

Reflections of a Scholar Gypsy

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Introduction

This book explores how our changing higher education (HE) system affects academic staff and how they, in turn, influence its evolution. The early chapters have described recent developments in academe. In this section, individuals reflect on their own career trajectories.

In his poem, *The Scholar Gypsy*, Matthew Arnold tells

The story of that Oxford scholar poor,
of pregnant wits and quick inventive brain,
Who, tired of knocking at Preferment's door,
One summer morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the gypsy lore,
And roamed the world with that wild brotherhood,
And came, as most men deem'd, to little good,
But came to Oxford and his friends no more.
(Matthew Arnold, 1853)

I feel an affinity for the scholar gypsy. On leaving Oxford I began an adventure that led me into a “wild brotherhood” of pioneers eager to change higher education. My friends said I was silly to forsake Oxford, and colleagues continued to decry my strange choices at each subsequent move.

Early Years

When I was six, after my father's unexpected death, our family moved from southern to northern England to live with my grandparents. This enabled my mother to return to teaching and find her feet again. My father had wanted his three children to have a boarding-school education, but we could not afford private schools. At age ten, after coaching from my mother and grandfather, I took the entrance examination for the UK's largest charity school, Christ's Hospital (CH), and won a scholarship.

My nine years (1952-61) at CH, wearing the Bluecoat uniform unchanged since the foundation of the school in 1553, were happy and stimulating. The teaching was superb, and we had great freedom to explore our own intellectual interests as we matured. I was named Senior Grecian (school captain) in my final year and won a scholarship to Oxford University to study Metallurgy at St. Edmund Hall. It was named for Edmund Rich (1174-1240) one of Oxford's early teachers,

who promoted lifelong learning with his sage advice: Live as if you will die tomorrow; learn as if you will live forever.

An Education in Medieval Universities

Oxford launched my career and a fascinating academic odyssey. I recount key steps in that trajectory, asking who or what motivated me for each move. What lessons did I learn, what was I able to contribute, and how did my perspectives change?

As an undergraduate I studied for three years and completed the programme with a fourth year of laboratory research. Two features of 1960s Oxford contrasted sharply with the academic systems that I encountered later. For the first three years, there were no tests or exams that counted towards our degrees. We then did a week of "finals," and those exam results were conflated with the assessment of the final-year research thesis to determine our degrees. I obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Metallurgy with first-class honours. After waiting three more years and paying a fee, this BA became a Master of Arts. Later, when Europe began to systematize degree structures and recognition, Oxford was asked to discontinue this "unearned" master's degree. Honour was saved by renaming it as a title, rather than an award!

Second, Oxford did not consider lectures important. We were simply told to sample those on offer each term and go to any that seemed relevant or interesting. The main vehicle for teaching and learning was the twelve-page essay that we submitted each week to our tutors before meeting them, with one or two other students, to discuss our efforts. I confess that I did not find Oxford's much-vaunted tutorial system effective for science subjects, although I enjoyed writing the essays. The succession of essay topics gave us an idea of the curriculum on which we would be examined in finals, which was not made explicit in any other way.

At the time of my final-year research project, my tutors suggested that I should continue for a doctorate. I had to make a decision. Did I want to spend three or more years researching a narrow subject and, if so, was Oxford the place to do it? Student life there revolved primarily around undergraduates and post-graduate students appeared to me to lead rather lonely lives.

I decided to switch institutions and prepared an application to the brand-new University of Sussex. This displeased my mother, who urged me that, "if I was going to leave Oxford, I might at least do something interesting!" I began to consider heading overseas, but discovered that PhD programmes in countries like Australia, Canada, and the US, imposed further coursework and a comprehensive exam before you could start research. Having already done a year's research and thesis, I was disinclined to take more courses.

Further investigation revealed that some European countries offered doctoral programmes that allowed you to start research immediately. My mother was a committed Francophile and, although I had passed exams in German and Russian at Oxford, French was the only other language in which I felt at all comfortable. My tutor, Jack Christian, helped me explore possibilities in France by writing to two of his professorial colleagues in Paris. The first, Jacques Friedel, replied that if I came to his laboratory, he would examine me and propose an appropriate

programme. The second, Paul Lacombe, said that if I turned up, he would start me on a research project. I opted for Professor Lacombe!

Meanwhile, we had found that under a decree of Napoleon III, degrees from a small group of ancient British universities were considered equivalent to the French *licence*, thus allowing their holders to undertake research for France's top doctorate, the *Doctorat d'État*. That seemed unfair to graduates from Britain's many newer universities, but who was I to cavil with a Napoleonic decree?

Before heading for Paris, I spent the summer in the USA working in an industrial R&D laboratory in New Haven, Connecticut. A post-doc friend in the Oxford lab found me the job. I readily obtained a Green Card and became the junior member of a team debasing the US coinage. The silver in dimes and quarters would soon be worth more than the coins' face value, so the Mint planned to replace silver with a sandwich alloy: a sheet of copper between two thin sheets of cupro-nickel. The copper behaved like silver in slot machines, while the cupro-nickel looked like silver. The challenge was to make the three sheets of metal stick together and my job was to test each attempt at doing that by pulling them apart. In the end the solution was simple. If the three metal strips were spotlessly clean of oil before putting them through a hot rolling mill, it became impossible to separate them.

I can still picture myself arriving at the Gare du Nord in Paris in October 1965, excited at prospect of a new venture but anxious that it could go terribly wrong. I found my room in the Collège Franco-britannique at the Cité Universitaire and familiarised myself with the pleasant campus. A day later I walked up the Boulevard Saint-Michel seeking the École des Mines. It was an impressive building, backing into the Luxembourg Garden, still pockmarked with bullet holes from the battle to liberate Paris in WWII. Professor Lacombe was in his office and took me to the lab, shared with a French and a Turkish student, where I would begin my research.

My project was to investigate the “deformation modes” of uranium crystals: i.e., how they react when put under stress. Uranium is unusual in being anisotropic, meaning that when you heat it, instead of expanding in all directions like most solids, it grows on some dimensions and contracts on others. This makes it a challenging material to use, so the French Atomic Energy Commission funded basic research like mine. The project, which I worked on for four years, was experimentally challenging because of the difficulties of preparing good crystals, deforming them at different temperatures, and using X-ray diffraction to study the results.

Meanwhile, the priority was getting my French up to speed. A research lab is an ideal place to learn a language because there are plenty of opportunities to chat without being challenged to perform. By the end of the first year my French was good enough for Professor Lacombe to ask me to teach a course in crystallography. The students' superior knowledge of mathematics was a greater challenge than the language!

In those pre-reform days, senior French professors could have posts in several institutions. Professor Lacombe also headed a department in the new science faculty at Orsay, south of Paris. That lab had better equipment and staffing than the École des Mines, so in the second year I moved my work to Orsay. This also suited me personally. In the summer of 1966 I went back to

New Haven, Connecticut, and married Kristin Swanson, whom I had met when I was debasing the US coinage the previous year. We started our life together at Orsay, where I could walk to the lab.

The greatest excitement during our years in France was the student uprising in May 1968, which led to the gradual curtailment of fuel supplies and other services. When the banks went on strike, we really felt stranded. But Professor Lacombe came into the lab that day with a bulging wallet and loaned each foreign student the cash necessary to tide them over until normal life resumed. His considerate gesture was in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the students demonstrating in the streets about the uncaring professoriate!

Before I had thought much about what to do after my doctorate, Rémi Tougas, a professor from the École Polytechnique, Montréal, came to our Paris lab to recruit new PhDs as faculty for his expanding department. None of my French fellow students was interested, but the prospect of continuing to work in French in Montreal appealed to me. Paris was still disrupted by the strikes, so Professor Tougas interviewed me in the bar at Orly Airport. After two beers he offered me the post of assistant professor.

I completed my doctorate, and not long afterwards Kristin and I sailed from Liverpool with our two children. I had never been to Canada, although I had been president of the Oxford University Canada Club, whose primary purpose was to organize student charter flights to New York! Two fellow students had persuaded me that my pleasant room in St. Edmund Hall, overlooking the front quad, would be ideal for transacting the business of selling flight tickets. Disembarking in Quebec City as landed immigrants in 1969 did something to assuage the guilt I felt about this previous, rather fraudulent, association with Canada!

Settling into Canada

After immigration formalities in Quebec City, the ship took us to Montreal. I had assumed that the French acquired in Paris would serve me well in Canada. It was a shock to find that I could barely understand the porter who came for our bags when we disembarked in Montreal!

I had arrived at École Polytechnique (Poly) well before term started, so I had time to reflect that twenty-two years of education had delivered me into an academic career. Desiring to be a competent academic, I supposed that I needed some training in education. Reviewing the opportunities in Montreal showed that most education programmes were full-time training for schoolteachers. An exception was a master's degree in educational technology that could be pursued part-time at Sir George Williams University. Before I had got to know my Poly colleagues well enough to realise that they would think taking an education degree was perverse, I had enrolled.

For full-time students, the MA (Ed Tech) was a two-year programme that included both a research thesis and a three-month internship. For the coursework, I joined the thousands of part-time students who came through the doors of Sir George's Hall Building at six pm after a day's work. This first exposure to the social sciences was fascinating for my previous tertiary education had been exclusively in the natural sciences.

Meanwhile, I was settling into Poly. In Canada, metallurgy is an engineering discipline, whereas at Oxford it was in the natural sciences. This gave Poly's teaching a solidly practical focus. The students were pleasant and cooperative, and I got to know them well because, as the newest member of faculty, I was assigned to organise their industrial visits. This meant long, overnight trips to distant mines and factories where some of the students might later be employed. Later in my career, as my work focussed increasingly on distance education, I was pleased to have had this early experience of research and teaching in the applied and natural sciences.

The style of classroom teaching at Poly recalled my experience of secondary school. In contrast to Oxford, lectures were a central element of the students' learning, with exams at the end of each course. I learned quickly that the academic styles and cultures of France and Quebec were so different that textbooks from France were unusable for the topics I taught. The faculty were expected formally to write up the subject material of each course and make it available as photocopied notes.

The evening courses at Sir George helped to make my teaching more systematic, but the internship transformed my career. In 1971, there were news reports of a revolutionary higher education project, in Britain of all places, called The Open University (OU). It used various technologies to reach large numbers of students at home and called itself "open" because it had removed all academic entry requirements. It seemed the perfect place for my Sir George internship. The OU agreed to host me for three months as an unpaid visiting lecturer and Poly generously allowed me to spend the summer of 1972 working at the OU in Milton Keynes.

The experience was life changing. The OU was a revelation in every way. First, the scale: 40,000 students in only its second year of operation. Second, the enthusiasm of the students: mostly working adults who had long wished to earn a degree. Third, the idealism of the staff and their commitment to the mission of openness. Fourth, the use of multiple technologies: print, TV, radio, and computing to create a multi-media distance teaching system. And fifth, tying this all together, a national network of hundreds of tutorial staff in study centres all over the country. I returned to Montreal, "no longer at ease here in the old dispensation" (T. S. Eliot, 1927). I had seen the future of higher education. I wanted to be part of it.

Joining the Wild Brotherhood

I was lucky. Soon after my return to Montreal, the Université du Québec (UQ) advertised the post of Director-General of its new Télé-université (TÉLUQ). As this was clearly Quebec's equivalent to the OU, I applied. Most institutions would have binned this pretentious application from a junior academic and recent immigrant. Instead, to its great credit, the UQ invited me to Quebec City, where I met the founding president, Alphonse Riverin, and his team. To my relief, they began by saying that they did not intend to hire me as Director-General. However, since I was the only person that they could find who had seen the Open University from the inside, would I join TÉLUQ and set up an Educational Technology unit?

Kristin and I moved with our three children to Quebec City and four thrilling years at TÉLUQ. Poly, which had been consistently supportive of my flirtation with educational technology,

generously offered me the safety net of a year's unpaid leave to try out the new post. By the end of the year, I was enjoying my role greatly and resigned from Poly. Without fully realising it, this was the moment that I left a conventional academic track and went, in Matthew Arnold's words, to learn the “gypsy lore” and “to roam with the wild brotherhood” of distance education.

TÉLUQ's first programme was PERMAMA (*Perfectionnement des Maîtres en Mathématiques*). Its purpose was to retrain all Quebec's secondary mathematics teachers in the “new math.” The learning system was based on written materials, some videos, and group meetings in regional centres. I decided to fulfil my mandate by instituting a system of course evaluation to provide feedback to the academics running the programme. This was not immediately popular, because evaluating the effectiveness of courses was unusual in those days, but my colleagues understood the purpose and it contributed to PERMAMA's success. In due course, Quebec's secondary pupils became some of the world's top performers - and tops in Canada - in the PISA mathematics assessment (Fraser Institute, 2022). I believe this owed much to the quality training all the secondary teachers had received through PERMAMA.

After becoming Directeur des études, I helped organize TÉLUQ's other academic programmes. We worked first with Quebec's strong co-operative movement to offer a course to the many employees of credit unions, agricultural co-operatives, etc. Its aim was to show how co-operatives differed from other commercial organisations. Thanks to our partners, this course, CO-OP, enrolled thousands of students in each of its early offerings, which made the rest of the UQ sit up!

A by-product of CO-OP's impact was that TÉLUQ became a magnet for faculty with nationalist leanings who were eager to change the teaching of social studies in Quebec universities. My wife and I enrolled in one course, *Histoire du Québec d'Aujourd'hui*, that these colleagues produced. Not only was it enriching for new Canadians like us, but I also realised that if you work in a distance teaching institution, the best way to assess the quality of the courses and the student support is to take courses yourself. I followed this principle in all my later appointments.

Our time in Quebec City (1973-77) coincided with the rise of the Parti Québécois. When the PQ came to power in 1976, four of my TÉLUQ colleagues were elected to the National Assembly, and three became ministers. That first PQ government may have had the most intellectually distinguished cabinet in Canadian history. It was all very exciting and, although I was TÉLUQ's only anglophone, I never felt a flicker of discrimination. A decade later I invited René Lévesque to give a talk in Sudbury and bummed a cigarette off him in the taxi to the hotel! In 2018, it was an honour to be awarded the UQ's 50th anniversary medal along with two other colleagues from TÉLUQ's earliest days.

Developing the Gypsy Lore

In the mid-1970s, Athabasca University (AU) was emerging as a distance teaching university in Alberta and TÉLUQ naturally made contact with it. The federal government was delighted to

find a ready-made partnership between English- and French-Canada and funded us to research the educational uses of Canada's communications satellites. In 1977, my AU contacts encouraged me to apply for the new post of Vice-President, Learning Services. It seemed like a long shot. When I went for an interview, I sent a postcard home saying, "this is the most you are ever likely to see of Edmonton." But just before Christmas, we moved to Edmonton, and I began a new job. I was attracted to Alberta by the prospect of a more senior post, not because I had felt unwelcome in Quebec.

AU was conceived in the late 1960s as an overspill campus for the University of Alberta, but enrolment growth then flattened. Instead of abandoning the idea, in 1972 Alberta converted AU into a pilot project to test the concept of an open, distance university. It produced some courses, notably the legendary "Ancient Roots of the Modern World," which had such demanding essay requirements that jokers said anyone passing it should receive a PhD!

When I arrived in 1978, AU was still hesitantly defining its curriculum and teaching/learning system, proposing changes whenever the academic council met. I argued that reasonable solutions, implemented effectively, would serve the students better than an endless search for the perfect programme. Somewhat relieved, colleagues buckled down and AU began a period of steady growth. AU's president, Sam Smith, was a great support and an important mentor.

The liveliest debate at AU was about imposing pacing on the students. From my own experience, I considered that having start- and end-dates for courses and deadlines for the submission of assignments was reasonable. However, AU already accepted new enrolments at the beginning of every month, meaning that, given the relatively small numbers of students overall, the notion of "student cohort" was weak and end-dates were flexible. This remains a live issue in open and distance learning (ODL). The evidence suggests that deadlines do increase success rates by obliging students to give some priority to their studies, but some still argue that complete freedom to pace oneself should be a core principle of ODL.

Gypsies and Gypsy Encampments Move On

One day in 1979, Sam Smith surprised me by saying that it was time for me to get experience in a "real" university. He put an ad in front of me for the post of Vice-Rector (Academic) at Concordia University, Montreal. Being an obedient type I applied, was appointed, and prepared to leave Edmonton. It was during my notice period that the Alberta government announced, without warning, that AU would be relocated from Edmonton to the small town of Athabasca. Sam Smith had not been forewarned of this decision and resigned on principle. I was proud of him. Forty years later history repeated itself when the government provoked the departure of AU President Peter Scott by ordering a massive move of staff to Athabasca.

Sam Smith was right that Concordia was a "real" university. It had classrooms and lecture halls! It was also a perfect place to train for leadership in higher education. A large urban university with a very diverse community of faculty and students (full-time and part-time), Concordia was

always nearly broke but competed successfully with McGill in opening new disciplines. Rector John O'Brien, who had been Canada's youngest university president when appointed principal of Sir George in 1969 at the age of thirty-eight and became the first rector of Concordia after it merged with Loyola College in 1974, was an experienced and wise role model. As well as looking after the Faculties of Engineering, Commerce and Fine Arts, I supervised the research office and the human resources department. I had some wonderful senior colleagues reporting to me. My three deans, as diverse as their faculties, made a great team, while my director of human resources was completely unflappable in the face of labour disputes.

Concordia's full-time faculty had voted to unionize just before my arrival in 1980. When negotiating its first contract the faculty union requested arbitration far too early, so the arbitrator wisely made us negotiate in front of him at the labour court rather than imposing things himself. This was a glacial process, and the contract was not signed until after I left in 1984. The part-time faculty also attempted to unionize, so I became practised in industrial relations, which proved useful when I moved to Sudbury, a union town.

Although Concordia had Canada's first graduate programme in Educational Technology, it did not offer distance education directly. But while at AU I had been elected programme chair for the upcoming world conference of the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) in Vancouver in 1982, which helped me maintain my ODL networks. We began a campaign to change "correspondence" to "distance" in the Council's name. This was accepted by the membership, who then elected me as president of the new ICDE. I began to understand more fully the huge needs for distance education in developing countries. It was only in the mid-1980s that this need began to be addressed by the creation of open universities and open schools.

To the Mid-North: God's Country

John O'Brien was due to step down as rector in 1984, so I began exploring new opportunities. The presidency of Laurentian University came vacant and this bilingual institution, which combined a small distance learning programme with classroom teaching, and served the vast territory of north-eastern Ontario through affiliated colleges in Hearst, Sault Ste. Marie and North Bay seemed a good fit to my experience. The Laurentian board handled the search impressively and we moved to Sudbury in the summer of 1984.

Concordia had trained me well, making the transition to a presidency straightforward. My predecessor at Laurentian, Henry Best, had operated more like a government minister than an executive head, and the staff welcomed a more hands-on style. I wondered how to get noticed by a Tory governing establishment that had ruled Ontario for decades, but I was lucky again. David Peterson was elected to head a Liberal government. His priorities of northern development and francophone services fitted perfectly with our strengths, and Laurentian developed steadily for the rest of the decade. I was greatly helped by a brilliant and pro-active vice-president, Charles Bélanger, who inspired Laurentian to get serious about research. He also started discussions

about a northern medical school. At first the officials in Toronto laughed at us, but it became a reality a decade later.

A contact with entrepreneur Sam Blyth led to Laurentian setting up the *Université canadienne en France*, a year-abroad programme near Nice open to students from across Canada. The students found it a great experience, and I was flattered when the French government made me a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques* in recognition of my promotion of French culture in Ontario. Sadly, some years after my departure, the growing disparity in value between the French franc and the Canadian dollar forced its closure for cost reasons.

After five years, Laurentian gave me leave to take the one-year senior executive course in national and international affairs offered by the National Defence College (NDC) in Kingston, Ontario. Primarily aimed at senior military officers, police, and civil servants, it also took two academics each year. The course explored how societies are organized. We had lectures in Kingston and made field trips to all provinces and territories of Canada in the first term and to twenty-two foreign countries in the second. It was a very rich experience, not least because 1989-90 was a year of radical geopolitical change as apartheid collapsed in South Africa and the Berlin Wall came down. We were the last group to go through Checkpoint Charlie before it was taken away. Sadly, the NDC was too good to last. Two years later the government closed it, citing its high cost.

The Mecca of Open and Distance Learning: The Open University

Before joining the NDC I had applied for the post of Vice-chancellor of the OU, due to become vacant in 1990. Leading the OU had been my ambition ever since my 1972 internship but having now lived outside the UK for twenty-five years, it seemed like a very long shot. The selection process was the opposite of the chat in the Orly airport bar that had launched my academic career two decades earlier. Interviews totalled more than eight hours and an OU dean, a Canadian, was dispatched to Sudbury to gather intelligence while I was at the NDC. The Laurentian faculty were on strike at the time, so I assumed that my goose was cooked!

But no! After my final interview the OU's chairman, Sir Kenneth Berrill, offered me the job. It was a great moment. During my career-changing internship at the OU seventeen years earlier I had seen the future of higher education. Now I was charged with helping to shape that future by leading The Open University into its third decade.

Those eleven years were marvellous. My luck continued. Whereas at Athabasca University, ten years earlier, I had found an institution struggling to discover its curriculum and modus operandi, the OU was crystal clear about its mission and highly effective in its operations. However, morale was low after the depredations of a government which had cut funds to universities generally and started a witch hunt for Marxist bias in OU courses. My first job was to rebuild confidence.

A ready-made instrument was at hand. The first issue on my desk was a government review of the OU, whose ostensible purpose was to help the government decide whether to give the OU more funds to take more students. We gradually understood, however, that the real aim was to guide officials in making recommendations about how to fit the OU, now the UK's largest university, into the total restructuring of UK higher education that was planned through the HE Reform Act of 1991-92. Although OU colleagues were still deeply suspicious of the government, I took an optimistic view of this review and insisted that we collaborate fully with it.

The results set the OU up for a successful decade. In 1992 it became part of an HE system that combined the “old” universities and the newer polytechnics, while at the same time giving jurisdiction over higher education to the UK's home countries. The OU became the only “national” university, eligible to receive funding from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Very importantly, we also argued successfully for a uniform funding formula and uniform quality assurance processes for all HE institutions.

The result was steady growth. From 100,000 in 1990, the student body grew to 200,000 by 2000, giving the OU the resources to move effectively and incrementally into the online world. Just 5,000 students were online in 1995; by 2000 there were 110,000. In operating their learning systems, large-scale distance-teaching institutions must rely mostly on media and equipment that the students already have, so the timing of innovations and the introduction of new technologies must be done sensitively.

Scholar-Practitioner

Despite - or perhaps because of - my intense engagement with running the OU, I remained active as a scholar. The publication of a letter in *NATURE* (Daniel et. al., 1972)), on our work at Poly, had been the summit of my activity as a researcher, but I continued contributing to ODL as a scholar throughout my career. Soon after joining the OU, I completed a distance diploma in Theology from Laurentian and considered embarking on a part-time law degree. My long-suffering wife suggested that a better choice might be to complete the MA (Ed Tech) programme from which I had dropped out fifteen years earlier. Showing admirable flexibility, Concordia re-admitted me to the programme, the OU gave me a month's study leave, and I spent a month in Montreal writing the thesis. It happened to be the month of Quebec's 1994 referendum campaign on sovereignty, and the results came in on the last night of my stay. It was a long evening until the verdict of “No” allowed us to open the bottle of scotch on the kitchen table! I returned later to defend the thesis and then converted it into my book, *Mega-universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education*, (Daniel, 1995) which became an academic best-seller. Higher Education was beginning to wake up to the potential - and threat - of teaching and learning technologies and its leaders were curious about how to operate at scale with quality.

Leading the OU was a deeply fulfilling experience. Everywhere I went, in the UK and overseas, I met people whose lives - or those of their relatives - had been transformed by OU study. All my speeches included the OU's slogan "Open to People, Open to Places, Open to Methods, Open to

Ideas,” which had been a perfect expression of my own educational philosophy ever since I first heard it.

Over the decade, I shook hands and talked with some 50,000 graduates at a hundred and fifty convocation ceremonies, one as far away as Ethiopia. The atmosphere at these ceremonies, inspired by my successive chancellors, Asa Briggs, and Betty Boothroyd, was extraordinary. It was also my privilege to organize the OU's 25th anniversary celebrations in 1994, which culminated in a Charter Day ball that was broadcast live by the BBC. That same year I was knighted by Queen Elizabeth - an honour that recognized the OU's extraordinary success more than any merit of mine!

International Functionary: UN and Commonwealth

During a two-year extension as OU Vice-chancellor, following my second five-year term, a senior government official phoned me. Britain had just rejoined UNESCO and he hoped that a UK candidate would compete for the vacant position of Assistant Director-General for Education (ADG-ED). The UK government would not support any application explicitly, but he encouraged me to apply. Upon getting the job, I moved to Paris in 2001 to start a new phase in my career.

International intergovernmental organisations are very different from universities. Others regarded my new position as the UN's top official in education as a big deal, but after seventeen years as a university president, this second-level job at UNESCO felt more like that of a janitor in a messy bureaucracy. Of the major educational institutions established with high ideals in the 20th century, I had been part of one of the most successful, the Open University, and was now engaged with UNESCO, which many outsiders judged to be ineffective. However, criticism of UNESCO is easy. Richard Hoggart is unsparing in his book *An Idea and its Servants: UNESCO from Within* (1978) but reckons that governments are largely responsible for suffocating UNESCO's founding ideals of objectivity, openness, and intellectual freedom. He concludes that UNESCO could again be an important vehicle for renewal when the world re-awakens to the need for collective solutions and less polarized ideologies.

In the early 2000s, UNESCO's top priority was the global campaign, “Education for All,” which had languished during the turbulent decade of the 1990s, before being given fresh impetus by the UN's Millennium Declaration. The key task was to get all the world's children into primary school. My role was to encourage the World Bank, the international development departments of major countries, and other UN agencies to collaborate on this task. Although co-operation does not come naturally to these bodies, we made solid progress. Governments were beginning to realise that it is not enough to train an elite; development requires basic education for all. Nevertheless, visits to Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003, in particular, brought home to me how challenging this work can be.

Although “Education for All” was the over-riding imperative during my UNESCO years, other significant developments were also in play. In 2002, we convened a meeting to define and promote Open Educational Resources (OER). Like many good UNESCO initiatives, this one developed slowly because of scepticism in member states and hostile lobbying by the publishing industry. It has taken twenty years for OER to become an accepted part of the educational landscape, but they now generate huge savings in textbook costs for institutions and students and have made the research literature more open.

Developments in international degree recognition took even longer. Starting with the Lisbon Convention for the European Region in 1997, it was not until 2023 that enough member states ratified the Global Convention that became the first UN treaty on higher education with worldwide scope. During the intervening years, worldwide student numbers had grown to 235 million, with six million studying abroad. The convention establishes universal principles for fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications.

In contrast to these glacial processes, UNESCO was able to develop an International Convention against Doping in Sport in the record time of two years between the request from a ministerial conference in 2003 and the Convention's adoption by UNESCO in 2005. Signing the Convention was a condition for a country's participation in the 2005 Winter Olympics, which speeded things up! It is now the second most widely adopted of all UNESCO treaties, with 191 states parties.

Wild Brotherhood Worldwide: The Commonwealth of Learning

Retirement age in the UN system was sixty-two. Moreover, when the director-general of a UN agency steps down, the senior team are expected to fall on their swords. Not feeling ready for retirement, I moved to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Vancouver as president in 2004. UNESCO colleagues could not understand why I would leave the UN system for a tiny agency of the Commonwealth with fewer than forty staff, but I judged that, because of its tight focus on Learning for Development, COL had a greater capacity for impact. I relished having a hands-on role again, and it was a pleasure to return to Canada after fourteen years in Europe.

COL wove together the major threads of my career. My international involvement, which began as president of the International Council for Distance Education in the 1980s, had been heightened by promoting the OU overseas and as a senior UNESCO official. I did not manage to visit all Commonwealth member states during my eight years at COL but by going to over forty, I raised my lifetime tally of countries visited to one hundred and twenty-four. I was frequently in India, which is the largest Commonwealth member. It is a huge pool of talent and innovation, whose impact, sadly, is too often stymied by dysfunctional management and politics.

My conversion experience at the OU in 1972 had inspired a passion for the role of technology in expanding and improving education. This resonated perfectly with COL's mission of applying technology to the development of communities and individuals through learning. Technology

changes constantly and COL's excellent staff were skilled at finding the most appropriate tools to support learning in the complex and varied development contexts found around the world. This meant being fully aware of the leading edge of educational technology, even if the optimal solutions for many challenges were at the trailing edge.

It was good to oversee an institution again and to be able to work closely with COL's education specialists. These experts, recruited on limited-term contracts from Commonwealth countries, had to be versatile. On their country visits they might meet with ministers and officials in the morning and be deeply engaged in a field project in the afternoon. Accompanying them gave me extraordinary experiences. I remember, for example, being in a vast hall in southern India with thousands of women who eked out a living by herding goats. COL had equipped them with cellphones, through which they received short daily messages, in their own languages, advising how to care better for the goats and address problems. One beauty of the programme was that we could evaluate its impact by studying the goats, which became measurably healthier and more fecund because of the cellphone messages. This was just one example of the beneficial impact of intelligently designed interventions in the very diverse countries of the developing Commonwealth.

COL was also a leader in open schooling: the application of ODL to secondary education. We worked closely with India's National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), which enrolled millions of pupils, funding them to share their expertise with other countries. Open schools were clearly an important answer to the huge challenge of getting children through secondary schooling, so I wrote another book, *Mega-schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All* (Daniel, 2010), to promote the concept.

Many elements contribute to COL's success but two stand out. First, it maintains close contacts with Commonwealth member states at many levels to remain aware of their evolving needs. Second, it perseveres with programmes until they have shown success and been embedded in local structures to ensure continuity. This may seem an obvious point, but I observed that other development agencies, both national and international, tend to terminate programmes just as they are beginning to bear fruit because a new minister or official wants to cut a ribbon for their own pet project.

I retired from COL in 2012 at age seventy. The following year I was appointed Officer of the Order of Canada for the “advancement of open learning and distance education in Canada and around the world.” This national recognition of the “wild brotherhood” of ODL that I had joined in the 1970s gave me immense satisfaction.

Retiring and Reflecting

In retirement, I have had three simultaneous part-time assignments. Each helped to focus the lessons of my earlier life as a scholar gypsy.

First, as a member of the academic council of a small, private, for-profit, HE institution in Vancouver, the Acsenda School of Management (<https://acsenda.com>), I observed how a classroom-based institution navigated the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, I participated as an "Education Master" in the DeTao Master's Academy, a Shanghai-based private-sector organization that brought global experts to China to encourage innovation (<http://detaoma.com>). Third, I chaired the International Board of the United World Colleges (UWC) a network of eighteen schools and colleges on four continents, the majority focussing on the sixteen to nineteen year age group. Their shared aim is to "make education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future" (<https://uwc.org>).

Each of these roles provided interesting experiences. Here I simply reference the organizations' websites and reflect on how they sharpened the lessons of my earlier work with respect to the evolution of ODL and the continuing campaign to bring education to all.

Is ODL progressing?

In recent decades, ODL has evolved in four phases. From 1970, the OU pioneered the development of multi-media distance education at scale to widen access to higher learning. Other jurisdictions were inspired to create similar institutions, accounting for some fifty open universities and millions of students worldwide by 2020. However, the OU model had little impact on campus universities. One commentator remarked that opening the OU had closed the UK's other universities even more firmly to part-time and adult students!

A second phase saw the incremental integration of online technology into higher education generally—slowly in the 1990s and then more quickly during the “dot-com frenzy” at the turn of the millennium. Most institutions relied on early adopters within their faculty to stimulate the process, rather than creating policy frameworks. The overall result was the offering of new study mechanisms to their traditional students, rather than widening access beyond that group.

A third phase, starting in 2008, was the introduction of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). These are now offered by hundreds of organizations to millions of learners (Daniel, 2012). Course completion rates are dismal, but I have taken over twenty MOOCs myself without completing them all - and they are a useful feature of today's continuing education ecosystem.

The Covid pandemic imposed a fourth phase, which had a dual impact. It obliged all HE institutions to develop remote teaching policies - sometimes overnight - and established live interactive video (e.g. Zoom) as the principal means of reaching students during classroom closures.

After living through these four phases, campus institutions are understandably confused about whether they should retain a remote teaching capability in the post-Covid era. Decisions and costings are not made easier by students who, having experienced both remote and face-to-face classes, would like to keep all options open.

Campus institutions that decide to include some distance education in their future teaching and learning strategies should absorb these two lessons from history:

- Technology allows teaching to occur at scale with consistent quality and low unit costs (Daniel, 2022). Institutions should take advantage of the opportunity to widen access to learning at low cost and put the “open “back into “open, distance and digital learning.”
- Good ODL should offer a blend of independent and interactive learning. Both are important and interactive learning need not require synchronous technologies (Daniel, 1979).

Education for All

When I first engaged with the OU in the 1970s, openness was in the *zeitgeist* of the times. I found the OU slogan, "open to people, open to places, open to methods, open to ideas," an excellent guide to the conduct of education and much more motivating than the vacuous mission statements of most institutions.

Today however, openness no longer resonates with the public as it did then. In the grimmer, post-Covid environment of wars, climate change and economic insecurity, the traditional view that quality education must be exclusive education is reasserting itself. Furthermore, the closures and disruptions of educational systems provoked by Covid have undone a decade of progress in achieving basic education for all (UNESCO, 2021).

It will be difficult to make up the lost ground, even where governments find the will. Today's multi-national fundraising campaigns address the military challenges of war, not giving all children adequate schooling for the 21st century. It is time to reassert that education is a public good for everyone in order to avoid a generational catastrophe and drive sustainable recovery. As societies reawaken to the need to nurture educated and skilled populations, they must be made aware of the alternatives to traditional education systems. With the methods and technologies of open and distance learning, they can offer quality teaching and learning at low cost to people wherever they are. The potential of ODL is still largely untapped, although fifty years' work by our "wild brotherhood" of distance educators has prepared the way for its growing impact in future.

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