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EDITORIAL

The 16th ICDE World Conference on Distance Education was held on November 8-13, 1992 at the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Bangkok, Thailand. I asked some people I met there to write a short piece about their impressions of the conference. In this issue of DEOSNEWS, you can read the contributions from these participants:

Bruce Scriven - Program Chair
 Lani Gunawardena - University of New Mexico, U.S.A.
 Torstein Rekkedal - NKI, Norway
 Phyllis Olmstead - Women's International Network (WIN)
 Elske Heeren - University of Twente, The Netherlands
 Tony Bates - Open Learning Agency, Canada
 David Murphya - Deakin University, Australia

THE NEW EXECUTIVE

During the Bangkok Conference, the new ICDE Executive Committee was introduced. The Committee will serve until the next ICDE World Conference planned to be held June 26-30, 1995 in Birmingham. The Executive Committee consists of:

Marian Croft, President of ICDE. She is the Director of Laurentian University's Center for Continuing Education, in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. At the university level, she has worked in continuing education for over eighteen years in three different universities. She has been the ICDE Vice-President for Canada, and she was the Program Chair of the ICDE's 15th World Conference held in Caracas, Venezuela in 1990.

Ian Mugridge, representative of North America, The Open Learning Agency, Canada

Erling Ljosa, representative of Europe, President of the European Distance Education Network (EDEN), and Director of NKS, Norway

Armando Villarroel, representative of South America, and Director of CREAD (Consortio-red de educacion a distancia)

Terry Evans, representative of the Pacifics, the Institute of Distance Education, Deakin University, Australia

Naran Kala, representative of Africa, and Chief Education Officer with the Government of Zimbabwe

V. C. Kulandai Swamy, representative of Asia, and Vice Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

David Sewart, the latest President of ICDE, from the Open University of the United Kingdom

Reidar Roll, Secretary General, from the permanent ICDE Secretariat in Norway

Reports on the 16th World Conference of ICDE

Bruce Scriven
Program Chair
Australia

From comments made to me at the conference, and subsequent letters and correspondence received, the 16th ICDE World Conference appears to have been very successful. It is always difficult to pick out the highlights of such a conference but certainly among them would be:

- . the official opening reception held on the Monday evening in conjunction with the Loi Krathong festival--which saw all our troubles float away and our wishes for the future made
- . the closing dinner and entertainment on the Thursday evening
- . the high quality of many presentations
- . the beautiful weather
- . the friendliness of our hosts at STOU and their willingness to try to accommodate every request.

Total attendance was about 800 and although this was somewhat disappointing there is no doubt that the world-wide recession affected the ability of many people to attend. Nevertheless there were delegates from more than 50 countries in attendance and the many contacts made and friendships cemented between people from so many countries, both big and small, can only benefit distance education in the future.

The accommodation, facilities and staff at STOU were judged to be excellent by all those I spoke to and the overall hospitality of our hosts would be difficult to surpass.

Perhaps the most disappointing feature of the conference from my point of view was the failure of many chosen presenters to actually register for the conference and deliver their papers. Although lack of finances was probably the main cause for this it was nevertheless a great disappointment to many attendees. About 45 papers from the 346 selected for presentation were, in fact, not able to be delivered.

I am currently working on preparing a book of the best papers which I hope will be published next year. All those (165) who forwarded full papers for consideration will be contacted over the next 3 or 4 months and advised of the outcome. Likewise the publication will be advertised when it is ready.

My special thanks go to all those who acted as chairpersons or who contributed to the efficient running of the conference. Despite the traffic problems (I spent 20 minutes at one red light on one occasion) all sessions seemed to start and finish on time and buses were able to get participants to their particular venues on schedule.

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The Bangkok conference was my first ICDE World Conference. I was impressed by the magnitude and scale of the conference and overwhelmed by the number of concurrent sessions I could have selected to attend. There were 10-14 sessions running at the same time! It was a good opportunity to learn about distance education (DE) programs and initiatives in other parts of the world. The papers related to the nine conference themes: 1. DE and development, 2. DE in the developing world, 3. DE, literacy & basic education, 4. Research and development, 5. Development of DE materials, 6. Student needs and support systems, 7. Applications of technology, 8. DE and open learning, and 9. Planning and the future.

Several papers focused on techniques for developing higher level thinking skills and metacognitive skills through DE course materials. The emphasis was on the implications of cognitive science for DE. Sessions that I enjoyed were: Problem Solving Activities in Study Guides, Developing Thinking Skills, The Role of Discourse and Narratology in Course Design for the Humanities, and Application of Problem-based Learning to DE. As a presenter and a participant I felt somewhat constrained by the time allotted to each presenter (15-20 minutes). There was not enough time for discussion or the discussion took place only after three presenters had completed their sessions. I believe that limiting the number of presenters per session or assigning some papers to roundtables would help. I enjoyed the crackerbarrel session that I attended on Research in DE. These sessions really gave us the opportunity to interact with each other and discuss issues.

For me, the best part of the conference was being able to meet and network with colleagues from different parts of the world. I came back with plans to collaborate internationally on future projects. One of these projects will be on research related to learning styles based on a paper that I presented. I was also able to participate in a meeting of the ICDE Women's International Network (WIN) and learn about the role the Network intends to play in ICDE and its past contribution to the field.

The wonderful hospitality extended to us by our Thai hosts made our stay a very memorable one. The social events, tours and performances organized by them enabled us to sample Thai culture and hospitality. I am looking forward to the next ICDE conference in Birmingham in 1995, and encourage others to attend as the Conference is an excellent forum for sharing ideas and learning from our colleagues in other parts of the world.

Torstein Rekkedal
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I attended my first ICDE conference in Brighton in 1975. Since then ICDE has developed considerably. Until 1982 ICDE was, in my experience, mainly an organisation which gathered for one conference every 3 to 4 years. Today ICDE has an executive committee, meeting regularly and working continuously between the conferences, as well as a permanent secretariat. For some years it also had a research committee that organised a network of researchers, initiated joint international research projects, and granted research funds.

In my view, the major benefits of the conference came from meeting with new and old friends and exchanging experiences on an informal basis. The quality of both keynote and parallel presentations varied considerably. Further, one easily gets the impression that the field of distance education moves rather slowly forward. Thus, if one seek new knowledge one might be a little disappointed. This is not necessarily the case for all participants, because the Bangkok conference attracted many delegates who were

quite new to distance education. I had the opportunity speaking to some who meant that the conference really had been an interesting and educating experience.

The most positive aspect of the Bangkok Conference was its excellent orchestration. The practical organisation of the conference, both before and during the week in Bangkok, was outstanding. The book of abstracts was well organised and provided a good basis for individual scheduling of attendance.

Unfortunately, there were too many announced speakers who did not show up. This problem should be taken seriously by the programme committee. At the Oslo conference, the programme was updated weekly and was not set to print until three days prior to the conference. This eliminated many of the scheduling problems. In my opinion similar measures must be taken in the future.

Many delegates felt that there should be a stricter selection process of presentations. I am wary of this prospect, because many participants must present a paper in order to secure travel funds. Further, I trust each delegate's ability to decide which presentations to attend from available information on presenters, titles, and paper abstracts.

Phyllis Olmstead
Women's International Network
U.S.A.

Women's International Network (WIN) reached its tenth anniversary during the 16th World Conference of ICDE. WIN was formed to provide a means for female members of ICDE to network and support each other in their research and academic endeavors in distance education. At this year's conference, WIN met and selected six representatives to compile the opinions of the group to present to the ICDE Executive Board. The WIN ICDE Liaison Committee included: Sue Warn, Australia; Gisela Pravda, Germany; Thandi Ngengebule, South Africa; Phyllis Olmstead, U.S.A.; Kusum Nangia, India; and Judy Ekins, England.

WIN members appreciated the efforts of the program committee, chaired by Bruce Scriven, to include women in the programming schedule and in paper presentations. Specifically, WIN acknowledges that two of the four scheduled keynote speakers were women of substantial position in the education. Several sessions were chaired by women and many of the papers included in the conference abstract were authored or co-authored by women.

WIN members suggest the inclusion of the names and pictures of all authors of papers in the abstract so that ICDE members will recognize the authors at the conference and so that all authors will be properly credited. Senior authors are often listed as the first author; senior positions in the field of education are held predominantly by men. Listing only the first author in the schedule and including only the first author's photograph in the abstract substantially reduces the exposure of quality female scholars in the conference session listings. As participants are leafing through the schedule of sessions selecting presentations to attend the presence of all author's names in the program provides a clearer set of choices.

WIN is very concerned with the use of language in papers, presentations, and speeches. Most participants speak English as a secondary language and many are women. The wording of papers and the presentations should include consideration of these factors. Presentations should be given in simple distinct English. Many non-English participants commented that English speakers (primary language) spoke rapidly and often incoherently. Secondary English audience members are entitled to the same quality presentations as those whose native tongue is English. Presentations and papers should also reflect gender neutral wordage. He, she, his, and her

should only be used when discussing people of the particular gender mentioned. The use of plural pronouns, he/she, or his/her are more acceptable than using he or she to refer to a nonspecific person.

WIN feels that ICDE should continue to show parity when scheduling males and females as keynote speakers, session chairs, and presenters. ICDE should continue to encourage female scholars to contribute their research for international publication. ICDE should show the same gender fairness in the selection of Executive Board members and programming committee members as it exhibits with geographic/cultural fairness when selecting these boards.

Elske Heeren
University of Twente
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The Netherlands

My impressions of the Bangkok conference atmosphere can be summarized through three phrases: dedicated preparations, stomach troubles, and metropolitan contrasts. But let me spend some more words on the conference content. I will shortly address two trends in distance education that appear to me as important: the students into the center of interest, and the students out of the social isolation.

We should focus on learning not teaching when we design and organize distance education. This trend was elaborated on by David Sewart in his keynote address. This may sound trivial at first sight: optimal learning has always been the main goal of distance education. However, this goal has been neglected, and it is time for a "reorientation". Sewart stressed the importance of student support systems, but I think the reorientation will carry over to all aspects of educational design.

In my own area, the use of new technologies in distance learning, interesting presentations were held. There were many promising examples of applications of computer-mediated communication, audio-conferencing, and video-conferencing. Technologies such as these enable the distance students to leave their socially isolated positions, and to have more frequent contact with their tutors and fellow students. Even collaborative learning at a distance becomes a possibility. A less socially isolated feeling is expected to have a positive influence on motivation, and a decreasing effect on drop-out rates. I was glad to see that some presenters not only spoke about their experiences, but also approached their applications of new technology in a way that supports the building of scientific knowledge on the design of these technologies.

As a final remark I would like to mention the six world-wide computer-conferences that have been called the "Bangkok project". I have followed some of these conferences through the DEOS conference list, and would like to conclude that the "Bangkok project" has been more than a great alternative for those who had to stay at home: I have enjoyed both the real conference and the computer conferences.

(Editor's note: Elske Heeren's final remark is a suitable transition to Tony Bates' report as moderator of one of the six conferences in the online pre conference called "the Bangkok Project". The project showed that it is possible to organize "electronic world conferences" and that they can be viable supplements to future distance education conferences. The TeleTeaching 93 Program Committee, for example, now considers to include an electronic post conference next fall.)

Tony Bates

Open Learning Agency
Canada

I did an analysis of the responses to the Strategic Planning Conference; I think 41 responses were recorded. These I have broken down as follows: Procedural 5, introductory/topic definition 7, moderator (me) 8, participants 18, and other 3. Perhaps of more interest was that in the first week, there were 8 moderator comments and 4 from participants. In the second week there were 0 moderator comments and 14 participant comments. In other words, the conference 'ran itself' for the second week. In addition to the 41 posted responses, I received about 10 'content' contributions via direct e-mail.

The reason why the second week went unmoderated was because I was blown out of the water by some kind of error over the weekend between the first and second week, which resulted in over 800 messages getting dumped into my mail box. This crashed my system, and our IS people were unable to sort it out until the conference was almost over. So the conference was by no means free of technical glitches. I am indebted though to Lani Guna-wardena, who was my 'host', who provided a summary of comments at the end of both the first and second week.

In terms of content, there were several very interesting and thought-provoking contributions. There were several 'diad' and 'triad' discussions, but while in the time available we got an 'opening-up' discussion, there was no structure or continuous or in-depth discussion of particular topics. The bulletin board format was a strong limitation, compared with a conference. Even in this format, a month would have been desirable. I'd rather it was clear completely of the face-to-face conference, as this 'interrupted' the computer conference, and there was no opportunity provided at the face-to-face conference to discuss the computer conference; two separate worlds!

In response to my request for lurkers to identify themselves, I had 80 responses, as follows: USA 44, Canada 16, Australia 14, UK 2. Mexico 1, Norway 1, Ireland 1, and Holland 4. USA covered many different states, from all over. Most 'lurkers' were complimentary about the conference, and many followed all six conferences.

Generally, it was an interesting and useful project, and I am really grateful to Terry (Anderson, the project manager,) and the porters for all their efforts, and I feel privileged to have been asked to moderate the Strategic Planning Conference.

David Murphy
Deakin University
Australia

I must declare at the outset that I love going to conferences, especially the opportunities they provide for meeting old friends and making new ones. This conference did not disappoint.

First, I attended the pre-conference workshop for course developers, which allowed me to hear and discuss the ideas and experiences of a variety of people involved in similar work to myself. It also allowed me to settle in to life at the STOU in readiness for the conference proper, and to locate the delightful swimming pool. The workshop sessions included small group discussions, some of which were rather more rushed than one would have wished, but they were all lively and informative.

An interesting feature of the pre-conference workshop was that participants had been asked to supply ideas and information to the organizers in preparation for the event. Happily, most people had responded, and their input was used and valued. For example, each of us had reflected on which metaphor for course designers was most influential on our practice.

The responses were varied and at times fascinating, with the two most popular probably being Noel Jackling's 'joint venturer' and Diana Carl's 'amicable guerrilla'. Our reflections on theories that inform our practice were also revealing. Other sessions of note included Fred Lockwood's 'hands on' role play, which enabled each of us to take part in a course team discussion of some real draft materials. Hopefully a detailed report of the workshop and its outcomes will be forthcoming which will supply all those interested with more detail.

The main conference challenged each of us with the usual 'Russian Roulette' choices of sessions--we examine the program, make a decision and live with the consequences. Sometimes we are disappointed, sometimes pleasantly surprised and occasionally fulfilled. At one stage I attempted to get to three papers in different locations during the one session, but the timing went awry. I'm sure that others will have had similar experiences.

Concerning (the editor's) request for recommendations for the Birmingham committee, I'm not too sure what to say. I believe that the committee members are well aware of the limitations of the format used for Bangkok, with the competing pressures of quality presentation and the opportunity for all to share their ideas (acceptance can mean make or break as far as attendance is concerned for many people). I heard a few good ideas being suggested by others, especially by Tony Bates, who was talking about the use of 'Poster Sessions' and the possibility of competitive bidding for the main slots in the program. As long as no one suggests the use of microfiche for the papers (were you at Melbourne) we should be OK!

For my own presentation, I was lucky. Not only was I slotted in early in the program (it's only natural for attendance to wane over a few days), but the people helping me performed superbly, making it fun (and hopefully stimulating) for those who attended.

Our Thai hosts were charming and warm, and to take part in the Loi Krathong festival (lighting the incense and candles in the small banana leaf boats and floating them in the water) was enchanting.

Does it all sound a bit too good to be true? Well, of course there were problems and disappointments (hours in buses in the Bangkok traffic, one night of misery with stomach troubles, missing good sessions and fidgeting in bad ones), but such things should be anticipated at any event. Overall, I have to ask myself whether I came away changed in any way by my experiences, and the answer is yes. And will I try to get to Birmingham for the next festival? Again, yes.

----- End of DEOSNEWS Vol. 2 No. 24 -----

Top of Page