Deconstructing dual mode provision in a digital era

T. J. Mays[a], M. Combrinck[b] and F. R. Aluko[a]

[a]*Unit for Distance Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa;*

[b]*Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa*

Tony, J. Mays

Email: tony.mays@up.ac.za

Linkedin: https://www.linkedin.com/in/tonyjohnmays/

OrcidID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3506-8497

Martin Combrinck

Email: COMBRINCKM@cput.ac.za

Socialmedia: https://www.linkedin.com/in/martin-combrinck-7473b075/

Folake, R. Aluko

Email: ruth.aluko@up.ac.za

Socialmedia: https://www.linkedin.com/in/ruth-aluko-645b4a4b/

Our motivation for a special edition of the journal focusing on dual mode provision, was in part because we were all initially working in distance education units within conventional institutions and wanted to reflect on our own practices and experiences; but it was also because we were increasingly encountering growth in similar practices in other institutions we were engaging with in forums such as the National Association for Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa (see www.nadeosa.org.za), the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (see www.deasa.org), the Distance Education and Teachers Training in Africa biennial conference (see http://www.deta.up.ac.za/) and OER Africa (see www.oerafrica.org), among others.

In addition, early in 2017, one of us also visited the US and engaged with representatives of a number of formerly single mode contact institutions which had introduced online programmes and were attracting students from outside the states where they were located, in most cases in numbers that dwarfed the traditional contact provision.

While acknowledging that this is part of a more general trend towards embracing open and flexible provision in response to changing student demands and the possibilities presented by technology (Naidu, 2017), we are reminded of Evans' (1999) acknowledgment that the notion of 'flexible delivery' in the Australian context had arisen, at least partly, in response to government interventions to "rationalise" distance education provision; so the approaches and practices of distance education provision within contact institutions was happening behind the scenes. More recently, King (2012) cautions that a continuing reluctance to engage explicitly with the particular demands of distance education provision may put the quality and effectiveness of such provision at risk in institutions that have become dual mode, when they were originally established as single mode contact institutions. These reflections on the Australian

context resonate with our own experiences in South and Southern Africa and suggests the need to deconstruct the notions of flexible, dual mode and distance education provision.

Why is the theme important?

The notions of openness and flexibility of study, formerly characteristic of the distance learning community, are becoming more universally adopted. This has seen an increased use of online learning in general, and MOOCs in particular, as well as the advent of new kinds of providers such as Coursera, edX, OER Universitas, University of the People, etc. The walls of institutions have become transparent and increasing numbers of institutions now reach students far beyond those constrained to campus. This special edition therefore sets out explicitly to explore the implications for contact institutions of expanding their provision to include distance education.

It is felt that the move into distance provision needs to be a conscious well-thought-through decision rather than a hasty reaction to the demand from students for more flexible and affordable services and/or the need to be seen to embrace the possibilities created by technology. We believe that such a decision will necessarily call for the revisiting of an institution's assumptions about how people learn, how staff should work and how resources should be allocated and what policy changes are needed if quality is to be maintained or enhanced and the offerings sustained (Aluko, Letseka & Pitsoe, 2016; Bates, 2015; Beetham & Sharpe, 2013; Bernard, Abrami & Brokhovski, 2009; Chae & Jenkins, 2015; Ehlers, 2011; Laurillard, 2012; Mays, 2014).

This special edition sought to foster critical engagement with examples of both successful and unsuccessful attempts to introduce distance education provision in formerly single mode institutions in order to identify the reasons thereof as guidelines for future practice. This remains an important issue to revisit periodically because the

differing demands and perspectives of offering distinct modes of provision in the same institution, appears to be difficult to sustain in a quality way (Daniel, 2012).

Why were we interested in a special edition on this theme?

Traditionally journals of distance education have focused on an existing audience of distance providers. However, the increasing use of e- and online learning approaches has blurred the boundaries between providers of contact and distance provision and there is need to debate whether this is a good thing, the extent to which the concept of distance education remains relevant, whether the established models are sufficient to inform the design, development, implementation and review of new kinds of provision and/or whether new models are emerging (Anderson & Elloumi, 2004; Anderson & Dron, 2011; Combrinck, Spamer, & van Zyl, 2015; Holmberg, 1995; Peters, 1998; Siemens, Gašević, , & Dawson, 2015).

It is felt that the special edition is consistent with previous recent editions in ensuring the journal continues to be at the forefront of conceptualizing the nature of distance education in relation to the possibilities and challenges of the digital era (as explored for example by Aceto et al, 2010; Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2010; Dietz-Uhler & Hurn, 2013; Ossiannilsson et al, 2015).

An explicit focus on dual mode provision may help both to expand engagement with the field and also offer new insights into the ways in which distance provision is both conceptualized and operationalized. A critical question to be addressed is whether the increasing use of online learning for a distributed and heterogeneous student body is offering new insights into distance education theory and/or whether the increasing blend of methods may even herald the end of distance education as a distinct sub-field of enquiry (Prinsloo, 2017).

Why is this the right time to explore this theme?

The changing nature of society generally, and the workplace in particular, has resulted in increased demand for flexible continuing education (Altbach, Resiberg & Rumbley, 2009; OLC, 2016). However, the rising costs of providing traditional campus-based programmes, coupled with increasing doubts about the extent to which graduates are suitably prepared for dynamic technology-ubiquitous 21st century contexts, has triggered greater interest in more open, flexible, technology-mediated and cost-effective ways to address the demand (Blumenstyk, 2015; Garrett, 2016; Johnson et a., 2016; Smith et al, 2016). We believe there is a real danger that in the process of convergence of modes of provision the unique quality concerns of distance provision, regarding for example the issues of access, success and cost, and the implications for how people learn and work, may be lost (CHE, 2014; Glennie and Mays, 2013; Hülsmann, 2016; McMillan, 2008; Simpson, 2013).

   The decisions made about where to focus attention and resources will reflect the reasons why formerly single-mode institutions choose to move into distance education provision. In some cases in sub-Saharan Africa, the move into distance education seems to have been a direct response to changing demand patterns: some institutions have found themselves overwhelmed with demand for campus-based places and have resorted to platoon systems for day scholars, and introduced evening, weekend, block mode, and eventually distance education modes of provision, simply to cope with the demand. Other institutions have seen a gradual tailing off of demand for their campus-based provision, for various reasons, and so have begun to explore more responsive flexible models. Yet others seem to have been attracted by the apparent commercial possibilities of offering a few large scale distance education programmes to supplement income streams. We are concerned that these different motivations obscure key critical

quality concerns for distance education modes of provision in particular, which include investment of time and resources in the following, among other things:

- Recognition of the need for investment in the interplay between quality learning resources, decentralised student support and decentralised assessment;
- Institutional adjustments in terms of polices, systems, procedures and service level agreements related to curriculum and materials development and renewal, support for both students and staff, robust systems making appropriate use of appropriate technology, cross border provision and different financial models; and centrally
- Robust systems for programme design, evaluation and renewal. (Mays, 2017)

In exploring these issues, we have included two different kinds of articles in this special edition. One kind of article explores the theme across institutional and sometimes even country boundaries and often at a theoretical level; the second kind of article takes the form of a case study reflecting on experiences in practice within individual institutions.

Kanwar, Carr, Ortlieb and Mohee explore both the potential for dual mode provision as well as some of the challenges of realising that potential in three African countries. They offer some explanations for why dual-mode provision may not be successfully implemented and some guidelines for future engagement based on examples of effective practice. Several of the issues raised by Kanwar et al., are reinforced by the case study of the University of Botswana by Nage-Sibande and Morolong.

Makoe then reflects on experience in working with a number of institutions in several African countries to suggest a process for creating a policy environment that is conducive to dual-mode provision, which picks up on one of the issues already

identified. Simui, Namangala, Tambulukani and Ndhlovu then explore the issue further by reflecting on policy development in a particular institutional context.

Nyaruwata's article argues the need to link a move into dual mode provision to the vision and mission of the institution, reflecting on the rationale for dual mode provision in reaching out to more women students and highlighting some of the challenges that have been encountered in her own institution.

Delaney and Brown remind us also to focus on the student experience in seeking to widen participation – they explore reasons why students enrol for distance studies in a predominantly contact-based institution and what their experience has been, using a social reproduction framework based on the ideas of Bourdieu.

Fresen's article presents a comparative case study exploring the challenges and prospects of technology enhanced learning in dual mode provision in two very different and very differently located institutions, the University of Pretoria in South Africa and the University of Oxford in the UK.

The article by Amory, Bialobrzeska and Welch, also notes the potential of technology to enhance learning but only if decisions are informed by appropriate pedagogy and an appropriate understanding of the learners and the context. For these authors learning design is critical and needs to be geared towards multi-mode provision.

There seems to be a clear trend towards more flexible modes of provision informed increasingly by appropriate use of appropriate technology enhanced learning. This shift has implications for policy, people, pedagogy and processes which need to be thought through carefully if we are to offer students equivalent quality learning opportunities in increasingly dual and multi-mode forms of provision within a single institution. As observed by Xiao in his reflection in the final article in this edition,

however we characterise the nature of our provision, it is clear that distance education issues are now mainstream rather than peripheral concerns.

The editors of this special edition would like to thank the following colleagues for their reviews of draft papers and their insightful suggestions:

Dr Ronel Callaghan, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Prof Daniella Coetzee, University of the Free State, South Africa

Prof Gerritt Kamper, University of South Africa

Prof Alwyn Louw, Monash, South Africa

Dr Wisdom Machacha, ISCED, Mozambique

Dr Ephraim Mhlanga, Saide, South Africa

Dr Alison Mead-Richardson, COL, Canada

Prof Ansie Minnaar, University of South Africa

Dr Jean Mitchell, independent consultant and former editor of the journal Progressio

Dr Bonface Ngari, Africa Nazarene University, Kenya

Dr Maitumeleng Nthontho, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Ms Assodah Tirvassen. Open University, Mauritius

Prof Geesje van den Berg, University of South Africa

Dr Stefaan Vande Walle, VVOB, South Africa office

Prof Freda Wolfenden, Open University, UK.

References

Aceto. S., Dondi, C., Marzotto, P., Ala-Mutka, K., & Ferrari, A. (2010). *Pedagogical innovation in new learning communities: An in-depth study of twelve online learning communities*. Seville: European Union.

Aluko, F. R., Letseka, M., & Pitsoe, V. (Eds.). (2016). *Assuring institutional quality in Open Distance Learning (ODL) in the developing contexts*. New York: Nova Publishers.

Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2009). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution. A report prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

Anderson, T., & Elloumi, F. (Eds.). (2004). *Theory and practice of online learning*. Athabasca: Athabasca University.

Anderson, T., & Dron, J. (2011). *Three generations of distance education pedagogy*. *IRRODL, 12*(3),80-97.

Bates, A. W. (2015). *Teaching in a digital age*. Accessed from http://wiki.lib.sun.ac.za/images/f/f3/Teaching-in-a-digital-age.pdf on 24 July 2016.

Beetham, H., & Sharpe, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing for 21st century learning* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Bernard, R. M., Abrami, P. C., & Borokhovski, E. (2009). *Three classes of interaction treatments in distance education: A within-DE meta-analysis*. Concordia University. Accessed from http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/artman2/uploads/1/Education_Bernard.pdf on 05 July 2016.

Blumenstyk, G. (2015). *American higher education in crisis? What everyone needs to know*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chae, B., & Jenkins, M. (2015). *A qualitative investigation of faculty Open Educational Resource usage in the Washington Community and Technical College System: Models for support and implementation.* Washington: State Board for

Community and Technical Colleges. Accessed at
https://oerknowledgecloud.org/sites/oerknowledgecloud.org/files/FINAL_OER_
USE_WA_CTC.pdf on 20 September 2015.

Cleveland-Innes, M. F., & Garrison, D. R. (Eds.). (2010). *An introduction to distance education: Understanding teaching and learning in a new era*. New York: Routledge.

Combrinck, M. H. A., Spamer, E. J., & van Zyl, M. (2015). Students' perceptions of the use of interactive white boards in the delivery of distance learning programmes. *Progressio, 37*(1), 99-113.

Council on Higher Education (CHE). (2014). *Distance higher education programmes in a digital era: Good practice guide*. Pretoria: CHE.

Daniel, J. (2012). Dual-Mode Universities in Higher Education: Way Station or Final Destination? *Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 27(1)*, 2012, 1-7.

Dietz-Uhler, B., & Hurn, J. (2013). Using learning analytics to predict (and improve) student success: A faculty perspective. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 12*(1), 17-26.

Ehlers, U-D. (2011). Extending the territory: From Open Educational Resources to Open Educational Practices. *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning, 15(2)*, 1-10.

Evans, T. (1999). From Dual-mode to Flexible delivery: Paradoxical Transitions in Australian Open and Distance Education. *Performance Improvement Quarterly, 12(2),* pp. 84-95.

Garrett, R. (2016). *The state of open universities in the Commonwealth: A perspective on performance, competition and innovation*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.

Glennie, J., & Mays, T. (2013). Rethinking distance in an era of online learning. *Policy Studies Organization, 2*(2), 126-143

Holmberg, B. (1995). *Theory and practice of distance education* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Hülsmann, T. (2016). *The impact of ICT on the costs and economics of distance education: A review of the literature*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Cummins, M., Estrada, V., Freeman, A., & Hall, C. (2016). *2016 higher education edition (NMC Horizon Report).* Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium. Accessed from http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2016-nmc-horizon-report-he-EN.pdf on 23 March 2016.

King, B. (2012). Distance education and dual-mode universities: an Australian perspective. *Open Learning, 27(1), February 2012*, 9-22.

Laurillard, D. (2012). *Teaching as a design science: Building pedagogical patterns for learning and teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Mays, T. (2014). Teaching, learning and curriculum resources. In P. du Preez, & C. Reddy (Eds.), *Curriculum studies: Visions and imaginings* (pp. 110-133). Cape Town: Pearson.

Mays, T. J. (2017). *Utilising Open Educational Resources in Support of Curriculum Transformation at Africa Nazarene University: a participatory action research approach*. Doctoral thesis, Pretoria: Unisa.

McMillan, E. (2008). *Complexity, management and the dynamics of change*. London: Routledge.

Naidu, S. (2017). How flexible is flexible learning, who is to decide and what are its implications? *Distance Education 38(3)*, 269-272.

Open Learning Consortium (OLC). (2016). Online report card: Tracking online

education in the United States. Accessed from

http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/read/online-report-card-tracking-online-

education-united-states-2015/ on 1 July 2016.

Ossiannilsson, E., Williams, K., Camilleri, A. F., & Brown, M. (2015). *Quality models

on online and open education around the globe: State of the art and

recommendations*. Oslo: International Council for Open and Distance Education

(ICDE).

Peters, O. (1998). *Learning and teaching in distance education: Pedagogical analyses

and interpretations from an international perspective*. Routledge: London and

New York.

Prinsloo, P. (2017). Personal communication, 06 March 2017.

Siemens, G., Gašević, D., & Dawson, S. (2015). *Preparing for the digital university: A

review of the history and current state of distance, blended, and online learning*.

Athabasca: Athabasca University.

Smith, K., Gamlem, S. M., Sandal, A. K., & Engelsen, K. S. (2016). Educating for the

future: A conceptual framework of responsive pedagogy. *Cogent Education,

3*(1), 1227021.

Simpson, O. (2013). Student retention in distance education: Are we failing out

students? *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 28*(2),

105-119.