The Interrelationships between Globalisation and Open and Distance Education Structures and Processes

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Abstract: Globalisation is conceptualised in this article, not merely in economic terms, but broadly social, political and cultural terms. The role of English as the global language is discussed in relation to the development of open and distance education in the English-speaking nations. Within this framework the interrelationships with open and distance education structures and processes are analysed and discussed. It is argued that open and distance education structures and processes can be viewed as 'globalised' educational phenomena that have developed as part of international and global networks of discourse and practice in the field. Likewise, these open and distance education structures and processes are strong forces for globalisation in themselves in that they have traditionally used the available technology to reach beyond national boundaries to provide education and training. The rise of the information and communication technologies, and their incorporation by educators into the new educational technologies, strengthens still further the globalising power of open and distance education. The reflexive nature of globalisation suggests that the global education will incorporate a form of hybridisation whereby local institutions and students reflexively weld the global and the local.

Introduction

Open and distance education have been important forces for national development for at least a century. From the earliest days of distance education as 'external' or 'extension' studies by correspondence, through the period of 'openness' when strategies and processes were established to provide courses to people whose access previously had been restricted by social, disability and other restrictions, rather than just distance, to the contemporary times of Internet mediated global distance education. In these respects it is arguable that open and distance education has been an integral part of the process that has been named 'globalisation' in recent times. What also seems to be integral to this process is the incorporation of English, or a variant of it, as the global language. In so doing, there are various conceptual, practical and political matters which arise for open and distance educators as they work across national and cultural boundaries, especially where these border-crossings encounter different national and local languages.

This article discusses these issues with the intention of enabling a critical awareness on the part of open and distance educators and policymakers of the tensions which surround globalisation and its interrelationships with open and distance education.
Globalisation

In recent times ‘globalisation’ has been receiving a ‘bad press’. There have been strong and vocal demonstrations against globalisation in cities as far apart as Seattle, Genoa and Melbourne. These demonstrations have been organised to protest against globalisation at meetings of global financial bodies such as the International Monetary Fund or the ‘Group of Eight’ (largest capitalist nations). In effect, the protests are against both the negative consequences of the practices of some ‘global’ corporations and also their support or lack of control by their host nation-states. Globalisation has been popularised, therefore, as the oppression of the world’s poorest people and poorest nations, and the avaricious exploitation of them, their cultures and their natural environments, by greedy and powerful transnational corporations. Whilst we do not wish to downplay the consequences of the distortions of capitalist market economies, we do believe that, conceptually, globalisation is more complex than this and is neither fundamentally economic or capitalist in nature, nor inherently evil.

Although, globalisation is often articulated in economic and financial terms—the ‘global economy’, the ‘global marketplace’—its real significance, in our view, rests in its social and cultural processes and consequences. Arguably, the origins of globalisation can be traced to the first endeavours of human societies to venture beyond their lands and shores to find and explore (and maybe, often to occupy, conquer and colonise) other places and peoples. The growth of transport and communications (and military) technology has aided the exploration and ‘occupations’ of the world. Not just in the relatively permanent sense of migration, but also in the sense of temporary incursions by business people, sportspeople, tourists and others. In their different ways they leave their ‘footprints’ on the local places, peoples and societies they visit. Each of these footprints can be seen as steps on the journey to what has been conceptualised as globalisation.

Therefore, globalisation is fundamentally connected to the development of transport systems and communications media that enable people to travel, send and receive objects, and communicate with people and places, almost irrespective of where they are on the globe. As Evans (1997) explains:

> globalisation implies that most people, if not all, are connected more or less contemporaneously with distant events, sometimes whether they like it or not. This ‘time-space compression’ (Giddens, 1994, p. 7) is not just limited to communications and transport, but also to economic activity. The social and cultural implications...are intimately connected (1997 p. 18).

The ownership and access to the transport systems and communication media are distorted by the range of social, cultural and economic structures and processes that distort so many other aspects of life. Therefore, ownership and access is markedly better for the majority (but not all) the inhabitants of Manhattan or Melbourne, than it is for the majority of the inhabitants of Mombasa or Mumbai. Access itself is not just a function of income or wealth, but also, using Bourdieu’s terminology, a function of the ‘cultural capital’ at one’s disposal. In this sense, the cultural capital required to participate globally, or to be what might be called a ‘global citizen’ requires the knowledge and skills to be able to use the systems and means of transport and communications. For someone to fly from Calcutta to
Calgary requires not just the money for the ticket, but also the knowledge and skills to book the flights, obtain and use a passport and visa, check-in and board the flight, etc. To use the Internet to obtain information from in those two cities requires a facility with language, not just any language, but almost invariably with the ‘global language’: English. When one takes these cultural elements into consideration it seems clear that the matter of education is fundamental to globalisation, because people have to learn to be able to be global citizens. Additionally, educators have begun to recognise the ways in which education is used increasingly as part of the globalising forces of contemporary life. Therefore, not only is education required to enable people to participate as global citizens, but once they have acquired sufficient cultural capital to do such, they are then able to develop their cultural capital still further by learning through forms of distance education that are available globally.

Our theoretical work in distance education has been significantly influenced by the work of Anthony Giddens. Of particular relevance here is his work on the changing personal, social and political conditions in late-modernity, a major aspect of which is globalisation (Axford, 1995; Giddens, 1991a; 1991b). The notion of ‘time-space’ compression occurring as a result of the new transport and communications systems, especially those using the Internet, is important for open and distance education. Arguably, the history of correspondence education, external studies, distance education, etc, has always been connected with practices that bridge or compress time and space to enable people to teach and others to learn. In effect, as the term itself suggests, distance education is about enabling people to learn in their own places—at home or work, for example—anywhere but where the teacher is located ‘on campus’. Of course, distance education was also about removing the traditional synchronicity between teaching and learning: not only did people learn away from their teachers, they also learned at a different (later) time to when the teachers did their ‘teaching’. Evans (1989) has explored these time-geographic features of distance education in more detail).

Despite the ways in which open and distance education have tried to liberate the learner from the time-space constraints of face-to-face teaching, there have always been concerns to enable forms of interaction between teacher and learners, and also between the learners themselves. The consequences for educators of using the new communications media that underpin globalisation to teach students who may be located anywhere on the globe where they have access to such media need to be explored and understood. Giddens helps by stating that globalisation effects:

...the transformation of local, and even personal, contexts of social experience. Our day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the world. Conversely, local lifestyle habits have become globally consequential (1994, p. 5).

Furthermore, Giddens, points to the ‘intensified reflexivity’ of globalisation which creates the conditions for ‘a world of clever people’. For us this implies that the repositioning of open and distance education within globalisation needs to be understood as concerning not just the means of teaching and learning, but also its curricula. For citizens to participate effectively and globally, and to learn within globalised/globalising forms of open and
distance education, they need to learn curricula which enable them to deal with what might be called a ‘worldly knowledge’ rather than local knowledge. Giddens suggests that

... individuals more or less have to engage with the wider world if they are to survive in it. Information produced by specialists (including scientific knowledge) can no longer be wholly confined to specific groups, but becomes routinely interpreted and acted on by lay individuals in the course of everyday actions (1994, p. 7).

We have discussed the implications of Giddens’s assertions elsewhere (Evans & Nation, 1996 p.164)

Giddens’s claim that globalisation necessitates a world populated by ‘clever people’ refers to a global population which is able to read, understand, analyse and, where appropriate, act knowledgeably on the information they can obtain and, indeed require, ‘to engage with the wider world’. Not only does this say something about the need for high levels of education for the population, but it implies that the curricula involved need to reflect both global and local needs. We can also infer that, due to the reflexive, and therefore dynamic, nature of globalisation, people need to engage in lifelong education in order to participate fully in social life. The importance of opening education to this challenge may be self-evident...

Future forms open and distance education are likely to be facilitated by the processes of globalisation in terms of technology, curricula and the rise of English as the global language. We shall pursue these matters in the next sections, however, we shall conclude here by noting that forms of international collaboration, joint course development, materials sharing etc, which are often evident in open and distance education are not only features of globalisation in themselves, but also generally contribute to what might be called global curricula to the extent that they reflect global (as well as local) interests and knowledge. Globalisation, through its forms of communication and through what is communicated – especially in education, news and ‘infotainment’ – not only creates the conditions of a global present – that is, the immediate and current. It also creates a global past – that is, the cultural base. Therefore, globalisation also concerns the development of what might be called a locally or individually interpreted globalised culture. No longer does/can education teach principally about the local; it must engage with global information, issues and concerns. The further opening of education to the global, especially through the use of new forms of educational technology seems inevitable. However, the ‘clever’ use of global forms of education will need to be predicated on a critical understanding, not (just) of technology, but of the linguistic and cultural matters that will make or break whether learning is appropriate, culturally sensitive, useful and relevant.

**English as the global language**

The emergence of English as a global language is an inextricable and multidimensional aspect of the processes of globalisation. Our task here is not to review this emergence comprehensively, but to examine critically those aspects that relate to open and distance education at the college and university level.
The linguist David Crystal (1997b) has provided a relatively brief but comprehensive analysis of English as a global language. There are three key criteria which make English a global language. First, it is the first language of the ‘core’ of the former British Empire including Britain itself, the dominant economic and political power of the nineteenth century, and also of the British settler nations, including the United States of America, the economic and political powerhouse of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries (Fennell, 2001, pp.256-260). Second, it has been given ‘official or second language’ status, for use in government, the law and education, in many other countries. Many of these are former British or American colonies, but there are an increasing number of countries from outside this fold which have also adopted this policy. Third, English has been adopted by design or default in many other countries as the favoured foreign language. Each of these factors inter-relates to further extend English’s reach as an official and foreign language. As a consequence, Crystal estimates, 2.1 billion people—more than a third of the Earth’s population—are exposed to English in their daily life on a routine basis. More significantly for our purposes, 1.5 billion people—almost a quarter of the world’s population—are ‘reasonably competent’ users of English (Crystal, 1997b, pp. 2-5, 53-63).

All three of these factors are at work in making English the primary language of the recent revolution in the information and communications technologies (ICTs) which have created the Internet and the World Wide Web. While there has been a broad international involvement in the development and manufacture of hardware and software for the ICTs, the heartland of design has been in the USA. This is demonstrated by the design and development of what became the Internet from the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) (Hafner & Lyon, 1998). The US government, from the 1950s, was keen to facilitate the design and development of computing systems that supported research groups to collaborate. Initially, it was conceived as a national programme but early in the design phase it was decided to adopt an international approach.

As a consequence of its American origins, English has become the dominant language of the Internet. Significantly, some of the early technical decisions reinforced this dominance by, for example, adopting the English alphabet as the character set (Crystal, 1997b, p. 106). Subsequent developments have catered for other languages, but by laying English into its foundations the designers of the Internet ensured that the factors identified above would amplify its dominance as the lingua franca of the Net. Various means of analysis estimate that about 80 per cent of Internet and Web activities occur in English (Crystal, 1997b, pp. 117-110).

The development of the Web from 1990 continued this trend. Tim Berners-Lee, an Englishman, working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Switzerland conceived the basic design of the Web (Berners-Lee, 1999). Right from its design and development stage the work was pursued from an international perspective. The founding principle of the Web was to achieve efficient, effective and instant connections between researchers and their databases. It has been a major tool in the continued development of international scholarship and is another factor reinforcing the dominance of English as the primary language of international scholarly discourse (Crystal, 1997b, pp. 102-103).
Related in part to its significance as a language of research and scholarship, English is becoming increasingly a dominating force as a language of instruction in colleges and universities internationally. This is manifested by the large numbers of students who travel internationally to study, most of whom attend colleges and universities in the English speaking world. While, the Australian higher education system is very small by world standards with about 700,000 students, the relevant trends in overseas student enrolments confirm this point. In 1991, overseas students constituted 5.5 per cent of total enrolments and a decade later the proportion had risen to almost fourteen per cent (DETYA, 2001). These trends are also manifest in the burgeoning growth in the teaching of English as a foreign language, much of which is as a preparation for university studies. There is also the beginning of a movement for postgraduate courses to be taught in English in non-English speaking countries, especially where there is a demand from overseas students (Crystal, 1997b, pp. 102-103).

Distance education institutions with the capacities to offer courses in English are presented with a wide range of options for catering for the increasing demand for them internationally. Universities providing courses for international students are in a position to offer students the opportunities to study without leaving their home country or community and, thus, minimising expenses and disruptions to family and working lives. There has been a rapid increase in the number of overseas distance education students enrolled with Australian universities in the last decade, from a small base. In the context of the rapid increase in overall overseas student number in the following decade, the proportion of distance education students from overseas has risen to ten per cent and appears to be continuing to rise (DETYA, 2001).

Various means have been employed by institutions catering for these overseas distance education students. At the centre of any effective programme will be a set of teaching texts combined with a strong system of complementary tuition and student support. The teaching texts may use a variety of media, including print, audio, video, multimedia and computer mediated delivery. The tuition and means of student support could include some in-country activities, including classroom based teaching, and a variety means of communication from the host institution, with an increasing and substantial emphasis on email and, often, with the support of Web based learning management systems such as Blackboard and Web CT. Well designed systems tailor the educational technologies involved to suit the needs of the course and the local circumstances of the students. The latter maybe diverse and require the provision of a range of teaching resources and means of delivery to be available.

The centrality of texts in the teaching and learning processes of distance education offers students for whom English is a second language opportunities and challenges which are different from those in classroom based teaching. This is not to deny, of course, the importance of texts in classroom based teaching at universities but, rather, to understand that oral discourse presents itself in that context as both an important support and a difficulty for students developing their fluency in English. Distance education students literally have the capacity to come to terms with the teaching texts in their own time. This offers the capacities for careful reading and composition. In email communication or asynchronous electronic discussion groups this can be a considerable advantage and it offers the capacity to make well thought out and substantial contributions. This can be a substantial advantage in academic discourse conducted in a global language.
There are many challenges for distance educators as they attempt to come to terms with teaching and learning in the medium of global English. For teachers the prospect differs according to whether or not English is their own first language. The advantages are obvious and considerable for those teachers with experience of, at least, learning in English as a second language. Academic staff with these backgrounds are highly valued in programmes aimed at students overseas who are learning in English as a second language. Not only do they bring valuable insights to their own relationships with students, but they are able also to assist their colleagues without these advantages to improve their knowledge and performance.

The emergence of English as the global language, in concert with the expanding global reach of the ICTs, has given distance education institutions and their students enhanced opportunities to teach and learn on a global basis. The important message from sociolinguists, such as Crystal, is to understand this process not as ‘the triumph of English’ but as the practical means of operating on a global scale. It requires all academic users of English to come to an appreciation of the language’s immense diversity and to accept that there cannot be a monocultural academic English suitable for all disciplines and contexts. It requires teachers to strive to understand the variety of cultural, linguistic and social contexts within which their students will be studying. It also means adapting teaching texts to the technologies adopted for communication to and from students. This relationship between language and the technologies is not one of simple cause and effect, but rather one whereby changes are effected in a multilateral fashion.

**Technology, Globalisation and the new Educational Technologies**

Open and distance education institutions have interwoven the use of the Internet and the Web into their practices since the early 1990s. It is not uncommon to find that these institutions have been at the forefront of the adoption and integration of the computer-based approaches—accessible via the Internet—to enable students to study and submit assessments, use the library, to participate in ‘tutorials’, to obtain counselling and student support, and to undertake routine administrative tasks. For example, our own universities—Deakin and Monash—enable their on-campus and off-campus students to do some or all of these things. To the extent that off-campus/distance education students increasingly participate from international locations, then the consequences for language and culture in those locations become important matters of consideration. The global reach of the ICTs is remarkable for the speed and volume of ‘data’ that can be transmitted. However, it should be noted that the telephone (especially in its mobile form) and, even more so, postal services have even greater practical global coverage. Popular access to these communications media is greater than is the case for the ICTs, and they each have different strengths and weaknesses. The likelihood is that open and distance education will be using these ‘old’ and ‘new’ technologies, as indeed will all organisations, to ‘go global’ (or even staying local).

The implementation of the use of ICTs in open and distance education is rarely seen these days as a mere technical problem, it is very common for people to mention the staff development and institutional change aspects (Latchem & Hanna, 2001). In this sense, the
implementation of the ICTs as 'new educational technologies' is understood as partly about organisational and cultural change. However, we suggest that the more powerful cultural changes and consequences of the development and use of these new educational technologies, are not within an educational organisation's culture, but rather rest within the array of cultural contexts in which the students are located. This is a proposition that is difficult to test empirically. The identification of cause and effect in a direct sense is not easy to establish, because cultural change is multiply constructed through various agencies, of which education—open and distance education in particular—is a small part. It is possible to identify significant cultural shifts over periods of time where various agencies come together to push in the same direction. For example, in developing nations, changes from traditional society toward the values and practices of consumerism can be seen to occur when government, industry, marketing, mass-media and education all move toward this end. In this way, cultures that have supported and sustained subsistence and barter societies are shifted towards consumerist cash societies within a generation or so; although, as Dorney (2000, pp. 72–100) demonstrates, such changes in developing nations, like Papua New Guinea, are neither complete nor total.

Therefore, we suggest that many recent technological innovations in forms of open and distance education are reflexively connected to other technological, social and economic innovations. For example, changes in computer and communications technologies affect the nature and circumstances of paid work, which in turn affect the knowledge and skills required to undertake this work, which consequentially affects the ways in which education and training are implemented. However, we do not wish to imply a form of technological determinism, rather we assert that the changes to computer and communications technologies are affected, sometimes even initiated, by research, research training and teaching (in the area of ICTs) in universities and other educational organisations.

Hence, reflexivity is an important condition of contemporary globalising societies and, in particular, it is an important condition within globalisation. Reflexivity is a fundamental element of globalisation, partly because it relies as much on the sophistication of modern language, culture and education, as it does on modern communications technologies and economic systems. As we argued at the outset, globalisation is not a rapacious capitalist force (although it may partly operate in this way), indeed, the processes of globalisation may also expose such capitalist forces to challenge and threat from, for example, Left or Green oppositional forces. In education, it is possible to argue that 'rapacious' educational institutions can use the media and technology of globalisation 'invade' other nations and cultures and impose their knowledge, values and ideas. However, as Evans (1997) argues, these same media and technologies of globalisation can be used to provide 'access' to knowledge, values and ideas that empower local people to participate knowledgeably in developing their nations and societies, and to participate as global citizens. These educational connections are reflexive because education does not merely respond to other changes, but also often effects and affects those changes itself. Indeed, as we shall argue later, it is the capacity of people and/or institutions in local circumstances to shape, resist and contribute to their learning and/or educational practices by incorporating imported educational resources and blending them with local resources.

The incorporation of ICTs into open and distance education as new educational technologies implicates open and distance education practitioners and their institutions in
globalisation. This is not only to the extent that they use these new communications media as part of the new educational technology, but also because the people—teachers, learners, course designers, administrators, etc.—involved, are influenced by the globalising of social, cultural and economic conditions more generally. Therefore, the practices of both institutions and their staff are influenced, not just by the capacities of the new educational media, but also by their messages, that is the curricula. We shall now turn specifically to the case of open and distance education institutions in globalisation.

Open and distance education, open universities: the rise of global forms of education

The creation and development of the open universities worldwide in the 1970s and 1980s (see Daniel, 1999; Panda, 1996; Peters, 2000) instituted forms of university management, curriculum and pedagogy that are very influential in building the structures and processes for institutions to make a successful transition to teaching on a global scale. The educational principles which have underpinned these developments may have remained constant, but the structures and processes based on them have evolved dynamically, taking account of local circumstances and, especially, through placing substantial emphasis on harnessing emerging technologies to serve educational purposes (Evans & Nation, 1989, pp. 237-252; 1993, pp. 196-214; 1996, pp. 162-176; 2000, pp. 106-175).

A commitment to systematic educational planning and design was at the basis of the principles and practices of the open and distance education movement. The processes of teaching and learning were shifted away from classrooms into systems using teaching materials combined with a variety of means of supporting students' study of the materials. Central to these processes and structures was the effective use of appropriate technologies. The distance teaching universities have always needed to review their use of technologies in the light of technological changes and to suit the needs of their students. As the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of the United Kingdom, John Daniel (1999) expressed it: these universities have had to develop 'technology strategies'. These strategies, Daniel argues, apply equally to campus-based universities (Daniel, 1999, pp. 136-165).

Despite the significant contributions the open and distance education movement has made to the development and understanding of educational technologies generally, and the technologies based on the new ICTs particularly, there are still many in conventional universities and many policy makers who have yet to heed this message (Evans & Nation, 1996, pp. 165-168). This is not to suggest that universities and policy makers are not interested in pursuing the benefits of the new ICTs. Indeed, all politicians seem to have a proposal for some form of 'e-learning' initiative in their electoral policies file. The prospects of offering genuinely global forms of education, based on the new ICTs, constantly exercise the minds of university leaders, politicians and policy makers, and some members of the public. There is no shortage of programmes and proposals articulated in terms of the 'g-word'—global, the 'e-word'—electronic or the 'v-word'—virtual. Nevertheless, we are a long way from any extensive provision of university education on a global scale.

An indication of current trends can be gleaned from two recent studies commissioned by the gleamed national government in Australia (Cunningham, & others, 1998; 2000). The first study gave particular attention to the influence of the ICTs on university activities and
to relationships with media corporations. The second study sought to investigate the challenges by ‘no-traditional providers, such as the corporate and virtual providers’ to ‘traditional universities’, giving particular attention to ‘cross-border provision’, ‘the development of more flexible “virtual” learning environments’ and ‘off-campus’ (home, workplace) provision (Cunningham & others, 2000, p. 1). The latter concentrated its investigations in North America and Australia.

The general conclusion of both studies was ‘that the rhetoric of globalisation of education far exceeded its reality’ (Cunningham & others, 2000, p. 126). They noted that references to the use of the ICTs were common as part of this push, but they really signal intentions, rather than achievements. From the Australian perspective of their study, they concluded, ‘that claims of technology-enabled international penetration of overseas providers into Australia, or into Australian markets in South-East Asia, should be at least treated cautiously’ (Cunningham & others, 2000, p. 129). They do present evidence that some Australian providers, such as Monash University, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), are well established as providers of distance education offshore. Monash and USQ have substantial distance education programs running from Australia. Monash and RMIT have a number of partnerships with overseas providers and Monash has campuses in Malaysia and South Africa (Cunningham & others, 2000, pp. 78 & 108). This is evidence of the patiently developed beginnings of large scale global programmes and that more developments are necessary for them to reach the ambitious goals of their initiators.

One feature of the emerging situation is the series of strategic alliances that have emerged using the ICTs and distance education as central elements. Typically these alliances include universities, media corporations (especially those with publishing interests), software providers (particularly those which have developed ‘learning management systems’) and marketing firms. These activities are genuinely global in terms of their objectives and their achievements and they could become very important in the later expansion of global provision of courses.

The Global University Alliance (GUA) and Universitas 21 (U21) are two of the best known consortia. The GUA has nine members—three in Australia and New Zealand, 3 in North America and 3 in Western Europe—and caters for institutions specialising in professional and vocational education (GUA, 2001). U21 has 19 members—4 in Australia and New Zealand, 5 in North America, 4 in East/South East Asia and 6 in Western Europe (U21, 2001).

The GUA is much further advanced than U21 as a gateway for students seeking to study online on a global basis. Fundamentally, the GUA home page is a very effective promotional, marketing and enrolment site. Potential students are encouraged to register their contact details and they then gain access to the detailed information required to proceed to enrolment. GUA has an agreement with NextEd (2001) to provide the online platform for course information, enrolment and teaching. More details of NextEd are in the discussion of online learning management systems below.

U21 has ambitious objectives in the provision of global online education that are far from being realised in 2001. Its key strategy has been to form a partnership with a major media
company to provide the teaching and learning infrastructure. Its initial partnership with
News Corporation collapsed. In November 2000, it announced a partnership with Thomson
Learning which would provide 'for the course design, content development, testing and
assessment, student database management and translation for the project' (U21, 2001). To
date the consortium has concentrated on building relationships across its member
institutions and beginning plans for the grand global venture.

Many media corporations, especially those with their origins in book publishing, have been
positioning themselves in the online education business. These corporations are organised
on a global scale. Their fundamental business has not altered from their basis in textbook
publishing: they sell 'packaged information' which plays an important support role in
university teaching and learning. They have integrated the ICTs into this information
business in order to facilitate the sale and provision of their traditional products, textbooks,
and to provide new products based on the ICTs such as CDs and Web based products. An
examination of the websites of two of the giants of this field, Pearson Education (2001) and
Thomson Learning (2001) reveals how effectively these corporations have woven together
the key elements of this information market and have established and maintained strategic
alliances with emerging providers using the ICTs.

University staff have been experimenting with computer based systems to support teaching
and learning since the 1970s (Evans & Nation, 1993, pp. 210-211; Haronisim, 1989). The
emergence of the Web has provided powerful technologies to extend these efforts. Many
creative and effective 'in house' projects have continued but standard online learning
management systems, such as Blackboard (2001) and WebCT (2001), are beginning to
dominate the market globally. Institutions are now in a position of having to decide whether
to continue investing in developing their own systems or whether to adopt a standard
system and to put their efforts into making it work effectively in their local context.

There are also middle level players, such as NextEd, emerging in the interfaces between
institutions and the global giants like Blackboard and WebCT. NextEd (2001) is a Hong
Kong based company, founded by its Australian Chief Executive Officer, Terry Hilsberg,
and financed from Australia, China and the United States. It has software licensing
arrangements with the large firms, it develops software and systems and makes them
available to its clients such as the members of the GUA and USQ. In this sense it takes both
a global and regional role.

Thus, it is important to understand that currently we have witnessed some significant
beginnings to the provision of global university education. Many of the genuinely global
activities have occurred, not in the central aspects of teaching and learning, but in the
provision of supporting products by publishers and supporting infrastructure such as
standard online learning management systems. The achievements so far suggest that the
familiar dangers of 'instructional industrialism' are evident and need to be avoided (Evans
& Nation, 1993, pp. 196-198; 2000, pp. 169-170). Currently, the major players in global
education are doing so for commercial gain and, as such, need to draw on those customers
(students, companies etc) with the capacity to pay. However, most of the world's
population is unable to participate in this market as they have neither the money,
educational background or (English) language capacities to do so.
Returning to the theme of the opening of this section, there is no doubt that those practitioners with experience in the distance teaching universities are a very valuable resource in the efforts to ensure the educational technologies are shaped and deployed in the interests of local communities and students. Many of these practitioners have worked in distance education institutions that have been mandated to address issues of access and equity, rather than to turn a profit—although the two are becoming intertwined in recent times. We suggest that it is important to understand that the diversity of the ‘world of learners’ needs to be comprehended and addressed before education can become truly and inclusively global, and that, despite the speed of change in the ICTs, we are long way from developing global education systems that are widely, let alone universally, locally effective.

Localising the global: mixed-language and hybrid curriculum and pedagogy

The notion of reflexivity in the processes of globalisation suggests that the future of open and distance education institutions and practices is likely to become one of increasing hybridisation. The planning and designing for hybridisation is an important element of making global education locally effective. Our recent research\(^1\) and practice\(^2\) in and for international contexts suggest that this hybridisation occurs where foreign open and distance education providers offer their courses in different local (national and cultural) contexts. In this respect, it is common in international education to use the term ‘localisation’ to indicate the process whereby overseas courses are modified in their curricula, teaching and assessment to accommodate (to a greater or lesser extent) local circumstances. We use the notion of ‘hybridisation’ here to indicate a more reflexive relationship, not only between the institutions and contexts concerned, but also at a global level. In this sense, we see the globalisation of educational practices, not just as the sum of a multitude of bi-lateral or multilateral institutional (or other educational) partnerships or transactions, but also, fundamentally, as the incorporation of a web of ‘meta’ reflexive relationships between them.

In this respect, in any given local setting a specific cross-national/cross-cultural educational endeavour will be a product, not just of the two national and cultural contexts—although these may well dominate—but also of the ways in which those two national and cultural contexts interrelate with what might be called global knowledge and culture. For our purposes, we assume this global knowledge and culture to be that which is emerging as commonly shared understandings of concepts, values, symbols and signs. This is a problematic notion both theoretically and practically (see, Axford, 1995, pp.156–159), but it is one that we adopt here for explanatory purposes. We do so on the basis that there are, increasingly, common concepts, values, symbols and signs shared by global citizens, especially through the rise of English as the global language. Indeed, many of the concepts, values, symbols and signs embedded within education are already ‘globalised’. So, for example, the notions of a school and of schooling, are shared by most, if not all, nations. Indeed these nations and their citizens invest a large part of their existences and resources
to sustain schools and schooling. The commonality of understandings about schools and schooling, does not mean a uniformity, indeed as we argue here they are good examples of the hybridisation process we wish to propose.

An 'imported' educational endeavour becomes the local educational product in much the same way that a hybrid species mutates and evolves through its biological ‘natural selection’ process (‘reflexiveness’) within its environment. The reflexiveness of educational endeavours is embodied, not only in the ways in which curricula, teaching and assessment are modified and adapted to suit local circumstances and conditions, but also in the ways the people (tutors, students, etc) ‘live-out’ these educational practices in their and their communities' own interests.

The evidence from our research and practice shows that there are several ways in which these reflexivities are practised to produce hybrid educational encounters. A good way to see hybridisation is in the classroom. Of course, for most distance educators this would seem to be a contradiction. However, Evans’s research in both Hong Kong and PNG showed that a common feature of the localisation of a course was to include classroom encounters in addition to the independent study at home, in the workplace or elsewhere. These classroom encounters were also locales in which further localisation was often expected to occur, that is, in both a curricular and pedagogical sense there was an expectation, sometimes even a prescription, that particular localisation would occur. For example, a local tutor may be expected to add new, or modify existing, examples or cases from the course (curriculum/ material) to make them relevant to the local circumstances. Often the expectation of the foreign institution is that such local cases will replace or supplement cases in the original course. (The use of case-studies is common in business and management courses which are amongst the most popular courses to export/import).

However, observation in the classroom showed that the local cases were privileged by the local tutors and students in comparison to the foreign cases in courses. However, perhaps more significantly, the requirements to provide local cases and examples were often interpreted by local tutors as an invitation or authority to go further and re-interpret other elements of the courses for the local students. In some cases this became a risky business when the assessment was conducted by the foreign institution's staff and they could not affirm the localised knowledge as appropriate. These matters are further exacerbated when the courses lead to registration for professional bodies in the foreign country and they apply their own de facto limitations on the boundaries of localisation that may apply. When problems arise, a hybridisation process may occur where both the foreign and local institutions/staff reach a mutual agreement on a 'hybrid' curriculum and assessment for both institutions. So, for example, Hong Kong cases appear in both Australian and Hong Kong offerings of the courses.

As the courses in our research and practice emanated from Australia, they were entirely constructed, and were expected to be conducted, in English. However, local tutors, like the local students, often do not use English as their first language. For example, in Hong Kong it is likely to be their second language (after Cantonese), in Malaysia it is likely to be the second or third language (after Bahasa Malaysia and a local language) and in PNG it is likely to be their third (or fourth) language after their local language (of which there are over 850 in PNG) and Pidgin (and sometimes Hiri Motu). Observations of classroom encounters were made in Evans’s research during which the actual practices of the local
tutors and students could be observed. In both Hong Kong and PNG the informal classroom language of the students was in the preferred *lingua franca* of Cantonese and Pidgin respectively. Typically, the tutor would commence classes and conduct informal conversation in these languages. When the formal teaching began, often teaching texts were read in English, invariably with flaws in grammar, syntax and pronunciation. If a more tutorial-style of discussion was required, then a mixture of English and the *lingua franca* was used. It seemed that a hybrid form of language was used to teach; so, for example, often particular terms or concepts from the course material would always be used in English and were not translated (some tutors said that often the terms did not translate well, or they were more cumbersome if they were). However, they could be inserted as a sole English word or phrase in an otherwise local language sentence. Hong Kong tutors revealed that they often use the strategy of explaining something in one language and then repeated the explanation in the other. These repetitions were rarely direct translations, but rather they were an adaptation of the typical pedagogical device of repeating an explanation in a modified way to help students learn, or to verify they have grasped what was meant.

It was also noticeable that some everyday English words were often used routinely within sentences. Some of these were new words are born out of the ICTs, such as ‘computer’ or ‘software’, others seemed to be legacies of either colonial times (‘smoko’ — an Australian colloquialism for a work break) or even the globalisation of work practices (OHS, for occupational health and safety). However, a most common expression was ‘OK’. This was used almost as a form of punctuation to indicate the end of a spoken piece that needed to be learned. It would literally be followed by a question mark in a transcript because it was often seeking a response from the students to indicate if they understood. However, it was often the case that the question was little more than rhetorical, and could even be an indication of closure of a segment or session.

**Concluding Comment**

The examples and discussion provided in the previous section are a glimpse of the complexities of the journey toward globalisation in education. In the other preceding sections we have sought to establish the theoretical and practical (technological and institutional) foundations for understanding the nature of globalisation and its interrelationships with open and distance education. More conceptual and practical work, including research and development, is necessary. This is important not just for clarifying and verifying theories and practices, but also because a more critical project is required. We have argued that the experience and scholarship of open and distance education practitioners is a very valuable resource to help ensure the educational technologies being marshalled in the pursuit of global education are shaped and deployed in the interests of local communities and students. Many of these practitioners have worked in distance education institutions that for decades have been mandated to address issues of access and equity, rather than to turn a profit—although the two are becoming intertwined in recent times.

This leads us to suggest that, if global education is seen or defined in purely economic terms, then its practises will be limited to providing for a (so called) global market. However, this market is far from global, in the sense of embracing all the citizens of the
world. Indeed, as we have noted many do not participate in cash economies or if they do, they do not have the disposable income to purchase access to global(ising) education. If these forms of education are providing education and training for, and thereby producing, a global elite, or even a global middle class, then future generations of global poor will also continue to be produced by their lack of access to such education.

For us, therefore, a form of hybridisation needs to occur where there is an assertion of global education for the public good, not just for private profit. Agencies such as the Commonwealth of Learning (Commonwealth of Learning, 2001) and maybe the new Virtual Colombo Plan (Virtual Colombo Plan, 2001) may suggest a way forward. However, for these global public good enterprises to work requires understanding the reflexivity of globalisation, and what we have termed the hybridisation of global education. This requires acknowledging the authority of local people to shape their own learning in their own interests, and to contribute back to the global ‘curriculum’. To see global public good education as making courses available to be ‘sucked-down’ off the Net, or as simply ‘localising’, First World nations’ courses for delivery overseas will be little more than a global form of ‘instructional industrialism’ or, perhaps, ‘instructional colonisation’.

Note 1 This section draws partly on the work of Evans on a project entitled Australian distance education in Hong Kong and Papua New Guinea: an investigation of the consequences of internationalising education. This project was funded from 1999 to 2001 by an Australian Research Council Large Grant. The research consists of case studies of different courses being negotiated, introduced and offered by Australian institutions in partnership with local institutions or agencies in Papua New Guinea or Hong Kong.

2 The authors have been involved independently in one or more of negotiating, developing, delivering or evaluating courses that have been (re)developed for offer internationally.

References


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