

# **A community for learning and teaching, research and Innovation in Distance Education**

**Theme:** Community Development

**Sub-theme:** Innovative Pathways to Knowledge Society

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The DE Hub: Innovation in Distance Education project was established as a central research institute to develop, facilitate and disseminate information on best practices in distance education for the Australian higher education sector. As a consortia of five higher education institutions (University of New England [UNE], Charles Sturt University [CSU], University of Southern Queensland [USQ], CQUniversity [CQU] and Massey University [Massey (2010)]. Partners are engaging in national and global collaborations on evidence-based approaches to new teaching technologies and are building capacity across the sector where appropriate. DEHub is exploring innovative modes of teaching and learning that strengthen the capacity of regional universities to meet the demands of their distance education students, and to assist rural communities enhance their economic and social sustainability.

### **What we do**

The Distance Education Hub (DEHub) is financed through a Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund Relations (DEEWR). DEHub serves as a central research institute for investigation into best practices in distance education. DEHub also serves as an online agency for the dissemination of information on best practices for the Australian higher education sector. The priorities of 'ease-of-access', 'ease-of-understanding', and 'ease-of-implementation' are designed to ensure that DEHub remains the primary first-step facility for educational, research, and community needs.

DEHub was designed with a broad base to serve an ever widening range of distance education needs and interests. The Distance Education Research and Development theme is designed to assist academic staff, independent researchers, higher degree research students, research committees and networks, government agencies, and non-government organizations. The Distance Education Learning and Teaching theme is designed to assist teaching and support staff, ICT providers and managers, and students engaged in distance education courses. Finally, the Distance Education Community and Open Learning theme is designed to assist all of the above, with the addition of broader public and private sector community and institutional bodies.

DEHub will provide leadership in researching, developing and implementing models for distance education research, teaching, and community engagement across the Australian tertiary sector. Resources available through DEHub will aim at streamlining and improving the processes involved in undertaking distance education research by serving as a clearinghouse for best practice methods and systems in networking and communication, research collaboration and cooperation, data sharing, resource hosting, and research management. DEHub will help teachers and students by providing world's best guidelines on the nature and format of distance education environments and practices. DEHub will facilitate and support distance education community environments and enhance the nature of community relations and partnerships by providing information and access to resources and services. In all cases, associated professionals can utilise DEHub to improve their practices through exploring the range of options, test the practicalities of theories and ideas, and, where viable, integrate these options into their own research, teaching, and community environments.

## **AN EMERGING RESEARCH PROGRAM**

Education is transforming at a local, national and international level. There is a move towards an overarching distance education environment mediated by technology and towards a lifelong learning paradigm.

DEHub has been established to facilitate topical research, inform policy development and disseminate critical information in distance education leading to knowledge creation and application by distance education practitioners.

### **A working definition of distance education**

Distance education, also variously referred to as distance learning, e-learning, online learning, online education or distributed learning, can be simply defined as a system of education delivery in which the majority of learning takes place with the learner and the teacher separated by space and/or time, the gap between the two being bridged by technology. A distance learner is one who experiences the majority (80+%) of their learning off-campus at a distance from the teacher and consequently has limited face-to-face interaction with their teachers and peers. Distance education can cater for a wide variety of diverse needs for both on-campus and distance learners and is usually characterised by greater flexibility for the learner, convenience of time and place for learning and the ability to work at one's own pace. As such, distance education requires special techniques of course/unit/lesson structure and design, distinctive instructional techniques and different methods of communication using electronic technologies. Distance education encompasses a wide variety of technology-based teaching and learning approaches, including blended learning, e-learning and mobile learning. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Learning technologies utilised by distance educators can include

- print-based media, such as hardcopy study guides or CDs of readings;
- voice-centred media, such as CD or MP3 recordings, teleconferences, podcasts, webcasts, or voice over IP systems (SKYPE);
- video platforms, such as instructional videos, DVDs, vodcasts or interactive video-conferencing;
- web conferencing tools such as Elluminate and Wimba;
- computer-centred support delivered over the internet or corporate intranet through learning management systems or more interactive Web 2.0 social networking technologies such as blogs, wikis, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, del.icio.us; and/or
- multimedia systems.

The implementation of distance learning will continue to evolve to incorporate emerging technologies. This working definition of distance education informs a range of DE Hub research themes/questions, areas of interest and projects. DEHub's research projects will be guided by particular themes and questions in order to contribute knowledge relevant to policy decisions, as well as researcher and educator interests. These major research themes, further delineated into priority research areas that can be linked to projects, constitute DE Hub's research program. Our activities will be of relevance and use to academic staff, independent researchers, higher degree research students, research committees and networks, students engaged in distance education study, government agencies and non-government organizations, as well as broader public and private sector community and institutional bodies.

### **Research themes**

In developing the priority research themes for the DEHub a literature scan was undertaken by DE Hub staff. This background research and analysis of the recent paper by Olaf Zawacki-Richter,<sup>[1]</sup> 2009, [Research Areas in Distance Education: A Delphi Study](#), IRRODL, Vol 10, No 3. formed the basis for a focus group inquiry structured around the three key themes of *Research and Development*, *Community and Open Learning* and *Teaching and Learning*. Fifty university distance education practitioners produced recommendations and further questions. The findings were refined and expanded through a two day research planning process with distance education specialists including two international visitors to the

DEHub. An extensive set of research possibilities were further refined and distilled into 15 research themes. Seven research themes were then prioritised for action in 2010. The remaining eight themes will develop and evolve as further research and analysis is undertaken.

### **Research and Development Theme: (Macro)**

Within this theme, distance education systems and theories will be examined in relation to international, national and state policy agendas. These include access, equity and ethics; globalisation of education and cross-cultural aspects; distance teaching systems and institutions; theories and models; and research methodologies used in, or suitable for, distance education topics and knowledge transfer.

[\*Theories and models \(2010 Research Focus\)\*](#)

[\*Globalisation of education and cross-cultural aspects \(2010 Research Focus\)\*](#)

[\*Access, equity, social inclusion and ethics \(2010 Research Focus\)\*](#)

[\*Distance teaching systems and institutions\*](#)

[\*Research methods in distance education and knowledge transfer\*](#)

### **Community and Open Learning Theme (Meso)**

There are eight sub-themes in this major research area: open education resources; quality assurance; professional development and faculty support; learner support services; innovation and change; educational technology; management and organisation; and costs and benefits of distance education models and practices. Additionally, this theme encourages collaboration across a range of stakeholders that include the partners of DEHub, Industry experts, Professional Associations, colleagues around the world, UNESCO and Commonwealth of Learning so as to address research areas of mutual relevance and interest.

[\*Quality assurance\*](#)

[\*Professional development and faculty support \(2010 Research Focus\)\*](#)

[\*Innovation and change\*](#)

[\*Learner support services \(2010 Research Focus\)\*](#)

[\*Costs and benefits\*](#)

[\*Management & organization\*](#)

[\*Educational technology \(possible linkage with Innovation & change\)\*](#)

[\*Open Educational Resources \(OERs\)\*](#)

### **Teaching and Learning (Micro)**

This micro level theme considers the individuals who provide and use the distance education system/s. Major issues identified include learner characteristics; the student voice and users' experience with distance learning; professional development; learning design for distance learners; and communities of practice and interaction and communication within these learning groups.

## [Curriculum design \(2010 Research Focus\)](#)

## [Interaction and communication in learning communities \(2010 Research Focus\)](#)

## [Learner characteristics](#)

### A STRATEGY FOR CONNECTING, SHARING AND CO-BUILDING OF KNOWLEDGE

DEHub takes a broad view that community development involves connecting, sharing and co-building of knowledge in a variety of global contexts amongst and with a range of researchers and practitioners. The DEHub provides an opportunity for a consortium of distance education universities to reach out to a range of research communities so as to support the making of policies and structures that are more flexible and relevant to community development in all aspects. DEHub supports the democratization of knowledge and the research hub has established a presence on wikieducator <http://wikieducator.org/DEHub> and a range of links on <http://delicious.com/dehub> in the spirit of sharing, constructing and disseminating research that is key to the field of distance education and the priority research themes of learning and teaching, research and evaluation and community and open education resources. A new data base DEHub Database of Research on Distance Education <http://cunningham.acer.edu.au/dbtw-wpd/textbase/drde/drde.html> which draws upon international indices and journals complements the project and is a resource available to all researchers in the field. This paper/presentation will demonstrate these resources and seek collaboration from others attending the conference.

**Delicious** <http://delicious.com/dehub>

The DEHub Delicious site has grown to comprise 142 sites directly related to the research agenda of the DEHub. These 142 sites are tag under 105 headings related to the DEHub research themes and sub themes. The delicious site continues to grow and is a valuable profiling device for the centre and its research agenda. The following snap shot shows the beginning of a list of 69 websites with a focus on research. It also identifies the top ten tagged site within the 142 sites listed.

The screenshot shows the Delicious interface. At the top, it says 'Signed in as dehub' with links for 'Inbox', 'Settings', 'Help', and 'Sign Out'. Below that is a search bar and a 'Search' button. The main content area shows a list of bookmarks. The first bookmark is 'Ako Aotearoa' dated 14 FEB 10, with 32 tags. The second is 'Primary Research Group' dated 07 FEB 10, with 101 tags. The third is 'Research in Science & Technological Education' dated 07 FEB 10, with 46 tags. The fourth is 'OLnet' dated 27 JAN 10, with 46 tags. On the right side, there is a 'Tags' sidebar with a list of tags and their counts, such as 'Access&Equity' (12), 'Assessment' (8), 'Bibliography&Citation' (2), 'Blog' (1), 'Community' (12), 'Computers' (1), 'Consultant' (6), 'Costs&Benefits' (7), 'Curriculum' (17), 'DE' (3), 'DE-Association' (5), 'Definition' (1), 'DESystems' (5), 'Disciplinary' (1), 'DistanceLearning' (6), 'e-learning' (7), 'Evaluation' (2), 'Firefox' (1), 'Globalisation' (14), 'HigherEducation' (16), 'Innovation&Change' (17), 'Institution' (1), 'InteractionCommunic...' (16), 'Internationalization' (1), and 'Journal' (3).

**DEHub Database of Research on Distance Education** <http://cunningham.acer.edu.au/dbtw-wpd/textbase/drde/drde.html>

The database was established in April 2010 and grows through the input of the Cunningham Library but also through submissions via the website. The database aims to be built by the community of scholars who see its value. *This searchable web database contains details of 6,391 books, articles, conference papers and reports on various aspects of distance education and distance learning from publishers in Australia and overseas. Material in the database is drawn from the Australian Education Index, produced by Cunningham Library, with additional material sourced from a variety of international organisations and publishers.*

We would encourage you to consider submitting your own work for inclusion or suggest sources to grow the database.

*The database request.....submission of suitable material for inclusion in the database are welcome. By submitting your material you are bringing it to the attention of an international audience with an interest in distance education. As well as indexing material we will also include links to the websites of relevant publishers and organisations. Please contact [drde@acer.edu.au](mailto:drde@acer.edu.au) for further information.*

**DE Hub** innovation in distance education

Australian Government  
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

**DE Hub Database of Research on Distance Education**

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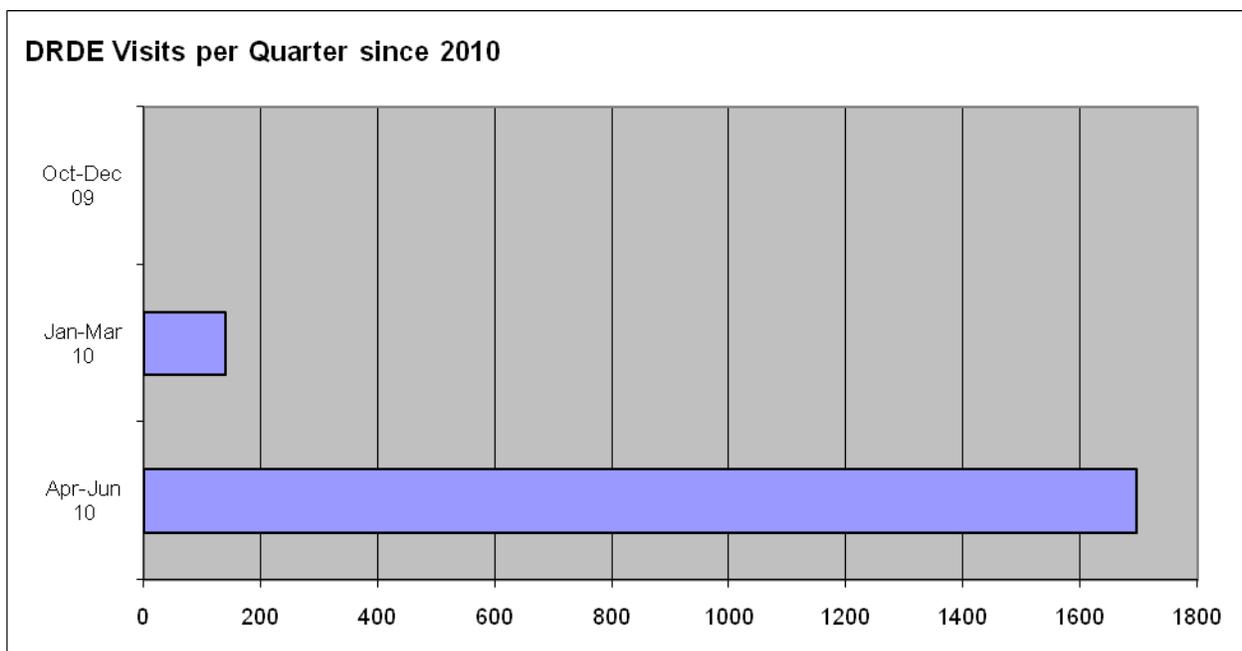
**About**

Welcome to the DE Hub Database of Research on Distance Education. This searchable web database contains details of 6,600 books, articles, conference papers and reports on various aspects of distance education and distance learning from publishers in Australia and overseas. Material in the database is drawn from the Australian Education Index, produced by Cunningham Library, with additional material sourced from a variety of international organisations and publishers. Submissions of suitable material for inclusion in the database are welcome. By submitting your material you are bringing it to the attention of an international audience with an interest in distance education. As well as indexing material we will also include links to the websites of relevant publishers and organisations. Please contact [drde@acer.edu.au](mailto:drde@acer.edu.au) for further information.

**Quick Search**

Quick search - enter keywords  
For multiple terms or boolean searching use: & for AND, / for OR, ! for NOT and \* for truncation.

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North America	949
Region Unspecified	364
Australia	185
Eastern Europe	92
Western Europe	70
New Zealand and Pacific Islands	12
Asia	6
Middle East	6
Sub-Saharan Africa	5
South America	5
Central America	1

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Home	1170
Journals	155
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Useful Web Links	92
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**Wikieducator** <http://wikieducator.org/DEHub>

The DEHub WikiEducator site was started in 2009 and is continually changing and over the past year a particular highlight of this has been the inclusion of information surrounding our research projects. Extensive material is now available aligned with the main Themes and sub themes. An OER section has been include with the expectation that OER materials will become available during the later part of 201 through to 2012. In early 2010 the site has been handed over to the DEHub research team and partners for their use and upgrading with resent research materials. In the period 1st August 2009 to 23 July 2010 158 pages were viewed a total of 12,869 times.

DEHub/Research Themes/Theories and models - WikiEducator - Mozilla Firefox

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WE | http://wikieducator.org/DEHub/Research\_Themes/Theories\_and\_models

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## DEHub/Research Themes/Theories and models

< DEHub | Research Themes



**DE Hub**  
innovation in distance education



Australian Government  
Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations

Home (DEHub Node) | DE Hub website | Research themes | Research projects | Resources | Research Network

**Contents** [show]

### Theories and models (priority 1)

The theoretical framework underlying educational models and the impact of various learning theories on distance education practice will be investigated in order to understand the foundations and future directions of distance education. Learning processes and the theoretical basis for construction of knowledge will also be considered.

### Guiding question

*What distance teaching theories and models are required to meet the needs of 21st century learners and how do these differ from existing theories and models?*

#### Research Questions

- Does an institutional pedagogic/philosophic approach to teaching and learning influence the role of business and industry in assessing potential employees? (e.g. on-the-job/off-the-job/ face-to-face/ off campus/part-time/full-time).
- What is the view of government towards integrated on-the-job learning provided by HE institutions? (e.g. for teachers, nurses, other public service professionals)
- What are the important factors of life-long learning?

**Open Forum Topic** [hide]

Insidious pedagogy: How course management systems affect teaching, First Monday, Volume 14, Number 10 - 5 October 2009 by Lisa M. Lane.

**Research themes** [hide]

- Theories and models (priority 1)**
- Globalisation of education and cross-cultural aspects (priority 2)
- Access, equity, social inclusion and ethics (priority 3)
- Professional Development & Faculty Support (priority 4)
- Learner support and development approaches (priority 5)
- Curriculum design (priority 6)
- Interaction and communication in learning communities (priority 7)
- Distance teaching systems and institutions)
- Research methods in distance education and knowledge transfer
- Quality assurance
- Innovation and change
- Costs and benefits

Done