

# *Book Reviews*

*Diane Janes, Editor*

**Distance Education: A Systems View.** Michael G. Moore and Greg Kearsley. Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1996. ISBN 0-534-26496-4.

*Reviewed by Mark Bullen*

Anybody involved in the teaching of distance education knows that finding a good textbook on the subject has been a difficult task. There have been several attempts to produce introductory books on the topic but they have not been very successful. Moore and Kearsley with their *Distance Education: A Systems View* go a long way to go a long way to filling that gap.

Their book presents an avowedly systems and American perspective on distance education and as long as that is kept in mind and other sources are used to balance the picture, then the Moore & Kearsley text fulfills a useful function in the field of distance education as a subject of academic study.

The first three chapters provide the historical and contextual background of distance education by defining the term, describing the systems approach, discussing the various forms of distance education and tracing its development from correspondence education through to a brief mention of computer networks and multimedia.

Chapter Four provides a summary of research on various aspects of distance education: effectiveness of technologies, media effectiveness, effective course design, teaching strategies, cost effectiveness and policy research.

Chapter Five focuses on how different technologies and media are used in distance education and Chapters Six through Ten deal with the different components of a distance education system: course design and development, teaching and tutoring, the distance education student and administration, management and policy.

Chapter Ten presents an overview of distance education theory. Chapter Eleven describes distance education activity in some countries outside of the United States, and Chapter Twelve presents some issues related to the restructuring of education that the authors claim will be the inevitable outcome of the growth of distance education.

This book certainly does not fall short in its breadth of coverage. The twelve chapters cover most of the important aspects of distance education, but it is a relatively short book (246 pages) and most topics are dealt with in only a few pages. The chapter on the theoretical basis for distance education, for example,

contains only 15 pages. Otto Peters work is given three paragraphs and the work of Bjore Holmberg is only mentioned in passing in the discussion of Moore's theory of transactional distance. The theoretical contributions of people like Terry Evans and Daryl Nation are not mentioned or provided as options for further reading. In the Technologies and Media chapter, computer conferencing is covered in one page and there is no mention of the Internet and the World Wide Web. The authors admit in the preface that the book is "somewhat superficial". They justify this by saying it is an introductory text "intended to give an overview of the field and, quite frankly, to make a complex subject as simple as is appropriate for a first reading about the field." Simple and superficial are not synonyms. The book is designed for graduate students who should be used to dealing with complex concepts. Distance education is not a self-contained discipline with its own concepts and terminology. It draws on other fields such as educational psychology, adult education, and educational technology, fields that most graduate students will already be familiar with. There is no need to "dumb down" an introductory book on distance education simply because it is the readers' first exposure to the subject.

Despite some of its shortcomings, Moore and Kearsley's book is a valuable contribution to the literature on distance education and anybody teaching the subject will find it useful. However, it is not the comprehensive text that one might expect and so it should be used in conjunction with other readings to provide a balanced picture of the field.

#### REVIEWER

Mark Bullen is a Project Manager in the Distance Education and Technology division of Continuing Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is currently completing a PhD in Adult Education. His research interest is in the area of instructional design and computer-mediated communication.

**The Program Evaluation Standards** (2nd Edition), The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 1994. ISBN 0-8039-5732-7

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*Reviewed by Brian D. Kerr*

"A standard is a principle mutually agreed to by people engaged in a professional practice, that, if met, will enhance the quality and fairness of that professional practice, for example, evaluation" (p. 2).

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation has compiled 30 standards, which are based on "...knowledge gained from the professional