Researching Student Learning
SRHE and Open University Press Imprint
General Editor: Heather Eggins

Current titles include:

Catherine Bargh et al.: University Leadership
Ronald Barnett: The Idea of Higher Education
Ronald Barnett: The Limits of Competence
Ronald Barnett: Higher Education
Ronald Barnett: Realizing the University in an age of supercomplexity
Tony Becher and Paul R. Trowler: Academic Tribes and Territories (2nd edn)
Neville Bennett et al.: Skills Development in Higher Education and Employment
John Biggs: Teaching for Quality Learning at University
David Boud et al. (eds): Using Experience for Learning
David Boud and Nicky Solomon (eds): Work-based Learning
Etienne Bourgeois et al.: The Adult University
Tom Bourner et al. (eds): New Directions in Professional Higher Education
John Brennan et al. (eds): What Kind of University?
Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill: Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education
Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskll: Discussion as a Way of Teaching
Ann Brooks and Alison Mackinnon (eds): Gender and the Restructured University
Sally Brown and Angela Glasner (eds): Assessment Matters in Higher Education
John Cowan: On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher
Gerard Delanty: Challenging Knowledge
Chris Duke: Managing the Learning University
Gillian Evans: Academics and the Real World
Andrew Hannan and Harold Silver: Innovating in Higher Education
Norman Jackson and Helen Lund (eds): Benchmarking for Higher Education
Merle Jacob and Tomas Hellström (eds): The Future of Knowledge Production in the Academy
Peter Knight and Paul Trowler: Departmental Leadership in Higher Education
Mary Lea and Barry Stierer (eds): Student Writing in Higher Education
Ian McNay (ed.): Higher Education and its Communities
Elaine Martin: Changing Academic Work
Moira Peelo and Terry Wareham (eds): Failing Students in Higher Education
Craig Prichard: Making Managers in Universities and Colleges
Michael Prosser and Keith Trigwell: Understanding Learning and Teaching
John Richardson: Researching Student Learning
Stephen Rowland: The Enquiring University Teacher
Maggi Savin-Baden: Problem-based Learning in Higher Education
Peter Scott (ed.): The Globalization of Higher Education
Peter Scott: The Meanings of Mass Higher Education
Anthony Smith and Frank Webster (eds): The Postmodern University?
Colin Symes and John McIntyre (eds): Working Knowledge
Peter G. Taylor: Making Sense of Academic Life
Susan Toohey: Designing Courses for Higher Education
Paul R. Trowler: Higher Education Policy and Institutional Change
Melanie Walker (ed.): Reconstructing Professionalism in University Teaching
David Warner and David Palfreyman (eds): The State of UK Higher Education
Diana Woodward and Karen Ross: Managing Equal Opportunities in Higher Education
Researching Student Learning

Approaches to Studying in Campus-based and Distance Education

John T. E. Richardson
# Contents

- Preface vi
- Acknowledgements ix
- Abbreviations x

1. Campus-based and Distance Education 1
2. Approaches to Studying 14
3. Conceptions of Learning 33
4. Orientations to Studying 51
5. The Study Process Questionnaire 60
6. The Approaches to Studying Inventory 86
7. Variants of the Approaches to Studying Inventory 108
8. The Distance Education Student Progress Inventory 124
9. The Inventory of Learning Styles 137
10. Other Inventories and Questionnaires 152
11. Conclusions and Implications 174

References 188
Author Index 214
Subject Index 219
An unprecedented expansion of higher education has taken place in the vast majority of industrialized and developing countries since the early 1960s. In most cases, this expansion has occurred through campus-based universities offering conventional forms of degree programme. More recently, however, many countries have found it difficult to sustain even the current level of provision in economic terms, and yet world-wide there are increasing numbers of people seeking access to higher education. Daniel (1996) recently argued that this crisis of resources and access could be resolved by the development of ‘mega-universities’: institutions with over 100,000 students delivering courses by distance-teaching methods using the latest computer and telecommunications technologies. According to Daniel, 11 such institutions already exist:

- Anadolu University (Turkey)
- Centre National d’Enseignement à Distance (France)
- China TV University System
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (India)
- Korea National Open University
- The Open University (United Kingdom)
- Payame Noor University (Iran)
- Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand)
- Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (Spain)
- Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia)
- University of South Africa.

To date, of course, the majority of students in higher education around the world have studied in campus-based institutions, and it is therefore not particularly surprising that the mainstream research literature on higher education has invariably taken this traditional setting for granted. Conversely, mainstream researchers into higher education have in the past paid little attention to the possibility of course delivery by distance education. A research literature concerned with distance education (or ‘correspondence
education' as it was previously known) does exist, although, historically, this was not concerned in the main with degree-level studies and thus it developed in parallel with, but essentially in isolation from, the mainstream literature on higher education. However, the advent of institutions to provide mass higher education through distance learning has rendered this separation between the two research communities wholly inappropriate.

A particular focus of interest in both research communities has been the approaches to learning that are exhibited by students on the relevant programmes. Several books provide good summaries of the relevant research carried out in campus-based institutions of higher education (for example, Richardson et al. 1987; Marton et al. 1997; Prosser and Trigwell 1999), although in this book I shall endeavour to provide a more detailed and critical account of that research than has previously been available. There are, in contrast, fewer publications that cover the research carried out in distance-learning institutions and these are often much less widely available (for example, Morgan 1991; Kember 1995). What is lacking is an integrated account and comparison of the research findings obtained in both kinds of institution, and this book aims to fill this gap. A central question from this point of view is whether students who are following courses by distance education set about their academic studies in different ways from students on similar courses in campus-based institutions of higher education.

In Chapter 1, I shall consider possible definitions of 'distance education' and discuss whether and how it is different from campus-based higher education. I shall also discuss the conceptual differences between 'distance learning', 'open learning', 'independent learning' and 'flexible learning'. In Chapters 2–4, I shall consider the results of qualitative investigations based upon the use of structured interviews with students about how they go about their learning in higher education. I shall conclude that these investigations have found broadly the same approaches, conceptions and orientations towards studying in distance-learning and campus-based students. The only apparent exception to this pattern is that distance-learning students – not surprisingly – are unlikely to be motivated by a 'social' orientation towards studying in higher education.

In Chapters 5–10, I shall discuss the findings of quantitative investigations based on the use of formal inventories or questionnaires. Here, I shall conclude that these investigations have found broadly the same factors underlying the responses given by distance-learning and campus-based students when filling out these instruments. Some researchers have identified differences in the scores obtained by distance-learning and campus-based students, but it needs to be remembered that students pursuing courses in distance education tend to be demographically quite different from students in campus-based institutions of higher education. More specifically, I shall argue that differences of this sort can be readily attributed to confounded differences in their ages, academic disciplines or response rates. In other words, students in distance education show no intrinsic differences in their approaches to studying attributable to the mode of course delivery.
This should mean that a productive *rapprochement* can be achieved between the two previously separate research communities. On the one hand, findings in the mainstream research literature concerned with approaches to studying in campus-based higher education will be broadly valid for understanding approaches to studying in distance education and thus can be fully exploited by academics in distance education in seeking new ways to develop and evaluate their courses. On the other hand, it also means that the distinct literature that is concerned with approaches to studying in distance education can be used to illuminate the processes at work in campus-based higher education. For instance, the student population in distance education tends to be far more heterogeneous than the student population in campus-based institutions, partly (although not exclusively) because of the use of more selective entrance criteria in the latter institutions. As a consequence, the effects of demographic characteristics such as age or educational background upon students' approaches to learning may be more apparent in research carried out in distance education. However, the more fundamental point is that research on distance education should not remain marginal but should be of interest to all involved in mainstream higher education.