- 8) a) The teacher, who is central to the teaching-learning situation.
b) The students grouped in one place participating in the same learning experience at the same time, in the same manner and, in the same order.

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- c) A common curricular, based on general acceptance of what constitutes “worthwhile knowledge” which will allow students to function as a community.
- 9) a) class room b) curriculum c) the teachers.
- 10) a) Social b) Knowledge c) Learners
d) Learning Process
- 11) a) Social b) Knowledge c) Learner
d) Learning process.
- 12) Open learning is system in which the restrictions placed on students are under constant review and removed wherever possible. It includes the widest range of teaching strategies, in particular those using independent and individualised learning
- 13) a) Correspondence b) distance education models.
- 14) The Education Department accepted the distance education paradigm as an appropriate model because it improved access to modern learning by remote students.

