

# Distance Education

New perspectives

*Edited by*

**Keith Harry, Desmond Keegan  
and Magnus John**

Routledge Studies in Distance Education

# Distance education: new perspectives

The wonders of technology have brought to the world the benefits of education at a distance. But the best research and analysis of distance education is notoriously difficult to track down. *Distance Education: New Perspectives* chronicles the final chapter to date of the major writing in this fast-moving field. Bringing together into one volume the best writings of the leading authorities in distance education from the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the book may be seen as a companion volume to the much-cited *Distance Education: International Perspectives* (Croom Helm 1983; Routledge 1986 second impression). A number of the best authorities from outside the English-speaking world are translated and appear in English for the first time.

*Distance Education: New Perspectives* offers a comprehensive survey of the entire field: from the theory behind this special mode of teaching and learning to international case studies of distance education in practice. The book considers the introduction of electronic communication technologies to distance education, including one- and two-way video virtual classrooms. The final section discusses for the first time in the literature the growing number of professional degrees and awards in the field of distance education from universities around the world.

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# **Distance education: new perspectives**

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and Desmond Keegan**

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# Preface

In 1971, Ossian MacKenzie and Edward L. Christensen published *The Changing World of Correspondence Study: International Readings* through the Pennsylvania State University Press. It presented a comprehensive overview of education at a distance up to the end of the 1960s.

In 1983, David Sewart of the Open University, Börje Holmberg of the FernUniversität and Desmond Keegan, produced a volume which gave an overview of distance education in the 1970s and early 1980s: *Distance Education: International Perspectives*.

The book brought together the best writing on distance education of the period. It was planned to provide a touchstone for decisions on the theory and practice of distance education for scholars and administrators in the field. For educators in other fields it was to be used as an authoritative introduction to distance education. It gives an introduction to the serious study of distance education and acts as a reader for the first taught university-level award in distance education.

The Sewart, Holmberg, Keegan book successfully filled the role for which it was planned. It was extensively cited. Few major publications on distance education in the last decade do not list it amongst their list of references. Published by Croom Helm in 1983, it was reprinted by Routledge in 1988.

It is now a decade since the original date of publication of the final contribution to that book. Taught degrees in distance education, both face-to-face and at a distance, have emerged in the 1990s as a major feature of the study of distance education. An up-to-date collection of the best writing on the subject is now needed for professors, Ph.D researchers and all who are seeking professional qualifications in this field.

Researchers in other areas of education are showing much greater interest in distance education and its methods, as are corporate trainers and administrators of international agencies. *Distance Education: New Perspectives* has been designed to give them an authoritative picture of this field in the early to mid-1990s.

Those who work in distance education still find it hard to locate information of the best analysis and discussion on this form of education. Library collections are poor. Conference proceedings are difficult to obtain and there are no copies of even the major texts on distance education in some countries where English is widely spoken. For these readers we have tried to put together a balanced selection of the best writing of the decade, with the proviso that each piece should have something of value for the practitioner in addition to its quality as a contribution to the literature of the field.

The progress of the last decade is reflected in the structure of this new book and its differences from the 1983 volume. There are no longer sections on the concept of distance education, course development, student support services or economics. This indicates that the concept of distance education and its relationship to cognate but discrete fields like educational technology, open/flexible learning and adult education has been clarified. Excellent work in the late 1970s and early 1980s has made it possible for course development, economics and student support services to be represented by a single chapter.

New sections deal with distance education as an international phenomenon and as a field of teaching or study. The aim of *Distance Education: New Perspectives* is to give an international overview of the successes, the problems, the institutions and the structures that characterize the millions of students throughout the world who study at a distance in the 1990s.

The problems confronting the editors have changed little in the last decade. Much of the best writing is in journals that are held by few universities and public libraries: *Distance Education*, *Open Learning*, *Epistolodidaktika*, *The American Journal of Distance Education* and *The Journal of Distance Education*. Other important contributions are in conference papers or local publications which may not appear on computerized databases; neither are they available to the individual reader or researcher. Every effort has been made to reflect the international nature of distance education with chapters which were first drafted or published in German, French, Italian, and Chinese. A number of these have been translated specifically for inclusion in this volume and appear in English for the first time.

The work of compilation of this volume was greatly facilitated by the availability of the excellent resources of the International Centre for Distance Learning at the Open University in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. This is the world's most extensive collection of books, articles, courses and documents on distance education in many languages, and the world-wide network built up by the Centre greatly helped in the identification and selection of the articles in this volume.

*K. Harry, M. John, D. Keegan*

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Sauvé, Louise, 'Media and distance education: Course description' is published in English for the first time. It is a translation of the course unit EDU6012, *Médias en formation à distance* of the Diplôme de deuxième cycle en formation à distance (Diploma in Distance Education) of the Téléuniversité, Québec, Canada. Published with permission.

Jenkins, Janet, 'Strategies for collaborative staff training in distance education', pp. 57–66 in The Commonwealth of Learning (1990) *Perspectives on Distance Education: Report on a Round Table on Training Distance Educators*, Vancouver: The Commonwealth of Learning. Reprinted by permission. The Commonwealth of Learning is an international organization established by Commonwealth Governments in September 1988, following the Heads of Government meeting held in Vancouver in 1987. Its headquarters are in Vancouver and it is the only Commonwealth inter-governmental organization located outside of Britain.

COL has a mandate to create and widen opportunities for learning, through Commonwealth cooperation, with a particular emphasis on utilizing the potential of distance education and the application of communication technologies to education. The overall aim of the organization is to help strengthen the capacities of Commonwealth member countries to develop the human resources required for their economic and social development.

The Chairman of the Board of Governors is the Rt Hon. Lord Briggs of

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Lewes and COL's President and Chief Executive Officer is Professor James A. Maraj.

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# General introduction

Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, advances in technology have provided people with the means for a new form of education, known today as distance education. In recent decades the wondrous array of electronic communications technology has given distance education new status. It seems to have something to offer almost everyone. It is now a normal form of education for those in employment, for homemakers and for those who choose not to go to schools or universities for the purpose of learning.

In response to this interest, institutions of distance education attempt to provide for their students a complete education system from enrolment to examination that is equal in quality, in quantity and in status to that offered to ordinary students in schools, colleges and universities around the world. In the 1990s more than ten million students, most of them adults, study at a distance – many with notable success. Glamorous new technologies ranging from desktop publishing to satellites and hypermedia point the way to an exciting future.

The success and popularity of distance education presents the educational theorist, whether he or she works in conventional or distance education, with a series of problems. Two of these are considered in this introduction. The first is the location of the students. Conventional students attend the schools, colleges and universities of the world. Distance students do not. They stay at home or study at work as in the Chinese system. By claiming that the same quality of education can be achieved at home, distance educators could be seen to challenge the ethos of two of society's most venerable institutions: the school and the university.

The second concern is with the communication between teacher and student, student and student, and student and teacher. Distance education replaces, either totally or substantially, the face-to-face communication and interaction of ordinary education with its own media-based forms of communication. The breaking up of the interpersonal communication process of

## 2 *General introduction*

education challenges a structure which had been considered a cultural imperative for educating in most cultures for hundreds of years.

These theoretical issues have been particularly acute in the award of university degrees at a distance. Distance training, on the other hand, has generally been regarded as posing fewer theoretical problems, particularly at the lower levels of training. But university degrees which are won fully or partially at a distance still receive a reluctant welcome in certain countries in the 1990s. The idea of the university of scholars coming together in the pursuit of knowledge as enunciated by John Henry Newman in the middle of the nineteenth century and reiterated by Karl Jaspers a century later, has raised barriers to bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees at a distance.

Distance education theorists have been slow to provide grounded theoretical positions to justify these challenges. When distance education emerged in the 1990s as a field of teaching for university credit, it was generally conceded that the theoretical underpinnings of the field were far from solid. One was faced with the unsettling prospect of students studying for masters degrees and doctorates in a field of study in which the work of the theorist was flawed.

The present volume covers the period from mid-1982 to mid-1992 during which the importance of grounding distance education theory within general education theory was frequently advocated. Ljoså's view that distance education should be conceived as part of education but continue to be both a distinct and meaningful term and a particular field of study and practice provides a balanced position in this debate.

During the decade under review a constant theme has been the effort of grappling with a kaleidoscope of constantly changing telecommunications possibilities. Barker and his colleagues provide a useful introduction to the impact of these technologies on the perception of the field in their attempt to differentiate between correspondence-based and telecommunications-based distance education (see Chapter 5).

Researchers whose work is included in later sections of this volume have made major contributions too to distance education theory in the period under review. In particular, the insistence upon and the analysis of the concept of interdependence by Garrison (Chapter 16) has been especially fruitful. Garrison sees this interdependence as a bringing together of the teacher and the student through the process of communication in distance education and the effect that the message has on both the partners in the communication relationship.

The work of Vertecchi (Chapter 11) in Italy has shown how distance education research can impact on general theory. Vertecchi sees the world of distance education as a privileged forum for educational research because it is so much easier to isolate the research variables. His addressing of the

age-old and ever-present problem of streaming in a classroom or a lecture group because of the differing abilities of students studying the same material has been instructive. His work indicates that the problem of streaming can be solved in distance education by establishing a student database of sufficient complexity that, when this is merged with a file containing the course, an individualized text for each student's requirements is printed.

The most incisive contribution to the development of distance education in the decade under review may prove to be the emergence of taught university degrees in the field as reported by Mitchell (Chapter 23). This represents a coming of age for the field of study. It may lead to the abandonment of over-ambitious claims for this form of education which, on examination, may prove to be only hopes which do not correspond to the concrete realities of the types of courses on offer from the institutions. This should lead to a needed maturity with the faults and failings of distance education, as well as its successes and glamour, revealed.

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# **Part I**

## **Theory of distance education**

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# Introduction

Distance education theory, like the theory of any other field of educational study, has as its focus what is characteristic of the field. This is what Sparkes in 1983 called the general acceptance in the academic community of the emergence of a new set of problems. The new set of problems with which distance education theory deals focus on the concept of distance. As distance education is a field within the discipline 'education', it is educational distance that is in question here: distance from the schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions around the world.

Distance education theorists can, and do, discuss what exactly are the characteristics of distance education, but the criterion of distance from schools and universities is clear: conventional students attend the schools, colleges and universities of the world; distance education students do not. They study at home, or at work as in the Chinese system; they choose not to go to school.

Working from UNESCO statistics for the period covered by this book, Dieuzeide showed that there were six hundred million students in the world, of whom ten million study at a distance. Dieuzeide's global figures, however, give a skewed picture. One would not want to underestimate the importance for the distance education theorist of the children who study at a distance (mainly in France, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), but it is necessary to underline that Dieuzeide's ten million distance students are nearly all adults; most of his six hundred million are children.

Thus distance education theory deals with a statistically important and little-studied grouping of students worldwide, reaching towards 10 per cent of adult enrolments in some countries.

The situation of the students at home (or at work) of necessity separates them from their teachers, and this creates problems for the theorist. These problems may seem to be insurmountable for those who insist that face-to-face interpersonal communication in the learning group at a school is a cultural imperative for education in both east and west, and has been so for

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at least 2,000 years. For those who try to set out grounded theory for distance education, the task has proved difficult, as the fragile underpinnings of this form of education so far provided testify all too clearly.

Theorists were slow to tackle the challenge presented by the new form of education created by industrial technology. For over one hundred years there was little theoretical development. One of the main reasons for this was that up to the 1970s much of the world of distance education was proprietary. The major development of the 1970s was the foundation of the open universities and the sudden swing from proprietary to government provision. Universities which differed so radically from the traditions that started at Salerno, Bologna, Paris and Oxford nearly one thousand years ago clearly needed a thorough theoretical explanation. In the 1990s the widespread offering of university degrees at a distance makes the provision of theory more urgent.

In the 1990s, also, there has been a rapid development of distance training. Working from American data in the early 1990s Devlin (1993) has claimed that distance training is now a preferred option for many multinational and transnational corporations (see also chapter 17). If training at a distance is, in fact, to become a preferred option then the onus on providing a proper scientific grounding for such a provision is increased.

Another dramatic new feature of the early 1990s is the provision of funding for research and development of distance and flexible education by government agencies. Van den Brande (1993) provides a detailed analysis of the funding by one agency: the European Commission structures in Brussels for advanced technological investigations.

The present volume covers the period mid-1982 to mid-1992. Peters, the founding Vice-Chancellor (*Rektor*) of the German FernUniversität who has written extensively on distance education since 1965, discusses various ways of understanding distance education, including 'a form of study for people at work' and the form of education in which eye contact between teacher and student is lacking. His chapter subjects to scrutiny managerial and analytical formulations about this form of education which have characterized the decade.

Moore, from the American Centre for Study of Distance Education, investigates the concepts of distance, of interaction and what happens in education when there is no class. Also from North America came one of the most important books on the theory of distance education of the decade, *Le savoir à domicile*. Published only in French, the book has had less attention than it merited. The extract translated here gives the views of the two editors, Henri from the Télé-université in French Canada and Kaye of the Open University in England, on what is essential to this form of education.

Ljoså, first President of the European Distance Education Network with a background in Scandinavian thinking, sees distance education as a service

industry. Barker and his colleagues from the United States anticipate the influence of an electronic future on theoretical positions.

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# 1 Understanding distance education

*Otto Peters*

## INTRODUCTION

Due to the unusual origin of distance education, the peculiarity of its methods, and its rapid unprecedented growth during the last twenty years, the question of its basic character and true nature has been dealt with several times. It may also well be that practitioners and scholars like to ponder on this phenomenon. The result is quite a number of theoretical explanations (Moore 1973, Wedemeyer 1977, Sewart 1978, Bååth 1980, Holmberg and Schümer 1980).

I do not want to deal with these explanations of the nature of distance education, nor do I wish to present a new theory of it, although it would certainly be appropriate and necessary to redefine its possible functions in the post-modern society. This, however, must remain a desideratum for the time being. Rather, I should like to conduct an experiment.

## ‘COMMON-SENSE KNOWLEDGE’ AND ‘LAY THEORIES’

In the 1980s, we have learnt or have been reminded again that the behaviours of people are, as a rule, not governed by elaborate theories but just by assumptions and notions which grow out of experience. They form our view of the world and influence our actions. As such, they are especially important for the analysis of our behaviour. These assumptions and notions are part of our ‘common-sense knowledge’. As they implicitly contain special views, ways of thinking and even conceptual elements, social psychologists call them ‘subjective’ or ‘lay’ theories (Furnham 1988). Lay theories can become influential when they are adopted by other people and assume the functions of stereotypes or clichés. They can be analysed but, of course, not to the same degree as objective or scientific theories. They are implicit rather than explicit. They are incoherent and inconsistent, and can, consequently, contradict themselves. But in spite of this, some researchers (Gröben *et al.* 1988) see analogies and parallels between lay and scientific theories. They are

important for us as we generally are not influenced by the facts in our world of everyday life but basically by our assumptions of and subjective theories about these facts.

With regard to the theme of this chapter, I should like to analyse subjective theories about distance education. In order to do this, I shall examine a number of designations of distance education which have been used widely. I assume that someone who 'invents' a name for distance education must have a certain concept and understanding of its nature. This holds true also for many people who accept and use this name.

Furthermore, I should like to refer to some stereotypes which have been derived from theories of distance education. As a rule, these theories are often reduced to a few words or phrases or catchwords in everyday practice. They start a career of their own – independently from their original theories. Here I am not interested in the original objective theories, but rather in the lay theories which have been developed by people who are using those stereotypes. My hypothesis is that there might be a lot of sound thinking in those lay theories in spite of their not being explicit and consistent. I hope that if we summarize various outcomes of these lay theories we learn something more about what really matters when dealing with distance education. We might recognize a way of understanding which is really shared by the people concerned with this particular form of education.

## DESIGNATIONS

We are aware of quite a number of different designations of 'distance education' in various languages. There are also different designations for the same phenomenon in one language, especially in American English. Dealing with them we have to accept the premise that different designations mean different ways of looking at distance education and of attaching importance to different elements of this form of education. Let us try to describe them.

### ***Fernunterricht* (Instruction at a distance)**

The German word *Fernunterricht* characterizes the phenomenon by pointing at a striking difference from face-to-face education: the apartness of teacher and learner. It stresses the physical distance between them which does not allow direct interaction.

A number of associations are still attached to this word, most of them originating in the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth century. These associations include the use and misuse of the term in connection with profit-led organizations, and the opportunity it offers to ambitious and gifted but underprivileged people who are denied the possibility of obtaining an

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education through the usual channels. Strangely enough, if these people engage themselves in instruction at a distance they are quite often still looked at with a mixture of admiration and condescension.

### ***Fernstudium* (Learning at a distance in higher education)**

The distinctive term *fern* (trs. 'distance') proved to be so successful that it was also applied in higher education when it became possible to study at a university without attending classes. Further, it was also translated into English and is now internationally recognized.

The notions evoked by this term are partly similar to those of *Fernunter-richt*. Here we think of individuals, discontent with their socio-economic status who try to change it in the face of many difficulties. Many people are impressed by these individuals who try to elevate themselves in the social strata or just between the more and less educated. However, again they are looked at with mixed feelings – with admiration, envy, suspicion and disdain. Not all people, especially workers, find it really appropriate to take advantage of this new form of education.

As most institutions of distance study are state institutions, this term is not tainted by associations with profit-making organizations.

### **Correspondence study**

Those who decided to use this term were undoubtedly impressed by a new communication medium in the middle of the last century: the letter (or postcard) in connection with the railway system, which guaranteed quick and reliable delivery. Here the concept of the teacher and the learner who send letters, instead of talking to each other, was in the foreground. The term was so successful that it was adopted in the Romance languages and also in Chinese, in which *han shou* means 'teaching by letters'. It dominated the conception of the new form of tuition for nearly a century.

The most important association attached to this designation is the teacher who instructs by writing and the student who learns by reading. Thus, it popularized a new teaching and learning behaviour.

### **Open learning**

This term when being used to designate distance education emphasizes the 'openness' of the teaching-learning process as compared to the 'closeness' of learning in traditional schools. It stresses that access to this kind of learning is easier ('open access') and that the students are allowed to operate with a degree of autonomy and self-direction. This does not refer only to decisions

with regard to the place, time, duration and circumstances of their learning but in some cases also with regard to the curriculum, as the students are free to select from pre-planned curricula or to develop curricula of their own.

### **Home study**

This term suggests that the teaching and learning does not take place in the class or lecture room but at home. It generates pleasant feelings connected to one's home: privacy, familiarity, cosiness – as opposed to the often unpleasant experiences at schools or colleges: publicity, the necessity to deal with many (unknown or not well-known) persons, the uncomfortableness of rooms, impersonality.

### ***Angeleitetes Selbststudium* (Guided self-study)**

Here, 'self-study' is qualified by 'guided'. Clearly, this term is to minimize the difference between distance education and teaching and learning at a university by referring to a highly valued element of advanced higher education. As it is the tacit goal of higher education to produce scholars who work independently and mainly by themselves, self-study has a tradition and is in no way questionable. Much of post-graduate work is done in this way with only occasional guidance by a professor. Seen in this way it is not so alien, so frighteningly different from academic tradition.

### ***Zaochny***

This is the Russian word for 'distance' in distance education. It is remarkable as it means – etymologically speaking – 'without eye contact'. This implies that the decisive criterion according to which distance education can be distinguished from conventional teaching and learning is the lack of eye contact. Distance education does not take place 'eyeball to eyeball' as Wedemeyer (1971: 135) once called it. As the eye is the organ of man's innermost feelings, this aspect of apartness is surely significant. We become aware that a whole emotional dimension of the interaction of the teacher and learner is lacking in distance education. The new form of teaching and learning is defined and characterized by pointing to a severe deficiency, as in a court when the judgement is announced without the accused being present.

### **Study without leaving production**

This designation is, indeed, telling. Obviously it was invented by bureaucrats

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of a state-planning institution. For them, the most important feature of distance study is the possibility that students can study without discontinuing their work. It shows how much work in production is valued and how much the products of the working force are needed. It is easy to see that this designation was coined in a socialist country: the [former] USSR. From there it was taken over by other socialist countries. There is no other designation for distance study which points to its economic advantage so bluntly. On the other hand one should not overlook the fact that it has strong ideological overtones which are important with regard to the general goal of education. This form of study appeared as an ideal solution to the problem of how practice and theory – the world of work and of theoretical investigation – can be combined and united. Small wonder that ‘study without leaving production’ was considered to be the main and regular form of higher education in the USSR for some years.

### **CATCHPHRASES**

#### **Guided didactic conversation**

Obviously, this phrase suggests that there is a communication between the teacher and the learner going on in distance education and that it is the most important structural element of it. The choice of the word ‘conversation’ reminds us that dialogue, as the basic traditional form of all teaching, applies also to distance education. The phrase suggests strongly that distance education is not simple self-study as it is organized according to the traditional pattern of teaching and learning. This phrase emphasizes the similarities between traditional face-to-face teaching and distance education rather than the differences. Implicitly, it means that without ‘guided didactic conversation’, distance education ceases to be distance education.

#### **Two-way communication in distance education**

Two-way communication became the catchphrase in distance education in the 1980s, as Keegan (1983: 83) once remarked. The people who used it again and again wanted to stress this particular attribute of distance education in order to demonstrate that again distance education is not just self-study, that the separation of student and teacher does not mean that communication between them is cut off altogether, that there are many tricks of the trade to establish and maintain two-way communication. Clearly, this phrase has been coined and is understood as an opposite to the ‘one-way communication’ of television. Perhaps this is the reason for its tremendous impact.

The first motive of those who invented this phrase and possibly also of

those who use it frequently is the desire to defend distance education. They want to criticize the opinion that in distance education the student is left alone with his or her learning material, which, as we all know, is quite often the case. They want to drive home the idea that distance education is much more similar to face-to-face education than, for instance, televised instruction.

The second motive behind the propagation of this phrase is the desire to show and mark the way in which much of the current distance education practice should and could be improved considerably.

### **‘Continuity of concern’ in distance education**

This is another phrase often used. It stresses a feature of distance education which is considered to be of vital importance and which by no means should be neglected. Those who advocate this phrase are opposed to the idea that learning packages could be really self-instructive and that the students should just work for themselves. Therefore, they consider face-to-face tutorials as constituent elements of distance education – being the bridge between the teaching material and the individual learner or a group of learners. Accordingly, they are strongly in favour of study centres. Again we can say: if this element is missing, distance education is no longer distance education. And again we can note that those who are in favour of this phrase are strongly convinced that it is necessary and possible to improve distance education.

### **Independent study**

Here, the liberation of the student from the fetters of school or college routine is emphasized. According to this notion of distance education, it is the student who determines the when, where and how of his or her learning. This phrase suggests that the student assumes more responsibility for his or her own learning than is possible in face-to-face situations. Studying in this way, the student is no longer forced to follow the lead of a teacher and is no longer subjected to the conformity pressure of the learning or peer group.

The success of this term can only be explained by referring to strong educational and political reform movement. In this respect, it has an ideological bias.

### **Industrialized form of instruction**

This characterization of distance study is being referred to quite often. Implicitly, it underlines the fact that distance study must be carefully pre-planned, prepared and organized, and that there is a division of labour, a growing use of technical equipment to work with, and the necessity of

formalized evaluations. People become aware that these and other features of distance study are structurally the same as those that can be found in an industrialized production process. Explicitly, these ideas are expressed by using the image of a teacher in the classroom working like a craftsman, as opposed to a teacher being a part of a complicated teaching-learning system organized like an industrialized process. The catchphrase 'industrialized form of instruction' helps to recognize structural elements which are typical for distance study.

### **LAY THEORIES AS THEORIES OF LEGITIMATION**

If we add up the designations referred to we get a composite picture of the content of the term 'distance education'. This picture must be necessarily illuminative. For whereas the catchphrases quoted tried to explain distance education by referring to one – considered to be the most characteristic or important – element, this composite picture will refer to seven of these elements. According to them, distance education is a special form of education in which:

- teachers and students work apart from each other – 'at a distance';
- teachers and students do not communicate 'eyeball to eyeball' with each other;
- letters (and other printed material) are exchanged with the help of the mailing system;
- the learning usually takes place in the homes of the students;
- the teaching-learning process assumes the form of self-study, however guided by the teacher;
- the teaching-learning process allows a degree of openness with regard to access, goals and methods;
- the student does not cease to work for a living as it is a study alongside work.

Evaluating this list of descriptive aspects we can see easily that distance education is not a common, but still an extraordinary way of teaching and learning. One of its characteristic features is that because of the apartness of teacher and learner certain emotional dimensions and overtones of instructional interaction are cut off. Hence it is depersonalized to a certain degree. Clearly, this is a deficiency.

On the other hand, the second characteristic feature is clearly an advantage: the student can study alongside work. This opens up the world of learning also to adults and the underprivileged who otherwise are denied the opportunity to learn and to get or continue their education.

Finally, it should be noted that there still is some ambiguity attached to