

AROUND THE GLOBE

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This regular column offers reviews of worldwide distance learning developments. It provides reports of international conferences and workshops, news of innovations in technology, and reviews of events, people, and institutions connected with open and distance learning practice and theory. Have you been to a distance education conference recently and would like to report on it? Do you have news on a new innovation or event that is significant for the world of distance education? Your news, conference reports and reviews of international events will be considered for inclusion in future issues of this journal. Please e-mail your contributions to: swheeler@plymouth.ac.uk.

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

When one thinks of the Middle East, one conjures up many images. We may think of idyllic pictures of the land of the Bible, of quiet oases and palm trees, stately camel trains, of veiled women and bustling, exotic market places. There are also the less palatable sights of poverty and squalor, and congested roads, filled with fumes and blaring car horns. At the extreme, we may think of the acts of violence that have recently scarred the image and saddened the world—of warring Palestinians and Israelis.

And yet, the Middle East is an area that has rich potential, not just economically, but

socially and culturally. Many of the governments of countries such as Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are beginning to invest heavily in flexible and open forms of education to raise the standards of knowledge production and equip their workforces to face the challenges of the new millennium. Whilst this troubled region reels from random acts of violence and civil unrest, there yet remain oases of calm where building for the future entails investment in distance education as a means to bridge the social divides and connect divided communities. For this issue, the Around the Globe column focuses on two such nations—Egypt and Turkey—and their current efforts to establish distance education as a means of social reform.

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Cairo, Egypt

Although it is the land of the ancient pyramids and vast deserts, the Arab Republic of Egypt also boasts some of the most technologically sophisticated telecommunications infrastructures in the world. Nestled within the foot of the Nile delta lies the Egyptian seat of government and “Jewel of the Nile”—Cairo. It was to this city of over 15 million souls, and more than six million automobiles, that I and several hundred other delegates gathered in the June heat for an international conference (a brief report later). Cairo is a bustling, noisy, fume-ridden, and cosmopolitan city, and in size, one of the world’s top five. Along the river Nile, which divides the city south to north, lay some of the most expensive and impressive buildings in Cairo, including banks, large corporate and multi-national businesses, and the high-class hotel chains. Immediately behind these towering edifices can be found squalor and deprivation. Children as young as four or five can be seen weaving between cars caught at traffic lights, defying death or injury to beg at car windows. Cairo is a city with much color also—many of the buildings in the downtown area are multi-hued, and there is plenty of character and mystique evident both in the ancient monuments and young people of the town.

The incongruity of Egypt is striking, and this was brought home to me on a visit I made to one of the largest public hospitals in Cairo. This hospital had over 2000 beds within its health care system, but the wards bore little resemblance to those we are familiar with in the Western world. Health can be a problem for visitors too, many of whom succumb to stomach infections from eating or drinking unwisely. The heat plays a role in compounding the problem—conditions are often humid—and it is easy to become dehydrated under the unblinking stare of the blazing Egyptian sun. In stark contrast to the hospital’s quality-challenged provision of care, a short series of steps down the crowded corridors brought me to a secure room bristling with the

latest in full motion videoconference technology. A demonstration and briefing by the hospital’s medical director revealed that the equipment is used regularly to update the hospital’s medical staff on some of the latest surgical and medical techniques available. Links to Western countries such as the UK and USA were commonplace, and the hospitals involved regularly collaborated in research to improve understanding. One of the universities involved in this form of research and teaching also happens to be one of the oldest in the world. Ain Shams University, built upon the foundations of the ancient University of Heliopolis (3000 BC), was the host of the First International Conference on Intelligent Computing and Information Systems on 24-26 June, 2002.

Conference Report: First International Conference on Intelligent Computing and Information Systems (ICICIS) and the Ministry Conference on Distance Education, Telemedicine and Bar-Coding

Although not strictly a conference about distance education, several of the papers presented at the ICICIS conference were oriented towards distributed learning and discussed how to connect learners with resources and remote teachers. Intelligent applications such as AI and virtual reality systems were discussed, and their roles in teaching and learning explored. The use of tracking devices, intelligent interaction with computers, distributed web-based learning systems, agent based software, streaming media, semantic portals, and voice recognition were all featured in paper presentations, indicating the high-technology focus of the conference. My own paper at this conference focused on the multiple modes of learning that can be made available to distance learners through the use of convergent technology (telematics) support. The predominantly Egyptian audience (over 200 attended) have a vested interest in developing distance education systems, due to the country's vast area,

remote rural communities, and north-south economic divide. The World Bank and other funding agencies are working within the country to develop and offer distance education opportunities to the remote communities along the Nile. Other delegates at the conference represented the UK, USA, Czech Republic, Spain, Germany, Italy, Japan, Qatar, Jordan, and France.

Another allied conference had been held the previous week at the nearby convention center. This two-day conference entitled "Distance Education, Telemedicine and Bar-Coding," was sponsored by the Egyptian Ministry of Information Technology, and attracted Egyptian academics and technical specialists from across the nation. Panel discussions and workshops mixed with the main presentations to offer the delegates a panoply of distance education applications and technologies. I was privileged to be invited to this conference to present the final keynote paper of the event, in which I reported on a project involving the training of surgeons throughout the UK and Ireland through distance education. Egypt is not merely ready for large-scale implementation of distance education, it is already doing it; the use of Internet learning resources and telecommunication based systems is already a common feature for many of the universities within Egypt. Keynote presentations by Japan's Kunihiko Fukushima (Tokyo University), Germany's Reiner Hartenstein (University of Kasierslauten), and the UK's William Edmondson (University of Birmingham) were challenging, provoking much thought and debate about the nature of computer and human intelligence, the philosophy behind the architecture of computers and the ways humans "interface" with them. Although the conference was largely technology-driven, there was a liberal lacing of psychology and learning theory throughout, both in the presentations and ensuing discussion.

Whilst attending the ICICIS conference, delegates witnessed the birth of a new academic journal. The first issue of the *International Journal of Intelligent Computing and*

Information Science was launched on the final day of the conference, and will interest many learning technologists.

The conference's social program was exceptional. Our excellent hosts provided several balmy open-air evenings when we were entertained by local musicians and artistes, several of whom were students at Ain Shams University. The program was very full, providing ample opportunities for visiting delegates to get to know each other and the Egyptian delegates, where many interesting discussions took place. An exciting but searingly hot visit to the plain of Giza on the western bank of the Nile enabled delegates to see up close some of the great wonders of the ancient world, the Pyramids and Sphinx. As foreign guests in Egypt, we were privileged to be specially invited by the authorities to view the inside of the Great Pyramid. This involved a slow climb 150 feet up a 26 degree incline to gain access to the famous burial chamber of the King. Although arduous and probably never to be repeated, our steady ascent through the Grand Gallery was breath-taking (not least because the quality of air inside the tomb was poor—it was not designed for the living, after all!), as we were able to see first hand the incredible feat of ancient engineering that resulted in a construction that has survived intact for at least 5 millennia. It was strange to consider that at that moment, with over a million tons of stone blocks above our heads, our lives depended on the engineering skills and technology of builders who were dead long before the birth of Christ. A visit to the Egyptian Museum to view the treasures of Tutankhamen and an evening cruise on the Nile completed the excellent social program of a very successful conference. The organizers are planning a second international conference in the spring of 2004, hosted in the ancient city of Luxor, site of the Valley of the Kings.

Turkey

One of the most significant distance education conferences of the '90s took place in

Ankara in June 1998. Attended by over 300 delegates, the international audience witnessed the opening of the conference by Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, (now Turkey's Prime Minister). The conference was addressed by an impressive list of distance education luminaries, including keynotes from Sir John Daniel, Michael Moore, Tony Bates, David Jonassen, and Chere Campbell Gibson. Other notable speakers included Michael Simonson and Charles Schlosser (USA), Sally Reynolds (Belgium), Elizabeth Stacey (Australia), Ugur Demiray (Turkey), Abdul Badeeh Salem (Egypt), and Susan Clayton (UK). Throughout the conference, a variety of key distance education issues were explored and

debated and many collaborations and future projects were birthed, including the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* you are now reading. It is with great pleasure then that this column welcomes a report on the latest distance education conference from Turkey, by one of our own editorial board and a member of faculty at Anadolu University, Professor Ugur Demiray. Anadolu University is the largest university on the planet, boasting a student population of over 550,000, many of whom study predominantly through distance education methods. A recent conference at Anadolu was attended by Professor Demiray, who provides us with an expansive account of proceedings:

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM REPORT: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, OPEN EDUCATION FACULTY (OEF). "NEW HORIZONS IN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY" MAY 23-25, 2002, ANADOLU UNIVERSITY, ESKISEHIR, TURKEY

Ugur Demiray

In its 20th anniversary celebrations week, the Open Education Faculty (OEF) held its First International Symposium on "New Horizons in Educational Communication and Technology," at Anadolu University, Eskisehir, Turkey between May 23 and 25, 2002. It was attended by many Turkish academics, as well as nine international presenters from Greece, Israel, Kazakhstan, Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic, and the United States. It was enlightening to hear their views and successes, as well as the problems they are still facing.

Apart from the opening and closing sessions and receptions, 8 pre-symposium workshops, 4 panels, and 23 parallel sessions were conducted during the celebration week. Pre-conference workshops took place May 20-22, followed by the three-day symposium (May 23-25). The afternoons of May 25 and 26 were reserved for sightseeing around Eskise-

hir, famous for its ancient Phrygian civilization artifacts.

The following summary is based on my notes during the symposium, the symposium program, the abstract booklet that was distributed at the symposium, and available on the symposium CD, including full text of the symposium papers. Publication of the proceedings book by Anadolu University, including discussions' and panels' texts, will be available in the near future. This is an attempt to present a summary based on the sessions and workshops, and general evaluation of the symposium.

Participants at the symposium included representatives from a number of areas, including distance education and open learning practitioners; lifelong adult education and learning professionals; distance education and open learning academic faculty; technical experts; policy experts; government, university, and

college officials of all ranks, trainers in private and public institutions and companies; and administrators, managers, and purchasers of equipment and software related to this field

The main aims of the event were: to evaluate the developments in the world with the help of plenary sessions in which the international participants present their academic studies and experiences; to evaluate distance education, which provides a lifelong and unlimited opportunity for education, and its applications in Turkey; to offer new designs, new suggestions, and to discuss the problems in this field with all academicians and practitioners; to share and exchange ideas and experiences; and to evaluate different distance education applications in Turkey with the help of paper presentations, panel discussions, and workshops (See: <http://www.anadolu.edu.tr>, Duyurular [Announcements] button).

The main theme of the symposium was "New Horizons in Educational Communication and Technology." The main theme, the six sub-topics and related issues mentioned, were discussed. But the symposium was not restricted with topics stated below. Applications on related subjects were also welcomed. Topics included: distance/open education, including management approaches, economic problems, theoretical perspectives, providing quality, and legal arrangements. For online education, the focus was upon interaction strategies, virtual communities/cultures and associated evaluation approaches. The spotlight on learning and teaching highlighted constructivist approaches, learning styles, and collaboration based teams. There was also an emphasis on instructional designs and improvements of teaching systems, learning needs, feedback systems, innovative learning/teaching strategies, and assessment/evaluation. Studies in the realm of teaching environments dealt with authoring systems, visual literacy, multimedia environment applications, interface-learner interaction, and integrated learning perspectives. Developments in the field of educational communication and its technology

were centered upon job possibilities, technological equipment, changing qualifications and, of course, the new roles for learners and teachers.

Workshop Sessions

On Monday, the first workshop was held by Marina S. McIsaac (Arizona State University, USA) and was entitled "Creating Virtual Communities." In the afternoon, a session presented by Antonis Linarakis (Hellenic Open University, Greece) was on "Comparative Study of Open, Distance and Conventional Education."

Tuesday workshops started with Charlotte L. Gunawardena (University of New Mexico, USA) on "Evaluating Online Learning: Models and Methods". Mediha Saglik and her team (Nedim Gurses, Emine Demiray, Senu Curabay and Serap Ozturk) from Anadolu University, discussed "Visual Telling for Television Course Productions" by presenting a live TV broadcast in OEF's Studio 3. This workshop was in Turkish. The team showed us the ideal condition and process of TV course materials production and its problems, which are met in the running of the OEF system. William Winn from the University of Washington, USA gave a workshop on "How to Use Virtual Reality to Support Learning."

There were four further workshops on Wednesday. In the morning, Francis Dwyer from Penn State University, USA discussed "Rapid Instructional Design: A Process" with the participants. The last presenter was Toshio Kobayashi, from Japan, National Institute of Multimedia Education who gave a paper on "Educational Reform by Multimedia Technologies in Japan."

Four commercial institutions and Atilim University, each in their expert areas, also conducted educational activities during workshops days. These commercial institutions were; Turk Telekom, Comsat-Turkey, Erel-Ersoft, and Norbo.

Thursday's General Sessions (May 23, 2002)

The first General Session began on Thursday May 23, 2002 with an opening ceremony and speeches by Ali Ekrem Ozkul (Dean of OEF), Engin Atac (Rector of Anadolu University), and Kemal Guruz (Director of the Turkish Higher Education Council). Following these, a paper was given by Yilmaz Buyukersen, a former rector of Anadolu University, and founder of Open Education Faculty. Now the Mayor of Eskisehir City, Buyukersen's talk was entitled "To Open Education from 20th Century to 21st Century." Marina S. McIsaac followed with a paper entitled "Global Distance Education: Anadolu University's Rise to Prominence." In her address, she reflected on the growth of Anadolu's Open Education System from its early days as the Open Education Faculty. She mentioned that the developments are viewed in light of the upcoming challenges posed by globalization and digital technologies. Emphasis is placed on connectedness as the defining measure of globalization, and emphasizes teacher training, shifts in pedagogy and instructional design in future distance education projects.

The panel focused on "Open and Distance Education in Turkey: Problems and Its Solving Ways" and was moderated by Ali Ekrem Ozkul-OEF, Ruhi Esirgen (Director of National Ministry of Education, EgiTEK), Nese Yalabik (Middle East Technical University), Asaf Varol (Firat University), Ibrahim Hakki Alpturk (General Director of Turk Telekom), and Abbas Guclu, Cumhuriyet Daily's education columnist who is an expert on education news. Atac began the panel with a series of statements, developments, functions, and the importance of distance education for Turkey. He offered a short biography for each panelist, and outlined their positions and responsibilities for the Open and Distance Education system in Turkey. As moderator, Atac limited each speaker to five minutes. This limit had advantages and disadvantages and, as Ibrahim Hakki Alpturk stated, it "successfully

avoided any one person dominating the agenda; but it also limited speakers who wished to structure an argument." The last speaker of the panel was Abbas Guclu, who argued that distance education in Turkey should re-structure itself absolutely as an obligation to run systems according to technological developments.

Friday's General Sessions (May 24, 2002)

On Friday, there were two keynote speakers and 15 presentations within the morning sessions. One of the keynote speakers was Charlotte "Lani" Gunawardena, who spoke about "Social Presence and the Sociocultural Context of Online Education." The other keynote speaker was William Winn from the University of Washington, whose subject was: "What Can Students Learn in Artificial Environments That They Can Not Learn in Class?" The Friday afternoon sessions hosted a total of 50 papers.

In addition to these, two more panel sessions were conducted. The first panel was on "Printed Materials Design: Anadolu University OEF Case." Levend Kilic, Hakan Aydin, Fikret Ucar, Hulya Pilanci, and Aysegul Tokbudak participated in this panel (all from Anadolu University). The second panel focused on "Distance Education Applications of National Ministry of Education." Erol Duzgun, Aynur Uzer, Zehra Adiyaman, and Mine Hicyilmaz Arslan from National Ministry of Education were the members of this panel.

Saturday's General Sessions (May 25, 2002)

Saturday was the last day of the symposium. The morning session saw one panel and 26 paper presentations. The panel focused on "Electronic Scholar Journalism in Distance Education." Ugur Demiray from Anadolu University and Editor-in-Chief of the Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education (TOJDE), Kursad Ozmen, Editor of hurriyetim.com, Arif

Altun from Izzet Baysal University and editor of *Ilkogretim Online*, and Mehmet Kucuk from Hacettepe University were members of the panel. The symposium finished with closing speech.

In summary, 99 papers prepared by 155 researchers were presented in 22 sessions and more than 500 delegates participated in the OEF's celebration week activities. The symposium registration fee was \$30USD. This fee included the symposium abstracts booklet, papers, CDs, and TOJDE's back issues CD.

Symposium bags and cups were given to the presenters as gifts.

Useful Websites

- Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education: <http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/>
- International Conference on Intelligent Computing and Information Systems (Egypt): <http://asunet.shams.eun.eg/confs/iccis2002.html>

