Chapter 3

Improving Research on Students’ Learning: a critical reflection on the work of Alistair Morgan

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Introduction

Alistair Morgan’s passing was a matter of deep regret to us both. He has a longstanding friend and colleague with whom we shared many varied and valuable experiences. In this chapter we reflect on his contribution to the RIDE experience and to research, theory and practice toward improving students’ learning experiences more generally. We also look beyond Alistair’s work to the challenges ahead for those who wish to improve students’ learning.

Alistair is a central figure in the RIDE experience, as we have come to understand it, from its beginning with RIDE’89. At that time Alistair was a visiting scholar in the Institute of Distance Education at Deakin University. His counsel and assistance were influential in the organization of the first conference—or participatory seminar as it was called—to bring together people interested in research in distance education within Australia. Although the intention was to invigorate such research in Australia, RIDE’89 attracted participants from overseas, and it became recognised internationally as the first event of its kind to focus on research in distance education.

Since its birth in the 1900s, distance education in Australia was regarded essentially as a form of educational delivery—a means to transfer education from the campus to the home. In this context, the implications, consequences, circumstances and possibilities of distance education were rarely considered in a scholarly way. By the 1980s, distance education had achieved a significant role in Australian universities with forty-eight institutions providing courses in this mode; and, for many, it was an essential element of their viability (Johnson, 1996). At this time, postgraduate study of distance education was also emerging in Australia (Calvert & others, 1991). Thus, the time seemed right for encouraging networking among Australia’s nascent researchers in distance education.

As a keen and committed researcher in the field, Alistair was enthusiastic about the prospects for the seminar. It was fortunate that RIDE’89 could draw on a colleague with this outlook, whose position in the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) at the Open University (OU) encouraged him to conduct research in distance education, in concert with his regular work within course teams as an educational technologist. Moreover, it was Alistair the person who harmonised so well with the emerging RIDE approach.

It was decided to develop the seminar as a small community of scholars joining together to present and discuss their approaches to research in distance education and to report on the consequent projects. The idea of keynote speakers was eschewed as being antithetical to the egalitarian purpose of the community; academic titles were similarly dispensed with. All participants were encouraged to contribute, in any appropriate form, and not just to attend addresses by “experts”. This was ideal grist for Alistair’s mill: he was not a
man for the trappings of scholarly prestige or academic pomposity. Alistair was at home working at research and conversing about its driving ideas: RIDE’89 was his style. Dare we say, he was at home in Australia. It became a second home, at least.

Alistair presented the opening paper at RIDE’89. His topic was inspired by David Fetterman’s book *Qualitative Approaches to Educational Evaluation: the silent scientific revolution*. The presentation and its consequent published version were in part autobiographical but also a commentary on the state of applied research in the field (Morgan, 1990b). The autobiographical aspects can be read at two levels: one, ostensibly, about Alistair’s work at the OU, where he saw himself simultaneously, struggling against a ‘hegemony of survey methods’ and also pressuring the case for ‘illuminative’ approaches; the other, subliminally, about his own personal ‘revolution’ whereby he had been transformed from a laboratory postgraduate student of chemistry into a qualitative social researcher concerned with humanistic psychology and critical social theory. Certainly, Alistair’s account was one that harmonised with those issues faced by most, if not all, RIDE’89 participants. This made his paper an ideal beginning for the conference. It was as if he had pegged a mark on the ground against which we could all measure our progress.

At what was to be his last RIDE conference in 1996, Alistair was invited to prepare an opening paper looking back to the 1989 peg-mark and reflecting critically on the progress the field had made from that point (Morgan, 1997). He warmed to the task. Partly because he was able to identify the real progress which had been made in the move from ‘mindless data collection’ towards more useful, critical research and scholarship in the theory, practice and research of open and distance education—some of which he had achieved himself (Morgan, 1992). He also enjoyed the opportunity, not only to hammer another peg in the ground, but also to signal another way forward. (He would never advocate the way forward!)

At the time, the bruises of years of ‘economic rationalism’ (he would growl ‘Thatcherism’) were showing their darkest hues. Teachers and researchers had ‘to do more with less’ and to demonstrate that they were doing so by leaping the ever-heightening hurdles of the authorities’ performance indicators. It was also a time when the new computer and communications technologies were beginning to spin their intricate, sticky webs around education and everything else. Alistair saw these circumstances as necessitating a rearticulation of educational technology which facilitated reflexivity and critique within the research, theory and practice of open and distance education.

**Rearticulating educational technology**

In mounting our own critique of ‘instructional industrialism’ in the late 1980s (it was never an assault on the field or any of its adherents), we had educational technology sharply focused in our sights (Evans & Nation, 1989, p. 244–52). This analysis was never based exclusively on the OU and its model of teaching and learning, but we asserted then—and still believe—that the OU, driven mainly by its founding Vice-Chancellor and the IET, was the signal paradigm case of instructional industrialism in higher education worldwide or, at the very least, in the ‘British world’.

Our understanding of educational technology was based on a deep respect for the OU and its achievements. Those involved in external studies in Australian higher education in the seventies and eighties were alert to the OU and its achievements. The OU’s planners had
drawn on Australian practice in developing their approach. The OU’s summer schools
drew directly on the University of New England’s residential schools. The diverse range
of ‘notes’ that passed for teaching materials in Australian institutions probably reinforced
the resolve of the OU foundation staff to ensure that both the pedagogical and
presentational of their own materials were of the highest standard possible.

Morgan’s response to the critique of instructional industrialism indicated his own interest
in the dynamics of reshaping the field and assisting the emergence of a ‘new educational
technology’ (Morgan, 1990b). He was concerned that we had equated instructional
industrialism with educational technology per se. This touched his home base literally
and led him to draw a distinction that subsequently became important both for him and
for Evans and Nation. “‘Traditional” educational technology, derived from behavioural
psychology and programmed learning’, he agreed, was a basis for instructional
industrialism. However, he emphasised, ‘this conception of educational technology does
not represent the present practice in the Open University’ (Morgan, 1990a, p. 66). His
parenthetic observation that ‘in some respects educational technology is in a state of
paradigm confusion and rearticulation’ signalled the journey he would undertake for the
next decade, culminating in Improving Your Students’ Learning (Morgan, 1993). He also
challenged Evans and Nation to deeper thinking in this area and engendered an analysis
that valued deeply David Harris’s (1987) critique from within the OU, the breadth of
scholarship that emanated from the IET, and a wider range of related endeavours (Evans

In a series of subsequent arguments we have attempted to demonstrate the importance of
understanding educational technologies in context from the ‘micro’ to ‘macro’ levels
educational technology with education, we contend that all attempts to offer effective
forms of education in ‘the age of globalised information’ must have broad theoretical and
practical understandings of the means of creating and changing technologies for the
purposes of teaching and learning. An important aspect of these analyses has been the
recognition of work by practitioners, researchers and theorists within open and distance
education in this general endeavour. Morgan and his associates have engaged positively
with our more general analyses in their quest to understand better students’ learning
generally and within distance education more particularly. Morgan identified a
correspondence of approach between Evans and Nation’s espousal of ‘critical reflection’
and the educational psychology that arose from and attached itself to the work of Ference
Marton, Roger Säljö and others, often referred to as the Göteborg School. We owe it to
Alistair to continue these explorations.

**Learning as a critical endeavour**

From the beginnings of his career with the IET Morgan demonstrated a keen interest in
theory, research and practice relating to students’ learning. He was recruited into an
organisation committed to capital E and capital T—Educational Technology. His
worldview ensured that he understood the critiques the OU teaching system offered by
104–106). From various perspectives, these critics argued that teaching texts of even the
highest pedagogical quality could not provide students with a complete basis for the
learning experience. Morgan was committed and remained committed to a faith in
teaching texts that observed sound pedagogical principles. His enthusiasm was for
practice, research and theory that would ensure that the teaching texts engendered
effective learning for students in the context of their total lifestyle. He sought out ideas
and techniques that would facilitate the creation of more effective teaching texts and complementary teaching techniques such as student assignments and residential school experiences that engaged them deeply with the relevant knowledge (Nation, 1991, pp. 105–106).

Alistair took up these challenges within the IET by taking an important role in the creation and emergence of the Study Methods Group, in conjunction with Graham Gibbs and Elizabeth Taylor (now Beaty). In this contribution, we wish to give emphasis to the ideas and methods that this project and, Alistair particularly, drew from the Göteborg School and like-minded thinkers. An article which he chose to publish in Australia offers comprehensive insights into this approach to understanding students’ learning (Morgan, 1984). It advocates, as a foundation principle, the distinction Marton, Säljö and their colleagues draw between two different approaches to educational research and evaluation:

the first-order perspective ... represented by experimental type investigations, psychometrics and traditional evaluation measuring the achievement of objectives in the observational and “from the outside” and the second–order perspective [which] is phenomenological and describes learning from the learner’s perspective, “from inside’” (Morgan, 1984, p.254).

Morgan’s critical assessment of Evans and Nation’s application of Anthony Giddens’s theory of structuration to the fundamental importance of the concept ‘dialogue’ for practice, research and theory in open and distance education demonstrated that these ideas could work in combination with other approaches from ‘the critical left’, such as Harris’s, and with those from educational psychologies such as those practised at Göteborg (Morgan, 1993, pp. 83–87, 90–92). His reformulation of these ideas and their combination with others for application to the principles and practices of flexible learning are among the most effective published versions of these approaches (Morgan, 1993, pp. 106–112). His pithy summation of the means by which it is possible to forge effective relationships between educational paradigms with more in common than realised by their adherents remains as one of the testaments to constructive ways forward for educational practice, research and theory in ‘the age of globalised information’ (Morgan, 1993, pp. 128–133; Morgan, 1995).

In an era in which we are all urged to be true believers in ‘deep approaches to learning’, in which ‘constructivism’ has arrived as a dominating slogan, where we all do our utmost to promote ‘self-directed learning’, where ‘lifelong learning’ is a prospect for all humanity, in which many have forgotten they were once ‘card carrying Marxists’ (even Althusserians) or ‘Gagnéian cognitivists’ or ‘instructional designers’, Alistair Morgan’s synthesis of the key issues offers a constructive way forward. In his own words:

...if we are to take our efforts to improve students’ learning seriously, we need to take account of learning from the learner’s perspective....we have to help students become more aware of how they come to be engaged in study, and enable them to articulate their orientations to education and training, as well as help them develop their conceptions of learning....we have to take a critical look at our course design and assessment practices....[we need to understand] the link between the more detailed processes of studying and the social and political context of learners’ lives....The challenge for us in open and distance learning is to design our learning activities so as to engage our students in dialogue....[W]hen students take some degree of control and responsibility for their learning and participate more in the processes of learning and teaching, they are more likely to
adopt a deep approach to their learning. If we can achieve this, then the quality in the learning and the students’ experiences of learning will be significantly enhanced (Morgan, 1993, pp. 128, 132–133).

Alistair Morgan’s approach serves as an excellent example to all those interested in spanning the paradigmatic divides as we move forward in our quest to improve students’ learning (Morgan & Holly, 1994). Before proceeding to a consideration of some possibilities for intellectual and practical progress in tune with his approach, we wish to consider some of his research undertaken in Australia and, also, Alistair’s life as a thinker and doer.

**Critical qualitative research: the silent revolution’s long march**

It is difficult to understand just how much the scholarly work of academics is shaped by their experience or life-history. It is easy to be overly romanticist or overly determinist in such matters. However, in Alistair’s case, it is possible to identify three strands which were woven together to provide the important connecting cord with his research and scholarship on student learning. Some, looking back on his career at the OU, might assume that he was an educational researcher who had emerged from within the qualitative research tradition which had grown in British educational research since the late 1960s, and in which Martyn Hammersley and Peter Woods, amongst others at the OU, were influential. However, this was not the case. Alistair was a self-taught, or self-made, *educational* researcher. When he commenced at the OU he had no scholarly background in capital E education or its associated forms of research. By the time of his death, over a quarter of a century later, he had undertaken many educational research studies, published widely, and supervised and examined PhDs in the field. What then are these three strands within Alistair’s life which were entwined to give strength to this career?

The first is his education and research training as a physical scientist. The discipline inherent within this area of science, its empiricism and its methods provided Alistair with a respect for the logic, reliability and validation of scientific enquiry. A glimpse at any of the publications from his case-study research shows that he saw these matters as important to qualitative research and that he could explain the practical and theoretical implications of them. Furthermore, he was able to employ the consequent skills to speak with practical authority when making critical comments about the principles and techniques of social scientists who regarded themselves as practitioners of empirical science (Morgan, 1991, pp. 6–7).

The second is his commitment to the politics of empowerment and liberation. In some respects this represents a resistance to the paradigmatic hegemony of the scientific method inherent to the first strand. Capable as he was of the experimental methods of the physical sciences, his view of the politics of the human condition would not allow him to reduce human beings to measures of performance, scores and tests. Nor would it allow him to compress human diversities into research designs that required null hypotheses, control and experimental groups, and statistical tests in order to show something of ‘significance’. For him, the notion of ‘degrees of freedom’ in this paradigm was oxymoronic.

The third strand may come as a surprise, to many, but was sometimes revealed to those engaged with him in philosophic discussion. Alistair’s passion for mountains and mountaineering (and later sailing) led him to participate in climbs that were tough,
arduous and risky. He climbed in different countries, at high altitudes, and in severe climatic conditions. He would endure physical deprivation and pain to reach his goal. He knew the essential interdependence of one climber on another. He understood that his life and well-being, and that of his comrades, rested on the nature and extent of his planning and preparation, the quality of his gear, and the checking and re-checking of everything. A similar trust in his fellow climbers to do likewise was fundamental to his understanding of the nature and importance of teamwork. This strand may be seen to contribute some of the most important clues to Alistair as a researcher. He was a person for the long haul (he was instrumental in advancing the first qualitative longitudinal research at the OU), he valued working in a team (but was intolerant of those who did not pull their weight) and he liked to validate his findings by painstaking checking and re-checking with informants.

One of the first teams that Morgan worked within at the OU involved Malcolm Parlett who, together with David Hamilton, conceptualised the notion of ‘illuminative evaluation’ to facilitate the progress of educational evaluation in _Beyond the Numbers Game_ (see Hamilton, D and others, 1977). As Morgan himself notes:

Illuminative evaluation was articulated as an alternative to the ‘agricultural-botany’ model of educational evaluation which, essentially, attempted to apply the methods of physical science to measure the efficiency of educational programs, particularly curriculum innovations. The primary concern of illuminative evaluation is description and interpretation, rather than measurement (Morgan, 1991, pp. 1–2).

Despite his undoubted capacities to drive performance-measurement models of evaluation, his concern for the politics of liberation and empowerment inclined him to Parlett’s approach. He took the same ideas and approaches into the partnership with Gibbs and Beaty discussed already above.

Case-study research was often Morgan’s chosen approach to research and evaluation in distance education. Indeed, he was reluctant to ‘draw a major distinction between research and evaluation’ (Morgan, 1991, p. 3). He favoured Rob Walker’s (1986) analysis that all research contained political dimensions, even if some evaluation studies possessed these to a greater degree. The beauty of case-study research for Morgan was that it enabled him to deploy a range of research methods to build the case-study, and also to draw on his early ‘illuminative evaluation’ experiences at the OU. Some of his best case-study work was done in Australia where he worked at Deakin on developing a case-study of the development of the innovative _Classroom Processes_ course, which had been inspired by Rob Walker. The case-study was to be used as a resource on the Master of Distance Education program, as well as help in the redevelopment work that the course-team was undertaking on _Classroom Processes_. This case-study rested alongside two other pieces of evaluative research: one an evaluation by Evans, and another a study into the students’ group work on the course by Herbert Altrichter. This small team worked with the course-team to help identify the key issues to be addressed in the redevelopment, and to generate new ideas for the new course. A book was also produced from their work for use in the Masters course (Altrichter, Evans & Morgan, 1991).

The _Classroom Processes_ work at Deakin reflected each of the three strands of Morgan’s working life and, indeed, his own personal silent revolution as he sought to become the sort of educational practitioner and researcher with the capacities to make a positive difference to students’ experiences as students, and maybe more broadly in their lives. Within his work he was able to deploy his systematic scientific rigour, his commitment to
theoretically grounded post-positivist research and his valuing of teamwork. After this he undertook another eight years’ work at the OU and continued to develop his ideas further. One of the matters which was a cause for particular deliberation by him was the shift to new technology in open and distance education. The potential for a return to the ‘instructional industrialism’ of the ‘old’ educational technology was ever-present; the long march of the silent revolution continued.

Continuing the journey: new demands for persistent revolutionaries

As we confront the emergence of a new computer-mediated age of distance education there is an engaging array of possibilities. The demands of the new millennium for educational services to be online and also cost-efficient present some significant contradictions for the distance educator interested in critical teaching and learning. On the one hand, the new computer and communications technologies enable means and methods of interaction that distance educators have struggled to provide using other media. Online study groups can work on problem-based learning; counselling and student support can be provided in private consultations, or in closed self-help groups; students can network or collaborate across nations and cultures; people with some disabilities can study equally with their peers; and students and their teachers can discuss their work virtually free of time and distance considerations. A ‘brave new world’ indeed. On the other hand, however, the design and development of ‘educational’ software seems to owe far too much to its military and industrial origins. Despite the inherent technical capacities of the new technology, the ‘solutions’ offered to educational organisations often seem to reflect an approach to educational technology which had been exposed to critique in distance education at least since Harris’s Openness and Closure in Distance Education was published (Harris, 1987). Forms of this critique have been evident in the work of RIDE participants over the years, perhaps most notably Mick Campion (Campion, 1990, 1992, 1994, Campion & Renner 1991). Indeed, in our terms, it seems that forms of ‘instructional industrialism’ (Evans & Nation, 1989) will continue to persist in conjunction with the ‘new educational technology’.

How does Morgan’s work assist those who wish to continue the struggle with instructional industrialism by developing and creating forms of teaching and learning that realise the full potential of all involved in the knowledge business?

Confronting and reforming constructivism

A recent statement by the founding Director of the IET, David Hawkridge, demonstrates the impact of work such as Morgan’s on ‘educational technology’. Following a review of progress within British educational technology since 1970, Hawkridge identified three challenges which remained to be met:

First, educational technologists should understand and apply constructivism rather than behaviourism in their development of teaching and learning systems. Second, they should develop systems for teaching and learning that match the opportunities offered by the hardware and software of modern computers and telecommunications, including the Web. Third, they should answer the moral and ethical challenges from those who criticise educational technologists for not caring enough about teachers and students, for not endorsing an emancipatory view of education (Hawkridge, 1999, pp. 299–300).
This summary grows from earlier analyses by Hawkridge (1976; 1979; 1981; 1983; 1991) in which he reflects critically on the mission of educational technologists, addresses the views of critics, and continues to suggest changes in approaches related to changing conditions in education and society and progress in educational theory and practice. We have addressed these analyses in considerable detail previously (Evans & Nation, 1993; 1996; 2000) We recognise the transformation in thinking demonstrated by reconstructed behaviourists. We remain disappointed, however, by the fact that most of those espousing ‘constructivism’ remain unwilling to recognise the need for substantial analyses of the economic, political and social contexts within which teaching and learning occur and, even more so, that they seem unable to grasp the rich potential of investigations from a diverse range of related disciplines.

Having said this, we recognise the considerable progress that has been made to bridge the paradigmatic chasm between those who can be regarded as ‘instructional industrialists’ and proponents of ‘critically reflexive education’. The recent ‘reconstruction’ of David Jonassen, an heir to the Gagnéan cognitivist tradition, is an instructive case. In a recent publication, with two colleagues, addressed to aspiring school teachers, they begin:

Constructivism is a relatively new idea in education. It is an even newer idea to educational technology. It is so new to some educational circles that some people perceive it as a fad. We think not. Constructivism is an old idea to sociology and art. And as a way of understanding the learning phenomenon it is ageless. People have always constructed personal and socially acceptable meaning for events and objects in the world .... People naturally construct meaning. Formal educational enterprises that rely on the efficient transmission of prepackaged chunks of information are not natural. They are pandemic. The modern age values understanding less than it does the efficient transmission of culturally accepted beliefs. It doesn’t have to be that way. Modernism can support meaning making as well. This book looks at how modern technologies, such as computers and video, can be used to engage learners in personal and socially constructed meaning making .... Learning With Technology is about how educators can use technologies to support constructive learning. In the past, technology has largely been used in education to learn from. Technology programs were developed with the belief that they could convey information (and hopefully understanding) more effectively than teachers. But constructivists believe that you cannot convey understanding. That can only be constructed by learners. So this book argues that technologies are more effectively used as tools to construct knowledge with. The point of the book is that technology is a tool to think and learn with (Jonassen, Peck & Wilson, 1999, p. iii).

In Morgan’s terms, Jonassen and his colleagues are espousing the new educational technology. We cannot resist making an important, if somewhat parochial point, relating to the alleged novelty of constructivist ideas in educational theory and practice. Accepting that Jonassen and colleagues acknowledge that ‘sociology’ has an enduring record for espousing the importance of the ‘social construction of knowledge’, it would be even more useful if they could point to substantial contributions in this regard, such as those made by Basil Bernstein, Geoffrey Esland and Michael Young in the late sixties and early seventies and given general currency through OU courses in education (Bernstein, 1971; Esland, 1971; Young, 1971a). These thinkers have continued to develop and retain their vitality today (for example, Young, 1998). While we do not wish to divert from our course, it is worth making the point in passing that there have been
educators theorising about and practising ‘constructivism’ since antiquity and, probably, before.

In 1971 Esland had identified the potential for educational psychology to create and facilitate the theory and research that could act as a basis for understanding teachers and learners as constructors of meaning. He did so, in the course of a study of the emergence of curriculum reforms such as ‘Nuffield science’ which were influenced very heavily by the work of Jerome Bruner and Jean Piaget. From this ‘epistemological perspective’, children and adolescents are ‘little scientists’ who can be led to discover what scientists have come ‘to know’. Esland’s study demonstrated that these reforms to teaching and learning in schools often foundered on the rocks of ‘psychometric’ approaches in the tradition of behaviourism and Gagné. He noted then the tendency for psychometricians to incorporate Bruner and Piaget’s ideas into their models and, in the process, to lose or misunderstand their emphasis on the meaning making capacities of learners. Bruner’s early work, with its conformity to the science of sixties and seventies academic psychology, also contributed to this misunderstanding. His mature work demonstrates much more clearly that an understanding of meaning making is the central aspect of educational psychology and that anthropology, art, literature, music, sociology and other social sciences all have important contributions to make to any complete analysis (Bruner, 1986; 1990).

We have argued in previous work that Giddens’s work offers a most effective basis for a thoroughly connected understanding of meaning making in economic, political and social contexts (Evans & Nation, 1996, pp.163–165; 2000, pp. 164–168). For example, Giddens has continued in the tradition of interdisciplinarity that Bruner valued in the Harvard Department of Social Relations. We would suggest that he has done this more thoroughly than most other individual social scientists. His understanding of the ‘reflexivity of modernity’ offers a substantial theoretical basis for the ‘the learning society’ that is rapidly becoming ‘the challenge we face’ as individuals making our way in the world personally, domestically, economically, politically and socially and as members of organisations (such as ‘educational enterprises’) attempting to reform the world (Giddens, 1990, pp. 35–45). With Lars Kasperson (2000, pp. vi–vii), we agree that many can be bewildered by Giddens’s overwhelming style, in his ‘technical works’, at least. We remain optimistic, however, that the time has come for his ideas to have a more pervasive influence. Alistair Morgan had commenced his own form of analysis that could lead the Bruner’s and Jonassen’s towards ‘critical theory’. We intend to carry on the work!

Connecting with ‘conventional’ educators we would like to draw to a close with a cautionary note for all of us who have marched under banners emblazoned with terms such as ‘open and distance education’. We offer these thoughts in the knowledge that paranoia often has a basis in reality and that to be ‘thin skinned’ is part of our critically reflexive capacity.

Alistair Morgan was justifiably proud of the fact that the Study Methods Group had been recognised within the ‘phenomenographic fold’. He often cited the chapter (Gibbs, Morgan & Taylor, 1984) in the first edition of The Experience of Learning as an example of this. Furthermore, he regarded the progress that was reflected in the second edition as even more important. The Group had two chapters placed very strategically (Beaty, Gibbs & Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Beaty, 1997). From a perspective with the open and distance education community, it is pleasing to see ideas and evidence relating to distance learners in the company of studies derived from what Alistair would have referred to as ‘conventional settings’. The Experience of Learning was a vehicle for many of the high priests of ‘learning and teaching in higher education’: Entwistle, Hounsell,
Laurillard, Marton, Ramsden and Säljö. In is interesting to note, that a careful perusal of other work by these and members of the phenomenographic priesthood make few substantial references to studies that are clearly related to open and distance education (for example, Bowden & Marton, 1998; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). One could be forgiven for concluding that ideas and experience from ‘non-conventional settings’ do not amount to the full twenty shillings in the pound.

Again, offering this as a point to engender further thought, rather than as a conclusion in itself. It may be that those called to teaching at a distance are generally perceived to be more concerned with educational technologies than with students and their learning. Is this a line of investigation worthy of further attention? Certainly, Alistair Morgan’s work offers much to those primarily interested in non-conventional settings.

We have no doubt that most conventional settings are becoming non-conventional, sometimes rapidly, but, more often, by evolution. The phenomenographers seem to understand that teaching staff believe that ‘lecturing’ or ‘telling’ are the preferred means to inform students. Their research confirms that this approach does not lead to ‘deep learning’. Why do they continue to ignore or fail to recognise fully work dealing with learning and teaching mediated by other means than the classroom? This is not a ‘whinge’ about being ignored, but needs to be addressed as a question designed to engender further work that will lead to recognition. It is a challenge that Alistair Morgan would have accepted with energy, enthusiasm and intelligence. Those who have prospered from his work should be pleased to accept the challenge in their own ways and continue to draw on the guidance and inspiration he has provided.

Alistair’s key message was, above all, we should learn from our students. As Basil Bernstein (1974, pp. 3–5) put it, after stumbling on a solution to the problems associated with teaching ‘trainees’ from the post office—paraphrasing E M Forster—the quest is: ‘Only connect.’

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