

ICDE World Conference 2001

Jannette Kirkwood

Head Unit Team Services

Distance Education Centre

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba , Australia

Email: kirkwood@usq.edu.au

Recent focus for ICDE (International Council for Open and Distance Education) has been the 20th World Conference on Open and Distance Education held in Dusseldorf, Germany from 1 -5 April 2001. This was the first time an ICDE World Conference was held in Germany, and the Congress Centre Dusseldorf provided a splendid modern venue on the banks of the Rhine River. The conference, titled 'The Future of Learning- Learning for the Future: Shaping the Transition' focused on the future of education and training in general and on the convergence of open, distance and virtual learning and traditional education paradigms.

One of the most defining features of ICDE world conferences is the international representation of the delegates. Among the 1305 delegates were representatives from 88 countries. These countries vary greatly in their stages of development, and this feature is reflected in the content of the papers, posters and discussions at the conference. While session relating to new developments in distance education were popular with a wide cross section of delegates, it was valuable for distance educators from developed countries to come down to earth to face the reality of education in countries where communication technologies are almost non-existent, where the need and demand for education is high, and the resources to supply this demand are low. While many papers addressed issues relating to technology, there were also many topics addressing support, services, strategies and policies.

In the plenary sessions, representatives from politics and economy, education and society explored further the themes of the conference. The various sectors of education were represented, and it was obvious that technology is a major issue for all areas. Speakers included Gabriel Behler (Education Minister for North-Rhine Westphalia), Molly Broad (President University of North Carolina) Professor Abdul Khan (COL) and Irwin Staudt, (CEO IBM), Germany. The visions for 2005/2010 in the areas of lifelong learning; school and vocational education, university and higher education, and company and workforce training were addressed by Guus Wijngaards (Deputy Director, European SchoolNet), Professor Jim Taylor (DVC at the University of Southern Queensland), and Dr Alexander Labak (Deutsche Bank). The panel discussions which followed each of the plenary sessions were popular with delegates and were beneficial in further exploring the topic areas. The varied backgrounds and experiences of those who added their views and comments provided the audience with multiple perspectives of the

topics under discussion.

The ICDE prizes of excellence have now become a feature of each world conference and were awarded in the following areas:

- the Institutional Prize -Open University of Catalonia (Spain),
- the Individual Prize - Professor SW Tam, President of the Open University of Hong Kong, and
- the Prize for Lifelong Contribution to the field - Dr Torstein Rekkedal, Director of Research and Development, NKI, Norway.

The 21st world conference will be held in Hong Kong in 2003. This conference will continue the theme of the Dusseldorf's conference with a working title of 'Lifelong Learning in a Networked World', The International Program Committee for this conference will be chaired by Professor Jim Taylor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Learning Services) at the University of Southern Queensland.