

## BOOK REVIEW

Daniel V. Eastmond, *Book Review Editor*

# ***Reflections on Research, Faculty and Leadership in Distance Education*, by Michael F. Beaudoin**

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*Reflections on Research, Faculty and Leadership in Distance Education*, ASF Series, Volume 8, by Michael F. Beaudoin (Germany: Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, 2004. 141 pages, \$21.00).

The Center for Research in Distance Education at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg in Germany has added its eighth volume to an already prestigious international collection of books about distance education in *Reflections on Research, Faculty and Leadership in Distance Education* by Michael F. Beaudoin. Many of the series authors would be listed in a who's who in international distance education, such as, Börje Holmberg, Otto Peters, and others; they are now appropriately joined in the series by Beaudoin, one of the United States' foremost distance education scholars.

Beaudoin, professor of distance education at the University of New England and adjunct

faculty in a master's of distance education program jointly offered by the University of Oldenburg and the University of Maryland University College, is particularly suited to make yet another significant contribution to the field in this book. He brings rare insight and foresight concerning distance education, especially about leadership, made possible as a leader in distance education theory and practice himself. His extraordinary career, now spanning nearly 40 years, has included administrative stints as associate dean, dean, and founding dean of colleges/divisions of distance/continuing education at three universities and as professor, visiting scholar, and adjunct faculty at six universities.

This book is organized differently than the majority of academic books in that most chapters, written as early as 13 years ago, have more recent epilogues appended. Beaudoin uses an engaging and conversational approach while still maintaining an academic presence.

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The author's writing style is unusually fresh, lucid, and straightforward.

In the prologue, Beaudoin tells the reader that this book was inspired in part by some of his graduate students' concern over what they considered dated readings on distance education theory, including some of his own. While he eliminated some, he retained others after having the graduate students analyze them for relevance; his students agreed that the earlier articles were still timely. Then he analyzed some of his earlier writings about faculty, research, and leadership in distance education and wrote responses he termed "epilogues." This reviewer, who, like Beaudoin's students, has a tendency to discount dated research in the field, was also amazed at the relevance of the older articles to today's situation; Professor Beaudoin got this right and his final section about the future of distance education merits more careful reading as a result.

The book is organized into seven sections or root chapters (the first section being prologue). I have written this review to address the six sections following the prologue in order, with sections three and four on faculty combined.

***RESEARCHING PRACTICE AND  
PRACTICING RESEARCH:  
A CRITIQUE OF DISTANCE  
EDUCATION RESEARCH AND  
WRITING***

All distance education researchers, beginning to advanced, would benefit from reading this chapter and its epilogue. Beaudoin points out how little research really exists in distance education and what does exist may be methodologically suspect. He posits that research should move beyond the common comparison of outcomes for students taught face-to-face in a classroom with those taught at a distance using either synchronous or asynchronous methods. He also explains that he does not consider many distance education case studies and presentations as sound research because they do not develop or test theory and as such

are not generalizable and replicable beyond their specific program.

An example of why Beaudoin's use of an epilogue was so effective appeared in his reflection on what he had written in 1991. He commented that the field "will remain undefined and undervalued until there exists more widely accepted principles of good practice"; in the epilogue he noted how a document called "Principles of Good Practice . . .," developed by a western educational compact of 15 states, has now been embraced nationwide by all six regional accreditation commissions. I noticed that the exact name for such a set of principles was that used by Beaudoin in 1991 in his call for the same; in 2001, all regional accrediting commissions formally adopted a standards document known as "Principles of Good Practice."

The author invited researchers to consider theory from related disciplines, e.g., adult education and continuing education, as they postulate, analyze, and research distance education theory and practice. He encouraged researchers not to overlook extant research from the international community who have been engaged in distance education research and practice, in many instances, much longer than the United States. He also rejoiced in the increasing number of books and journals devoted to distance education and the increasing interdisciplinary dialogue he observes these 13 years after first writing the article.

***FROM CAMPUS TO CYBERSPACE:  
THE TRANSITION OF CLASSROOM  
FACULTY TO DISTANCE  
EDUCATION ROLES AND THE  
INSTRUCTOR'S CHANGING ROLE  
IN DISTANCE EDUCATION***

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on distance education faculty. In chapter 3, Beaudoin reported on the results of a survey he conducted with 50 distance education faculty spread over six universities. The survey sought to understand more about faculty perception and experience in

their transition from teaching in the classroom to teaching online.

Unfortunately, the space constraint for such an extensive and fascinating study with its carefully developed survey instrument was sufficiently limited, making the chapter incomplete. A copy of the original instrument would have been useful for review in an appendix, especially since the study was replicated by Israeli researchers with similar results. Furthermore, it would have helped the reader to see more of the results presented in tables and context, thereby enabling his or her own analysis, interpretation, and validation. Still, it was insightful to learn that classroom-based faculty who adapted to and experienced the online, distance education modality invariably became more positive about it following their experience. Many faculty also reported that learning outcomes for distance students were no different than for those in the classroom, and some faculty reported more meaningful interaction with their distance students than their classroom students.

The study as well as subsequent discussion in both chapters emphasized that students and faculty alike need support services to succeed. One of the most important support needs for faculty in their role as mentor and facilitator is training early on and adequate administrative and technical support later on. Students also need training, clear expectations, some sense of community, and administrative and technical support, including library resources.

Clearly the roles of faculty generally and distance education faculty specifically are changing with the advent of communication and instructional technologies. Beaudoin acknowledges in his epilogue that industrialization, with its divisions of labor, is dramatically changing faculty roles; the need for faculty flexibility and adaptation has never been greater, as is the need for administrative responsiveness to faculty issues like load, compensation, support, and intellectual property. The author also identifies not only the need for additional research on faculty in distance education but also sets forth nine specific

research questions. One of particular interest seeks to examine the effect of distance education instruction on classroom instruction—something akin to instructional, reverse osmosis. Does a faculty member's involvement in distance education help improve instruction in the classroom? The author and I both think so but, plainly, this topic merits additional research.

### ***DISTANCE EDUCATION LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW CENTURY***

This chapter was first published in the *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration* in 2003 and received acknowledgment as “Best Paper” at the Distance Learning Administration annual conference in Jekyll Island, Georgia, June 1–4, 2003. This reviewer would also bestow “Best Chapter” award to it and its accompanying epilogue, especially if one's intent in reading the book is to learn more about the principles and characteristics of good distance education leadership. The reader will not be disappointed.

Beaudoin supports his claim about the paucity of research available on leadership in distance education—something to which he refers throughout the book for other aspects of distance education, too—by not only conducting a typical literature review of journal articles and books but also of presentations at distance education conferences. In short, all sources within the field reveal little or no research on this subject; what *is* available is primarily in the context of case studies—which he suggests will not make a significant contribution to theory—or focused on the managerial responsibilities and not the leadership role of distance education administrators. He doesn't stop with a typical review of literature, either, as he puts forth plausible reasons for this vacuum of research and theory while at the same time calling for a theoretical framework of distance education leadership.

Fortunately, Beaudoin's review of literature transcended the field of distance education and included research findings on leadership in related fields like continuing education and business. One insightful study identified seven critical attributes of continuing education leaders: (1) ability to analyze systems and know where the competition is; (2) awareness of power sources; (3) capability of negotiating differences and building consensus; (4) understanding of institutional culture; (5) talent for working with abstract, undefined, and complex concepts; (6) skillful planner and tactician; and (7) knack for persuading others of a continuing (distance) education program's value. He also pointed out the importance of charisma and innovation when it comes to leading in distance education by briefly introducing the reader to two of distance education's foremost leaders: Charles Wedermeyer at the University of Wisconsin and Lord Perry Walton, who established Britain's Open University.

Finally, Beaudoin discussed typical future distance education dilemmas and identified leadership styles to meet these situations: transformational, situational, transitional, or a combination of these. The essence of this author's view on the distance education leader role is that "whatever other roles he or she may assume, [they] must always maintain the essential role of educator" (p. 87). He also addressed the question of how to organize a distance education effort: is it best to have a central distance education office or not? While not answering the question for the reader, he certainly established a basis for institutional analysis and discussion on the issue. He concluded by encouraging administrators and faculty involved in fledgling distance education efforts to start small and to consider initial efforts experimental. In his epilogue he metaphorically reiterated the importance of not

working "out of the box" but rather "at the outer edges of the box."

### ***REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION***

In this brief, previously unpublished chapter, the author predicted that the day might come when distance education will be traditional education. If distance and online education continues to proliferate at a rate even half of what it has in recent years, his prediction will be realized sooner than later.

He cites the work of two scholars whose research over several decades describes how difficult change is within the academic culture. Beaudoin also credits technological innovation in and out of the class for hastening the acceptability and growth of distance education—a "third generation" of distance education characterized by an online community of networked learners. (The first generation is print; the second, print plus some broadcast media.) In all, Beaudoin's discussion about the future never takes him far from his thesis that the astute distance education leader must work incrementally with, not against, change.

### ***CONCLUSION***

This book merits a careful reading by any who seek to provide leadership for, conduct research in, and educate students using distance education. While its three topics—faculty, research, and leadership—complement each other, a reader with primary interest in just one topic will benefit from a discrete reading. Finally, the author's research and writing on leadership in distance education is preeminent within the field; this book captures the essence and significance of his most important contribution to distance education: how to be an effective leader.