TOWARD NEW HORIZONS FOR WOMEN IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

International Perspectives

Edited by
Karlene Faith

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Foreword by Elizabeth Burge

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PREFACE

by

Karlene Faith

This book was the inspiration of Elizabeth Burge, Head of the Instructional Resources Development Unit of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and an internationally respected innovator in distance education. Liz presented the idea to Jo Campling, Editor of the Radical Forum in Education series for Croom Helm publishers, who was enthusiastic. Liz then communicated the idea to members of the Women's International Network (WIN) of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), at meetings in Melbourne, Australia in August 1985. Delegates from Fiji, Israel, Sweden, Turkey, Canada, Kenya, Australia, West Germany and New Zealand immediately volunteered to contribute articles; following the ICDE meetings, further offers came from distance educators in Papua New Guinea, India, England and the Netherlands. There was a clear consensus that a need existed for documentation of women's work in this rapidly expanding phenomenon in global educational systems. During the past decade women have produced a substantial body of work related to women's needs and experiences as students and practitioners within conventional educational settings. Distance educators have benefited from this research while realizing that the experience of women in distance education is likewise relevant to the interests of educators in more traditional contexts.

Given that this would be the first published book on women in distance education, and given the nascent stage of the research in this area, it was agreed that we would take a case study approach, with each author independently identifying the relevant issues within her own professional and regional context. The contributors to this volume are strikingly varied in terms of cultural, national, religious, educational, family and class backgrounds. They do not represent unified ideological perspectives, feminist or otherwise. Their levels of experience vary, as do the foci of their expertise. And yet, their remarkable diversity notwithstanding,

there are common themes which recur again and again, demonstrating global and cross-cultural convergences of women's concerns. One of my keenest challenges as an editor, in this regard, was to reduce thematic repetition without removing from the reader's view the realization that, however variable the particulars, the contributors echo one another's general perceptions and theoretical conclusions. Whether or not they represent a global "feminist" awakening, their collective voices make an unambiguous statement about universal similarities in female experience and response. Even taking into account cultural, social, political and economic variables, it is clear from this volume of articles that women throughout the world are expanding their horizons; for many women, distance education is the vehicle for this development. Indeed, perhaps the most provocative and paradoxical observation to be made concerning distance education is that while, on the one hand, it encourages individual development and choice, on the other hand, it colludes with traditional gender roles and expectations by facilitating women's confinement to the home.

* * *

On a different note, the clearest distinction between distance education (that is, home study) and face-to-face classroom instruction is in methodology, and new technologies have been a factor in the rapid growth of the worldwide distance education movement. At the same time, global inequities of resources and different cultural styles of communication preclude any universal prescriptions for appropriate methodologies in distance education. Therefore, for example, while Canadian authors in this volume attest to the value placed in their country on high-tech telecommunications systems, authors from other nations suggest that dependency on the written word for interaction with students is not perceived as a negative limitation. The question as to whether some "delivery systems" are more effective than others (taking goals and context into account) is one that female distance educators share with their male colleagues, and it is hoped that articles in this volume will help stimulate further evaluative research in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The compilation of the manuscript for this book has been an outstanding team endeavour conducted under the generous auspices of Simon Fraser University (SFU) in British Columbia, Canada. Dr. J. Colin Yerbury, Director of the SFU Centre for Distance Education within the Office of Continuing Studies, offered vital encouragement and facilitated access to university resources. I am very grateful to him, as I am to all other individuals whose talents and generosity of time and spirit made this project feasible. I offer my special thanks to:

- Elizabeth Burge, whose contacts and expertise enhanced the book's development and whose long-distance friendship, counsel and sense of humour kept my confidence afloat.
- Barbara Lange, who typed every word, made every needed change (time and again), caught errors on my behalf, coded the entire word-processed manuscript in preparation for typesetting, and cooperated in every way beyond the call of duty. And, through it all, she managed to get married and host her wedding.
- Laura Coles, upon whom I depended at every stage of the book's development. Her keen editorial skills proved indispensable both substantively in a number of chapters and in copy-editing throughout. Laura also prepared the index and she coordinated the multi-faceted final stages of the production, ensuring synchrony among all the other members of the team. Her myriad professional skills combined with her gentle demeanor lightened the load for everyone concerned. Laura's participation was all the more remarkable because she had to commute to the university by ferry from her country home on the B.C. coast.
- Dr. June Sturrock, my esteemed colleague and valued friend, who rallied to my aide on many occasions during the year in

which the book was developed. She listened sensitively to my concerns and found solutions for them. She contributed a chapter, and her knowledge, insight and editorial acumen improved my own work and that of several other contributors.

- Elizabeth Carefoot, a respected independent artist as well as an illustrator with the SFU Instructional Media Centre, who applied her considerable talents to the book's design and layout and whose bright spirit and enthusiasm for the project made our collaboration a joyful one. (It is also worth mentioning that Elizabeth has a reputation as one of Canada's most renowned belly dancers!)
- Rupindera Rai, who provided library assistance and who skillfully and patiently instructed me on how to use the word-processor.
- Kay Uno, who respectfully and expertly handled the reams of correspondence and telegrams exchanged between our office and contributors from many nations, and whose clear eye for detail saved me from some potential embarrassments.
- Members of the Executive of the International Council for Distance Education—notably Elizabeth Burge, Gisela Pravda and Maureen Smith, and ICDE President, Kevin Smith—for their strong support of the Women's International Network and this project.
- Charles Chadwick and Ken Wallace of the British Council in Ottawa, and Barbara Davis in London, for facilitating contacts in England.
- Jo Campling, the series editor, whose belief in the project led us to the respected imprint of Croom Helm.
- Sue Joshua, Croom Helm in-house editor, who kindly responded to all my questions and who patiently accommodated delays in the manuscript's completion.
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- Dr. Simon Verdun-Jones, Director of the SFU School of Criminology, whose respect for the value of distance education and

international collaboration provided me with needed encouragement and time away from routine course development responsibilities.

- The staff of the SFU Centre for Distance Education—Catherine Porter, Christine Dempster, Debbie Sentance, Teresa Book, Carol Lane, Leila Hargreaves, Deanne Mackie, Mindy Ferrier, Lesley Rougeau and Karen Saxton, and administrators Dawn Howard and Hannah Hadikein—for their collegial and practical support, and Eddy Chan, SFU photographer, who graciously took our pictures.
- Ellen Sangster, of the SFU Computing Services Typesetting Service who, with assistance from Jill Whaley, transformed the completed draft of the book into a camera-ready manuscript and who assured the project's favourable completion in miracle time.

I am especially grateful to each of the women who authored articles for this collection—for their promptness in submitting their work, their flexibility in responding to editorial suggestions, their patience with Canada's peculiar postal system, their many personal kindnesses to me, and above all for the good work they do and the thought and care they bring to it. Our hope is that this collective effort will be for some readers an enlightening introduction to distance education, and that it will also benefit our colleagues around the world with a deeper appreciation of women's concerns and contributions to the field.

Finally, for sheer inspiration I thank my longtime and long-distance friend Leslie, who through many years of unavoidable isolation has succeeded in completing two Bachelor of Arts degrees and is now headed for a Master's degree—and has done it all as a first-rate distance education student. – *K.F.*

FOREWORD

by

Elizabeth Burge

Elizabeth J. Burge worked as a librarian and library designer in Australia and was educated at the University of Adelaide, the Salisbury College of Advanced Education and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). She is currently head of the Instructional Resources Development Unit of OISE, which is the Graduate School of Education of the University of Toronto. She is also responsible for the development of distance mode M.Ed. courses run by OISE throughout Ontario. Her field development, teaching and writing interests centre around developing stronger links between theory and practice relating to the design of adult learning. Liz has been active in the ICDE, of which she is Vice-President, the Women's International Network, of which she is the Chair, and the Canadian Association for Distance Education.

"Light a candle, don't curse the dark."

The old exhortation is an appropriate metaphor for this book. After over one hundred years of formal distance education, we confront the darkness of the unwritten experience of women as distance mode learners and educators. This book is the first known published compilation of the experience of women in international distance education. This initial candle therefore has its own style, values and intensity—all of which Karlene Faith addresses in the context-setting first chapter.

But the book has more significance than in being a record of past achievement and future concerns. Its emergence is very close in time to two important fiftieth anniversaries, each of which is part of our personal and professional histories.

I

In 1938, *Three Guineas* was published, authored by the English feminist and writer Virginia Woolf. In a first-person style that claimed the legitimacy of a woman's perception of the world, she argued strongly that women's access to education was essential for their economic independence. This independence in turn, Woolf believed, was essential for a critical intellectual autonomy in the world. Education, however, as it had been structured up to the mid-1930s in the United Kingdom, was inhibiting both access to and development of independence because of the limits of its intellectual resources for learning. "Language structures, categories of analysis, and criteria of what was worth knowing [arising from male domination of knowledge production and use] was so androcentric as to severely handicap women's capacity for self-understanding and communication" (Pierson, 1984:7). Woolf argued for "finding new words and creating new methods" (1986:164). She wanted a new and radically different education, one that would produce a different kind of person who valued a civilized existence, in balance between private and public worlds: "Let it be built on lines of its own... Let the pictures and books be new... or it should teach the art of understanding other people's lives and minds" (p. 39).

Woolf's arguments have, since 1938, supported those writers and educators who value feminist approaches and those who argue against gender bias and for a balance of "feminine" and "masculine" in our world (e.g., Nelson, 1977; Salner, 1985). Rich (1979) has described their activities as "a feminist renaissance," and her description is an appropriate context for the writers of this present book:

> that in the struggle to discover women and our buried or misread history, feminists are doing two things: questioning and re-exploring the past, and demanding a humanization of intellectual interests and public measures in the present. In the course of this work, we are recovering lost sources of knowledge and of spiritual vitality, while familiar texts are receiving a fresh critical appraisal, and the whole process is powered by a shift in perspective far more extraordinary and influential than the shift from theology to humanism of the European Renaissance (p. 126).

McCormack, for example, has suggested recently that the new academic freedom will be one of "affirmative access" — "the right to speak and be heard in a language that is your own, to define an

agenda and set priorities, and to set standards of performance" (1986:2).

This kind of access is needed because we know that the female experience of education differs from the male experience (Belenky *et al.*, 1986). That difference cannot be explained adequately by arguments about inherent male and female characteristics, but rather by the impacts of very early gender-based socialization, the consequent sets of achievement expectations, and conditions of schooling. "Women's ways of knowing" and some of their preferred ways of learning are challenging educators to rethink how they can help women learn (Clinchy *et al.*, 1985).

The contributors to this book illustrate what Martin calls a "gender-sensitive" approach: "Taking gender into account when it makes a difference and ignoring it when it does not, such an ideal allows us to build into curricula, instructional methods, and learning environments ways of dealing with trait genderization and with the many and various other gender-related phenomena that enter into education today" (1986:10).

Women distance educators are still taking initial steps toward recognizing the presence of women and girls as learners. At the research level, as evidenced in this book, there is new attention to context-embedded phenomena. Some procedural limitations of research designs and rigid scientific procedures (Scheuneman, 1986) have been challenged. One doesn't want to over-simplify the "context-embedded/context-removed" distinction, but it points to a need for an integration of different epistemological approaches and a recognition that gender-related and feminist issues in writing and research must be acknowledged (Miller and Swift, 1980; Poff, 1985; Eichler, in press). Scheuneman argues that the needed integration of male and female perspectives in educational research parallels the integration of male and female behaviour in our personal lives; my argument is that the professional arena of distance education research and practice needs to show integrated perspectives much more than it has to date. But this is a long-term goal. A shorter-term goal has to be a wider recognition of the experience of women students and educators: a naming of the realities and the problems. Developing new concepts or new definitions of old concepts is needed before "feminist explanatory models and feminist epistemology" (Poff, 1985) can be built as sturdy foundations for distance education practices.

II

Across the Atlantic and west to the Pacific, in Victoria, British Columbia, distance educators gathered in 1938 for the first conference of the then International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE). Thirty of the eighty-eight listed delegates were women. Since then twelve more international conferences have been held with large increases in the number of delegates. The 13th world conference in Melbourne attracted approximately six hundred listed delegates—more than a 65% increase over the 1938 attendance. But that steady growth has not applied to women delegates. Judging from published figures for eight of the thirteen conferences, one of the best years for women's attendance was 1957, when 51% of the delegates were women. At the largest conference, in Melbourne in 1985, 24% of the 596 listed delegates were women. With so many women involved at the grassroots level in distance education internationally—as educators and administrators as well as learners—their low conference attendance figures have to be illustrative of the same barriers and realities for women that Woolf had seen fifty years earlier.

The WIN candle was lit at the 1982 world conference of the ICCE in Vancouver, B.C. where 25% of the 374 delegates were women, and the host was Audrey Campbell. They helped change the name International Council for Correspondence Education to the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), to reflect positive and innovative distance education methods. But they also experienced some conference realities that were not felt as positive or innovative: for example, exclusive "he-man" language and other indicators of marginalization and male control of knowledge production and transmission. Students and teachers alike were referred to as he or him—very rarely as she or her.

Balancing these discomforts were reassurances—the indicators of respect for and belief in each others' experience as women educators, and strong shared commitment to distance education and to providing radical means of helping people learn.

Before the 1982 conference ended, the Women's International Network (WIN) had been established. While its goals are specific to women, it operates as an integral part of the ICDE and shows that the organization is losing its androcentric bias (at least some of it!). Six goals emerged from a post-conference survey of all female ICDE members (Burge, 1983):

- sharing of ideas and experience on a regular basis
- developing a professional and personal support system
- analyzing women's roles in distance education
- conducting research and disseminating results
- meeting new colleagues and staying in contact
- addressing the needs of female distance learners

These goals have been met through newsletters, workshops, individual networking, activity at ICDE world conferences, and now through this book. It is fair to say that since 1982 WIN has shown signs of progressing through Janeway's three stages of understanding power relationships—disbelief and questioning, bonding and organizing for action (1980).

WIN's presence at the 1985 ICDE conference in Melbourne was a landmark event. Greater recognition of issues affecting women was evident; there was serious attention paid to non-sexist language guidelines for writers, and inclusive language was used in the conference sessions. WIN held special sessions on issues relating to women; these sessions were notable for their intensity and for the recognition that a lot of research into women in distance education is needed.

While talk about women distance learners and educators has been plentiful, writing and research has not. In all the issues of two journals, *Teaching at a Distance* and *Distance Education,* since 1974 and 1980 respectively, only six articles have been overtly concerned with women (Peacock *et al.,* 1978 and 1979; Swarbrick, 1978 and 1980; Thornton, 1986; Tremaine and Owen, 1984). The strong emergence of male writers to define and explain their perspectives on the field of distance education has not been paralleled by activity by female writers. The research lacks a balance between rigorous positivist (e.g., experimental) and rigorous naturalistic (e.g., ethnographic) epistemological paradigms. Neither has the research to date, with rare exception, been noted for extensive use and explorations of feminist epistemological frameworks (for discussions of this problem, see Gilligan, 1982; Poff, 1985; Salner, 1985; Belenky *et al.,* 1986). Few studies have used Woolf's "new words" and "new methods" to explore how the construction of knowledge is built into the design of distance courses,

the impacts of gender-based contexts on that construction, the particular experience of women-learners from phenomenological perspectives, and feminist research approaches. Kelly and Elliott have indicated the dearth of general published scholarship on women's education, up to 1982, and their summary is appropriate for us:

> The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of excellent research studies on very important topics concerning women—their roles and relative status, their participation in the work force and in politics, their contribution to economic development, and so forth. This scholarship is rich and highly relevant for understanding the significance of education to women's lives. However, most of it does not directly consider education. We learn little from this body of knowledge about why women attend school, what they learn in school, how education affects them, or whether education makes a contribution to improving their lives apart from class, ethnicity, and other social background factors (1982:1).

It is no accident that this book is set in a growing literature that values the experience of women students, teachers, researchers and administrators—a literature recently described as "The New Scholarship on Women and Education" *(Educational Researcher,* special issue, 1986).

The first flickerings of the candle that is this book grew in August 1984 when I discussed with Jo Campling of Croom Helm an idea for a book about women in international distance education. Jo's support of the idea and her encouragement to continue planning led to more detailed discussions a year later at a WIN meeting in Melbourne. We decided to proceed under the able editorship of Dr. Karlene Faith of Simon Fraser University, a criminologist and distance educator by profession, a feminist by conviction. Since September 1985, Karlene has sheltered, trimmed and nurtured the candle to increase its power and light. Without her skill, persistence against great odds, good humour and unshakeable belief in the legitimacy of women's needs and experience of the world, the candle would have flickered out. Without the support of Dr. Colin Yerbury and Simon Fraser University, Karlene would not have had access to all the institutional resources needed for her work.

Enjoy this book. Be impressed. It is unique as a first event and in its feminist style. It illuminates experience, it celebrates achievement, and it reveals inequities. It also seeks companions against the dark.

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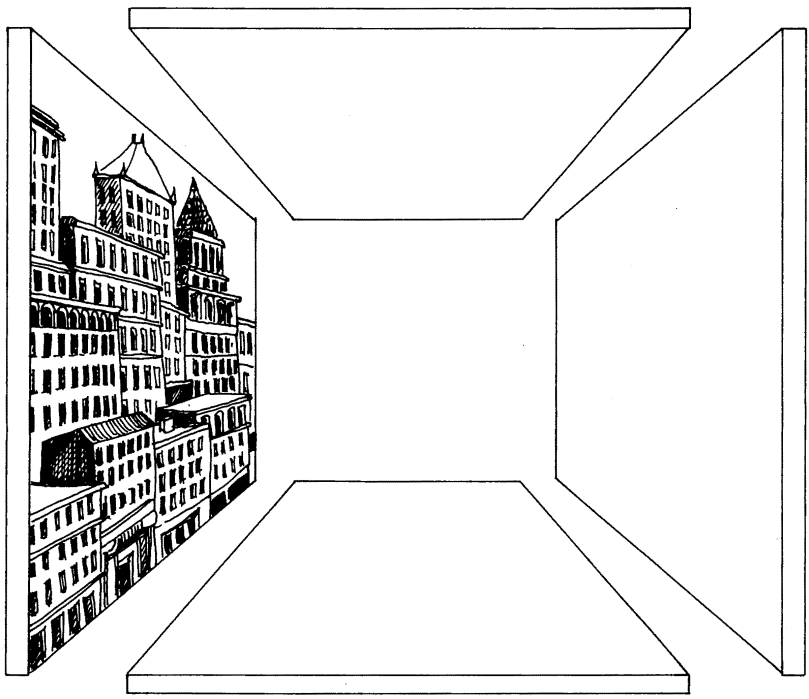
INTRODUCTION



NAMING THE PROBLEM

by

Karlene Faith

Karlene Faith was born in Saskatchewan (Canada) in 1938. She studied at the Université de Poitiers (France), the Centre for the Study of Intercultural Documentation (Mexico) and the University of California in Santa Cruz (UCSC), where she received a B.A. in Anthropology (completing field work in Jamaica, West Indies) and a Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness. She taught courses at a number of universities in women's studies, criminology, music history and Third World studies and has published in these areas. She worked for the Peace Corps in Eritrea, East Africa; in California, she coordinated programmes in community schooling, women's studies, cross-cultural field studies and prison education. Since 1982 Karlene has been at Simon Fraser University (British Columbia) as Distance Education Coordinator for the School of Criminology, where she also teaches courses on women and criminal justice. She is the mother of four grown children and has one grandchild.

> The desire for education... is a desire which springs from no conceit of cleverness, from no ambitions of the prizes of intellectual success as it is sometimes falsely imagined, but from the conviction that for many women to get knowledge is the only way to get bread, and still more from the instinctive craving for light which in many is stronger than the craving for bread (Josephine Butler, 1868).

Introduction

The challenges encountered by women within the distance education enterprise reflect universal educational inequities, which will be discussed in this introductory chapter. Approximately two-thirds of the world's illiterate adult population are women (UNESCO, 1984), and even in countries with a high literacy level women are significantly underrepresented in positions of educational authority. In most countries, curriculum development, instructional design and methodology, administration and textbook authorship are conducted primarily from the perspectives of male educators. At the primary school level 52% of the world's

teachers are female (Taylor, 1985:77), but principals, superintendents and others in decision- and policy-making positions, at all levels of schooling, are predominantly male (Sexton, 1976:58; Acker and Piper, 1984; Sivard, 1985:21; Shakeshaft, 1986). School enrolments and educational attainment levels, as reported in a 1985 world survey, indicate a continuation of the biases against females, with a disturbing increase in the imbalances:

> In 1950 there were 27 million more boys than girls enrolled in primary and secondary levels of education; currently there are 80 million more boys than girls enrolled....In developing countries two-thirds of the women over the age of 25 (and about half the men) have never been to school (Sivard, 1985:5).

Student enrolments in many industrialized nations are now evenly balanced from elementary school through undergraduate university study. However, female participation at the graduate level declines sharply, and females commonly constitute fewer than 15% of all tenured university faculty positions (Roberts, 1984:7). Thus, even when the persevering female student succeeds in completing a Master's or Doctorate degree, she remains, to use Virginia Woolf's parlance, an Outsider (1938:106).

Conventionally, the historical exclusion of women from the respected ranks of the academy is blamed on women: women are deficient in natural intellectual ability; women are temperamentally unstable, and they lack motivation; women's domestic preoccupations preclude public life; and so on (see, for example, Newman, 1985 and Shapiro, 1987). Such perceptions of women were crystallized in the teachings of virtually all major religions and were further legitimized by the philosophical underpinnings of global political systems, aided and abetted even by great revolutionary thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In 1762, he wrote a critique of eighteenth-century schooling practices in which he proposed many of the ideas that were later to permeate progressive models of education in Europe and in North America. And while Rousseau surely advanced the necessity of a student-centred approach to teaching, he failed entirely to grasp the contradictions between his liberationist theories on the one hand and his teleological view of female destiny on the other. To wit:

> The whole education of women ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honored by them, to raise them when young, to care for them when grown, to

> counsel them, to console them, to make their lives agreeable and sweet—these are the duties of women at all times, and [these duties] ought to be taught from childhood (1979:365).

Throughout history women have vigorously challenged the concept of preordained female subservience. Not until the twentieth century, however, have women been able to organize world-wide initiatives toward rectifying the imbalances. Distance education is one of the educational arenas in which women in numbers are now speaking out.

Women and Distance Education

Distance education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling. Teachers and students are separated by physical distance, and the means by which they communicate range from basic print materials and the use of postal service to highly sophisticated communications technologies. In the early twentieth century, children living in isolated regions benefited from government-sponsored home study programmes as a means of achieving an education. My own grandparents, Canadian pioneers and prairie homesteaders, relied greatly on home study for the education of their twelve children, and it was my grandmother who supervised this activity. Indeed, there was pressure on girls from pioneer families to be highly literate so that they could one day, in turn, educate their own children. The importance of women to the early home study enterprise was acknowledged by the noted Australian scholar Geoffrey Bolton, in his address to the 1985 meetings of the International Council for Distance Education in Melbourne. He states:

> One side-effect of correspondence education which appears to have been less widely publicised than it deserved was its reliance on the labour of wives and mothers as supervisors and teachers. The new democracies have always tended to regard the transmission of culture as an interest for women. It was taken for granted that as the men of the household would be fully occupied with their farm duties the children's mother would accept the responsibility of organising the receipt and despatch of correspondence materials, overseeing the students to ensure that they got on with their assignments diligently and regularly, and in general fitting in the role of surrogate monitors with the thousand and one tasks of a busy pioneer wife. Few mothers had previous teaching experience of any kind and many had limited formal education. It would not have been surprising if in the process

> of helping their children with their education many mothers experienced some stimulus to their own intellectual interests (Bolton, 1986:17-18).

Geographic distance from educational institutions is no longer the single motivation for entering a distance education programme. Adults whose employment demands and/or family responsibilities preclude school attendance make up a major share of distance education enrolments. People who prefer guided or tutored independent study to classroom attendance likewise turn to distance education programmes. However, as the papers in this volume attest, adult distance learners more often share the single fact of having enrolled in a home study programme as the only or as the most viable option for advancing their education. And whereas in the past home study was perceived as inferior to "real" schooling, developments in recent decades of high-quality study materials, access to external library services, increasing sophistication in tutorial methods and myriad uses of technology have significantly advanced both the quality, we believe, and the reputation, certainly, of distance education. Economy and flexibility continue to be the most obvious characteristics of home study, but this method is no longer assumed to be less effective than classroom learning (see, for example, Daniel *et al.*, 1982). Over four hundred institutions in sixty-one countries now offer home study in twenty-six languages, serving over two million people in accredited programmes ranging from basic literacy to post-graduate studies (plenary session, ICDE, August 14, 1985, Melbourne).

The high level of enrolment by women in many home study programmes world-wide in part reflects the still-prevalent assumption that a woman's place is in the home. And whereas female students are commonly employed at least parttime, a significant share of them are indeed homemakers. For example, a study of enrolments at the Open University in England found that in 1975 women represented 42% of all new enrolments, and one-third of these women were occupationally self-defined as Housewife (McIntosh, 1976:vi-vii). The determination of such women to expand their knowledge and gain new skills is testimony to the global perception that females need and deserve to be educated no less than their brothers. Whether or not they get married and whether or not they become mothers, women are insisting as never before that their exclusion from educational domains is unacceptable.

This book documents case studies of the incremental progress in a number of distance education programmes in various countries.

Based on distance education literature, conference attendance and informal observation we can estimate that as many as a third of all distance educators globally are female. Student enrolments in distance education vary, but females constitute the majority in many programmes. The purpose of presenting these papers and case studies is primarily to document selected examples of women's contributions to and female participation within distance education. We are also concerned with how our presence is relevant to education in the larger context. We hope that this international forum will generate more discussion, exchange and publications.

The Quest for Equality

Given national disparities, as identified by the contributors to this volume, we cannot generalize about the status of females in education. We do know that women in virtually every country are promoting equal educational opportunities for females, and that initiatives since the 1960s have occurred in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as in Europe, North America, the Pacific, India and so on (Jayawardena, 1986; Kelly and Elliott, 1982; Sivard, 1986; Smock, 1981; Thomson, 1986). We also know, however, that in most countries females are still undereducated—relative both to males and to their own needs. Even in countries which show a commitment to providing more access to education for girls and women, much work remains to be done to improve the quality of education. The question has been raised as follows: "Does education enable women to widen their roles beyond the household, mitigating the impact of marriage, childbearing, and child rearing on women's participation and status in social, economic, and political life?" (Kelly and Elliott, 1982).

Global societal demands for democratization have accelerated in recent decades and, notwithstanding clear differentials of opportunity according to class position and other structural inequities, women in all parts of the world have awakened to the discriminations they have suffered simply because they are female. Whether they enter a study programme for personal enhancement or to improve their employment opportunities, the large numbers of women returning to school via distance education signify the importance of this learning mode as a means for women to expand their horizons.

The goals of social, economic and political empowerment are implicit in struggles for liberation. Whereas structural changes in

power imbalances require major challenges to the status quo, on an individual basis "liberation" is often perceived as achievable through education. The rhetoric (if not always the reality) of western nations which prize individualism has traditionally emphasized that education is the ticket to success: that is, occupational choice, increased income and higher status. Educators in developing nations have likewise posited education as the route toward both individual advancement and constructive social change. Clearly education is no guarantee against poverty, social injustice and powerlessness, and wherever these exist women and children suffer the most. (See, for example, Sidel, 1986; Sivard, 1985; Thomson, 1986). Yet, to organize effectively against these conditions, education is universally perceived as essential.

Given this widespread confidence in education, it is not surprising that so many women have turned to it in an effort to improve their lives. Increased access to basic adult education programmes, vocational programmes and academic study through distance education reinforce this belief that individuals, and even whole societies, can transcend inherited limits through increased knowledge. Despite the undeniable drawbacks of many affirmative action admission and hiring policies, the effort to increase participation by women and other political minority groups conveys the clear message that to qualify as a democracy a society must give equal educational (and employment) opportunity to all members.

The ideal of equal opportunity is not, however, as straightforward as it might seem. To some it indicates a commitment to equal access to the existing system; to others it signifies a challenge to that system. Certainly, as many scholars have discussed at length, "equal" does not translate as "identical" (see especially Ayim, 1986, and Weiner, 1986). Fennema and Ayer convincingly argue that equal access to a male-biased education cannot be construed as an advance for women and that instead of calling for equality in education we should be seeking equity—allowing for curriculum diversity which addresses the needs of various student constituencies and which takes socially inherited inequities into account (Fennema and Ayer, 1984). Jane L. Thompson states unequivocally:

> It is not merely a question of improving the chances of women to compete in a man's world...but to demand a radical change in the nature of what is being offered. This implies at least an equal share in its control, at least an equal share in the determination of what

> counts as valuable knowledge within it, and at least an equal recognition that what is important about women's experience of the world is as valid as men's. Without such *real* equalities, notions of "equality of opportunity" are essentially rhetorical (1983:93).

Each of the contributors to this volume is a distance educator who recognizes that women's status can be measured in part by their degree of access to education, even though educational attainment does not necessarily translate into equitable economic returns either in developing countries (Smock, 1981) or in those that are highly industrialized. In Canada, for example, the numbers of women enrolled in undergraduate education actually exceeds that of men (CCLOW, 1986a); however, the wage gap between men and women in Canada is greater than in any other industrialized nation except Japan (CCLOW, 1986b:7). As several chapters emphasize, male distance students are typically motivated by the expectation of greater occupational advantages. Many female students, on the other hand, are more likely to select courses for general interest, with little confidence that their newly acquired knowledge will significantly enhance their employment or promotion opportunities. This lack of confidence is related to class as well as to gender. In defining theoretical parameters within which women's lower status can be examined relative to education, Arlene McLaren succinctly sums up the dilemma:

> In class-structured societies, it is argued, schools are crucial in ensuring that children inherit the class positions of their families. Similarly, it is claimed in gender-structured societies, education is crucial in ensuring that males achieve positions of greater economic rewards, power, prestige and authority than females (1985:61).

The issues of gender and class are inseparable for women, given that a woman's class position is generally determined by her father's or husband's status and income. The reality that the vast majority of the world's females are dependent on resources acquired through and/or controlled by males is a commonplace explanation for the perpetuation of female subordination. Further, as Audrey Smock remarks in her cross-cultural study of women in education:

> It seems likely that the more pronounced the inequities in income distribution, the more highly stratified the society...and the more traditional the basis for social differentiation, the poorer the educational prospects would be for the majority of women, over and above the disadvantages they share with males from lower social and economic strata (1981:15).

Thus, women are caught in double (or triple) jeopardy: even when as individuals they overcome systemic economic (and/or racial) barriers, they still remain subject to those barriers that are engendered by sex discrimination.

Strategies for organizing against class disparities generally focus on male-dominated labour market issues or questions of foreign imperialism and only peripherally address issues of sexism (Yates, 1986; Sargent, 1981). The struggle for women's liberation, on the other hand, has been informed not only by the oppressive conditions of women's lives but also by a recognition that economic, racial, sexual and all other structural forms of discrimination against powerless groups are inherent in a patriarchal model of social organization. The revolutionary goal, therefore, is not merely to alleviate women's suffering just to the point at which their misery balances that of the men in their status group; rather, it is to challenge effectively the very foundations of status differentials. Educators may exaggerate the potential role of education in this process toward genuine democracy; knowledge and understanding do not necessarily lead to concerted social action. However, it is surely relevant, as Paulo Freire demonstrated so brilliantly, that education which encourages a critical consciousness can be a first step toward human liberation (1972). Indeed, it is almost routine within developing countries that at the inception of national independence women have fought for the right to be educated as a primary expression of female emancipation (Jayawardena, 1986). It is at this stage that, for many women, the question of how to combine study with mothering, homemaking and, often, an outside job, becomes problematic. For such women who are determined to advance their formal education, home study may be the only option.

The Student at Home

Women who enrol in distance education programmes, including those who are employed, commonly cite their responsibilities as mothers of young children as their reason for choosing home study. As increasing numbers of women enter the paid work force from necessity, the need for high-quality universal childcare facilities becomes indisputable. However, this need has not been met. In most countries it is expected that mothers will be somehow always home with their children, even if they must be employed to support them. Countries engaged in educational reform commonly intro-

duce courses specifically for women on family care and nutrition, with the straightforward implications that 1) women have a sex-bound responsibility for these domestic activities, and 2) women do not share with men the same need for knowledge and skills required by public life or the paid labour force. Such sex-specific curriculum, based on gender-role traditions, may advance family health, which must be the first priority. However, it will not advance the fundamental struggle for equality. Ultimately, neither justice in the abstract nor a concrete commitment to human development can be seen as a priority within an approach to education which exclusively delegates females to the least socially empowering activities.

The conflict that many women experience between their need and desire to care for their families and their need to study, both for personal fulfillment and for job-related purposes, is particularly poignant for the single mother whose children are dependent on her earning capabilities. Even in two-parent families, with both adults working outside the home, the mother is expected to assume primary responsibility for children and housekeeping. Many women attempt to re-educate their husbands as to the fundamental inequity in such arrangements, apparently with little success. Moreover, husbands sometimes actively oppose their wives' efforts to gain an education. Although it is likely that most men, as well as women, are supportive of their spouse's educational aspirations, several female adult students have reported to me that their mates have refused to accommodate their need for quiet study time. Colleagues tell me about extreme cases where women's husbands have hidden or damaged their study materials and assignments in efforts to sabotage their educational ambitions. (I have never heard of a case where a woman did this to her husband; however, although it would be structurally anomalous, we cannot presume this does not happen.)

Related to the problems of family-responsibility imbalances, women often identify a need for more contact with others in similar circumstances. In this book, several authors address the issue of a support system and show how a number of distance education programmes have created opportunities for student interaction.

Female distance educators often feel isolated too. The 1985 meetings of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), held in Melbourne, Australia, were attended by almost 600 distance educators from over 60 countries. Under the inspired leadership of

Liz Burge, more than half of the approximately 150 women in attendance at this conference gathered at several meetings to meet each other and to strengthen the ICDE Women's International Network. The recognition, voiced in Melbourne, that women in the same profession need to increase communication with one another *as women* strengthened our resolve to develop this first book on women in distance education.

Feminist Perspectives

The contributors to this volume represent thirteen nations and a wide range of priorities as distance educators, yet all are concerned with the planning of curricula which not only respect female interests and experience but also challenge gender-dichotomous role and value systems, which place *de facto* limitations on girls' aspirations and expectations. Public education in many countries, for as long as a century, has demanded that girls shall have the same learning opportunities as boys. However, both the overt and the hidden curricula have issued clear messages that it is boys, not girls, who are being trained to conduct the world's business (Chisholm and Holland, 1986); girls only need to learn how to cook, clean and care for babies and other people. The basic premises of public education continue to reflect patriarchal imperatives. In 1978, Dorothy Smith, an oft-quoted Canadian scholar, articulated the problem as follows:

> Women have largely been excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered. There is a circle effect. Men attend to and treat as significant what men say. The circle of men whose writing and talk was significant to each other extends backwards in time as far as our records reach. What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men. Men listened and listen to what one another said....This is how a tradition is formed (1978:281).

The uses of language, definitions of meaning, construction and deconstruction of paradigms, underlying epistemological assumptions, interpretations of history, theory-making and practical learning methodologies have all been transmitted, within the diverse range of cultural and national contexts, through male-dominated conduits of judgement. Into this solid mass of patriarchal authority and tradition, twentieth-century feminists (including some males) have ventured—with some trepidation and considerable courage. Notable among such individuals is Dale Spender. In response to

those who take an individualistic and ahistorical view of feminist social analyses and who, therefore, feel personally and unfairly accused of perpetrating travesties against women in education, her comments are relevant.

> Feminists have come to appreciate that the invisibility of women is not a problem of individual male historians or philosophers conducting a personal campaign to keep women out of their respective disciplines (although such individuals can still be found) but a *structural problem* which has been built into the production of knowledge. Because it has been primarily men who have determined the parameters, who have decided what would be problematic, significant, logical and reasonable, not only have women been excluded from the process *but the process itself can reinforce the 'authority' of men and the 'deficiency' of women* (1981:2).

Not every contributor to this book would identify as a feminist, given the political connotations and the negative stereotypes so often attached to that word. And yet, these educators are describing radical alternatives to the educational status quo. They are devising innovative approaches to doing their work, leading us toward new ways of learning and educating within inherited structures, asking questions that until recently would have been considered heretical, and leading us toward new horizons.

Whereas distance education curricula, as in conventional schooling, continue to be dominated by patriarchal constructions of knowledge, models for change are in the making. The architects of these changes no longer acquiesce to traditional assumptions about what must be taught, how it must be taught, or to whom. They gauge truth not only in terms of what is "proven" but also in terms of what is possible, assuming that truth must include experiential and subjective realities as well as objective and quantifiable data. They recognize that the practice of handing down one objective "truth" is both arrogant and limiting. In fact, they no longer uncritically accept "objectivity," as traditionally defined, as a viable concept (Spender, 1981:5-8). In this regard, Adrienne Rich quotes from filmmaker Michelle Clinton: "The culture assumes in general, that male films (read art, journalism, scholarship, etc.) are objective and female films are subjective; male subjectivity is still perceived as *the objective point of view* on all things, in particular women" (1979:14).

Articulate feminists must continually face the charge that their work is "biased," not objective, because their observations and analyses often include advocacy and perspectives drawn from per-

sonal experience. Individuals who are commited to preserving the status quo are surely likewise biased, whether or not they are prepared to recognize or acknowledge it. (This would include all those who ignore research that focuses on women, because they find the subject "too limiting"; such critics are apparently oblivious to the irony in this judgement.) The problem here involves not just the collection of accurate facts but also their interpretation and implementation: what Spender calls the "politics of knowledge" (1981:7).

In 1973, in the United States, a major report on women in higher education was conducted by the prominent Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Presented at a time when little research had been done in this area, the report confirmed the negative situation experienced by women in higher education and gave impetus to institutions for making needed changes. Reflective of that need was the fact that of the nineteen esteemed members of the Commission, only two were female (Carnegie, 1973:viii). By the late 1980s, the voice of authority concerning women's predicament has shifted to those who are the subject of their own research. In the past half-decade, particularly in England and North America, many women writers have exhorted educators to examine masculinist or patriarchal traditions as they affect learning and teaching in primary and secondary schools, adult education, colleges and universities, and vocational training. This literature is a direct outgrowth of the development of feminist theory over the past two decades. It also reflects on the considerable skills and energies that women have used to establish new presses, organize conferences, design curricula, build programmes and associations—in short, to show that if women are to be included in the educational enterprise in a meaningful way, that enterprise must be transformed (see, for example, Bowles, 1984, and Spender, 1981).

But the transformation is complex and problematic. Peggy McIntosh (1984:26) identifies a "sequence of thinking" related to the History discipline that shows the complexity of this transformational process:

Phase 1: Womanless History;
Phase 2: Women in History;
Phase 3: Women as a Problem, Anomaly, or Absence in History;
Phase 4: Women as History;
Phase 5: History Reconstructed, Redefined, and Transformed to include us all.

This intellectual heritage first disregards the fact of female existence then identifies those few famous women who are included in history as relevant by virtue of being exceptional. Next it acknowledges female existence as a problem, a deviance or as irrelevant and, in effect, absent. Then the balance is turned on its head, with a feminist recognition that women have at all times been central players in human development. And finally, we have the challenge presented to us in its fullest dimension, whereby we search for means by which humanity can locate our wholeness as a species.

* * *

A horizon, according to Webster's dictionary, is "the apparent junction of earth and sky, from the observer's perspective." We can also think of it as a symbolic line separating the ideal from the reality. Our distance education horizons can reflect transformations and new partnerships if we change our attitudes toward and processes of knowledge and learning. Those who have been denied their history on the bases of sex, race, class and other categories of suppression and subordination would stand strongly together on the new horizon. The ultimate and radical result would be the eradication of systemic and categorical power imbalances and a fuller development of the human capacity for excellence.

> Elitism and oppression are both incompatible with excellence. Excellence emerges neither from already knowing everything nor from not knowing anything but rather from a trust in the possibility of finding out....Excellence could be defined as clearly communicated discoveries which have consequences for thought, feeling, behavior and society....One could define liberation work as the breakdown of elitism and oppression in the world between all peoples....Liberation and knowledge are not only compatible but interdependent. [Education] can offer relevant resources for the liberation of women and...the liberation of women is essential to humanizing our knowedge (Peterson, 1982:84-85).