

EMOOC21 - Potsdam

Future Track Panel Session:

**Transformation of the University towards a Hybrid University**

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Contribution by

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**Hybrid of What?**

*Introduction:*

I'm very pleased to be on this panel with Carlos, Peter and Pierre. We span three continents and three different higher education traditions. Pierre is at an elite selective institution where the 'open' in 'open and distance learning' doesn't mean much. I'm from the tradition of distance education at scale, where you're not really open if you have fewer than 100,000 students, and Peter has experience of both open universities and campus teaching.

Our topic is the 'Transformation of the University towards a Hybrid University'.

I'll just ask the simple question: *Hybrid of What?*

First point: we shall not know until the end of 2022 - any perhaps not then - if we are really moving towards hybrid universities.

Two respected Canadian colleagues have opposite views on how universities teach after COVID-19.

Alex Usher, of Higher Education Strategy Associates in Toronto, writes a candid blog on developments in Canada. Recently he wrote:

*"Canadian PSE institutions will look ridiculous if they do anything other than a near-complete return to in-person teaching for the autumn. The vast majority of students – 70-80% or so – are simply desperate to be back on campus, to be back with friends, to be in classes. They will be simply – and rightly – furious if we force them into another term of remote learning when the rest of the economy is open" (Usher, 2021).*

Tony Bates is known to many of you. He opened up research into the student use of media at the UK Open University back in 1970. Since the e-publication of his master work, 'Teaching in a Digital Age', he is the leading guru of eLearning. In his Contact North blog he wrote:

*"The growth in both fully online and blended/hybrid learning is bound to accelerate – and both institutions and instructors had better prepare". (Bates, 2020).*

Who is right? Probably both predictions are partly correct. Two of my grandchildren are undergraduates in Montreal. After a year of remote online teaching and lockdowns, they are very keen to get back to campus and classrooms.

Tony Bates has followed the development of eLearning in Canada, where the growth of registrations for online courses has outpaced those for on-campus courses for some years. Covid-19 has made more teachers and students familiar with working online, so the growth of online enrolments will probably accelerate, particularly for graduate students and upper year undergraduates.

So universities will likely adopt various hybrids of online and classroom teaching. The key issue is, what are the elements of the hybrid? What is being hybridized?

Carlos did this slide that sharpens our focus. It presents the future as a blend of traditional university and open university. We know what we mean by 'traditional university' but what about 'open university'?

My second point is that the purposes and methods of open universities will not hybridise well with campus universities. Let me explain.

COVID-19 has accelerated a bifurcation of distance education.

Before COVID-19, distance education developed in three phases.

Broadly, we had a century of correspondence education, mostly commercially run.

Then, in 1970 the UK Open University brought three revolutionary novelties to higher education: it used modern communications technologies; it abolished academic pre-requisites for entry; and it operated at scale. The term multi-media open and distance learning was coined and today there are 50 open universities around the world.

For thirty years open and distance learning had little impact on campus universities, but since 2000 the Internet has spread around the world and teachers have used it to put courses online. Tony Bates (2000) called this the 'Lone Ranger' approach to course development. But it is very different from the way that open universities do it.

The Irish scholar, Desmond Keegan, put this well when he said that: *in classroom education the teacher teaches; whereas in distance education the institution teaches.*

Back in the 18th century the economist and moral philosopher Adam Smith drew attention to the very different ways that cottage workshops and industrial factories operated. Classroom teaching and distance learning are the educational equivalents of this dichotomy.

Future challenges will require us to conduct distance learning in two very different ways. That is my third point.

First, we need distance education at scale, enrolling millions of learners, to meet the huge ambitions for education and training in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Second, we must also improve the quality and attractiveness of the hybrid remote teaching that will be part of the future for some campuses. A simple model of distance learning helps us to highlight the different requirements.

Think of distance learning as a stool with three legs, which are learning materials, administration & logistics, and student support. This stool is a good analogy, because unless all three legs are strong the stool will collapse and the student may fail or fall.

How do we make the legs strong? Let's look first at three examples of successful distance education at scale aimed at different groups of learners.

The UK Open University is the icon for effective operation at scale in higher education. It has close to 200,000 students served by a relatively small full-time staff. Millions of extra students will seek post-secondary education in the next 30 years. Open universities are part of the answer.

There are huge needs at the school level too. Some 200 million of the world's teenagers are not getting secondary schooling. Open schools are part of the answer. The world leader is India's National Institute for Open Schooling, which reaches 2 million pupils with a central staff of only 250 and partnerships with over 3,000 study centres.

Finally, for continuing education we now have MOOCs, Massive Open Online Courses. I take the example of FutureLearn, where I have taken 20 courses myself. FutureLearn reaches 12 million users with a central staff of 150 and partnerships with over 250 other institutions for course development and student support.

These are three examples of the use of industrial methods and networks of partnerships to achieve scale, quality and reach. They answer the aspirations expressed in the slogan that launched the Open University: to be open to people, open to places, open to methods, and open to ideas.

But trying to hybridize campus universities with these large-scale operations will not work. Their purposes are different. Campuses want to offer some distance learning, but they are not making access their mission and seeking to do **open** and distance learning with thousands of students.

The methods are different too. I go back to my three-legged stool. My three examples of large scale distance education carry out the functions of producing course materials, supporting students and providing efficient administration in different ways, but none those ways can easily be grafted on to campus teaching.

So how can campus universities benefit from the successes of distance education in doing hybrid teaching well?

Let's take the three legs of the stool one by one, starting with administration and logistics.

Cottage-industry methods of teaching are part of the attraction of campus study. It is unwise to adopt industrial approaches. But the Lone Ranger cannot do it alone and, if the system is to work for students, the administration must get involved. The teacher will teach, but with more guidance and organisation from the institution.

How can a hybrid university create learning materials that match the quality of those produced by open university and MOOCs course developers?

The answer is to fish in the well-stocked pool of Open Educational Resources. We draw on colleagues' work when we do research, so why not do the same for teaching? As well as Open Educational Resources, students can be directed to MOOCs, which are mostly still free and have high quality components.

Finally, what are the elements of student support in large scale distance education that campuses expanding online learning should graft into their systems? The key principle is that effective support from real human beings is vital for the success of most remote students. The planners of the UK Open University learned this when they examined Australian experience in the 1960s. They created an extensive tutorial network, numbering 5,000 tutors today.

Over my 11 years as vice-chancellor of the UKOU I spoke individually to 50,000 graduates as they collected their degrees. Thousands of them told me, with some emotion, that their tutors were the key to their perseverance and success.

Campus universities tend to take the availability of student support for granted, but for remote students it has to be organized. The reason that my present institution, the Acsenda School of Management, saw increases in student retention and performance during the pandemic was because we took every opportunity and used every mechanism available to stay in touch with the students.

My conclusion is that you cannot create a hybrid of a traditional university and an open university. What you can and should do is to take some of the secrets of success of the large scale distance learning providers and incorporate them in your plans to expand remote learning after the pandemic. I wish you well.

## **References**

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