



DEANZ and FLANZ: Tracing the Development of Distance Learning in New Zealand and the Professional Association Supporting it

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Abstract

This invited article comprises three parts that document the history of distance and flexible learning in New Zealand and the professional association DEANZ/FLANZ (Distance Education Association of New Zealand, later known as the Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand), which serves this community. The first part was originally published in the *DEANZ Magazine* in July 2015 as “DEANZ: A Brief History”. The second part was originally published in the *FLANZ Magazine* in July 2016 as “DEANZ Foundation”. The third, newly written, part brings the history of DEANZ/FLANZ up to date, and is published for the first time here. FLANZ (formerly DEANZ) is a professional association. The *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* is the Association’s flagship journal.

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Part 1: DEANZ—A brief history

In the first part of this invited article, Andrew Higgins casts his eye over elements of the history of education in New Zealand that concern the development of distance education, and takes us to the beginning of DEANZ.

Higgins helps us to understand why the activities that we now call “open”, “flexible”, and “distance” education are such an important part of New Zealand’s education system.

Distance education is hardly a new phenomenon. It might be argued that St. Paul’s letters, written to Christian communities 2000 years ago, constitute a form of distance education. However, such a method would not be recognised as distance education today. A little more recently—in the late 1700s in Europe, and more particularly in the United Kingdom—people wrote to one another about great issues of the day (e.g., the French Revolution). This activity led to charges that resulted in imprisonment for sedition. Participants in this activity called themselves Corresponding Societies (Cumming, 1978).

People emigrating to New Zealand from Europe (e.g., 1820s to 1840s) carried with them not only the hopes and aspirations for a new future, but also some ideologies, traditions, and expectations from their home countries. For example, by 1840 the English migrants had experienced an educational system establishing methods, often associated with social class, from that country. The almost-feudal upper classes followed traditional Church of England practices in exclusive private schools, while those at the lower end of the economic spectrum went to Dame schools, which taught basic reading and writing through the Bible. Few Dame schoolteachers had any qualifications to teach.

Between these extremes there was a variety of volunteer schools, grammar schools, nonconformist schools, and even schools operated by companies. Roman Catholic schools ran on a separate system, especially after 1868 and the release of the papal encyclical “Quanta Cura” of 1864. Organisations such as the British and Foreign School Society favoured established “low” church education for the deserving poor. Most schools used a monitoring system that allowed a single teacher to manage large numbers of pupils sitting on numbered forms or alongside standards. These names carried through to recent times with Form One, Two . . . and Standards One, Two . . . (Simon, 1969; Bailey, 1989).

Migrants from Ireland had been brought up on the Irish National System, which compromised between the competing Roman Catholic and Church of England methods. In Scotland, pupils received education through Presbytery-linked public schools—either via the Church of Scotland or from other church schools. Obvious consequences of these competing systems arose; for example, the Scottish migrants who settled in Otago used the Scottish system, while the Church of England system dominated not too far away in Christchurch. Despite these competing systems, mostly deriving from religious variations, there was general agreement among immigrants that their children should be schooled, even if there was disagreement about how it might be managed.

The combined issues of religion and localism impinged on educational provision through the fragmentation it generated. To overcome these issues, in 1877 the government passed an Education Act establishing free, secular, and compulsory education for children. It also created a Department of Education that controlled education through a Minister for Education. Attendance at school was expected for pupils aged 7 to 13 who lived within two miles of a public school (by road) for at least one half of each year. Non-compliance by parents could result in a summons to appear before justices of the peace and a fine of up to 40 shillings a week. None of this applied to Māori education.

A perhaps unforeseen issue arising from making education compulsory, even if it were not immediately possible to achieve this in practice, was that of educational provision for pupils living in isolated or remote places. Although Education Boards petitioned Ministers for Education to create schools for all settlements, there were often too few children to create a school or teachers to staff it.

The Department established a system of itinerant teachers to reach remote and isolated students, and male teachers travelled on horseback to visit remote families. However, this system was not sufficient because some families received few visits and itinerant families would have had little or no continuity with their visiting teachers. The system of itinerant teachers persisted until 1919.

One of the consequences of World War I was a shortage of men in the teaching service—first because of the high casualty rate, and second because there were now fewer men to staff the service. The Department of Education adopted a new approach to providing education to remote and isolated families. This involved using a correspondence system. It copied similar developments that had been made in each of the Australian states for largely the same reasons. The Correspondence School commenced operation in 1922 with one teacher for about 200 students. The school appointed a second teacher in 1923. By 1927 there were 720 students, and shortly thereafter the school commenced its secondary education programme. By 1934 there were 1800 enrolled students (Te Kura, 1986).

The Correspondence School expanded its cover and its reputation after World War II. Te reo courses commenced in 1949, and an Association of Parents commenced operation in 1956. The school began teaching special needs pupils in 1960, and in 1976 it began teaching early childhood students who were unable to receive any other form of education. In 1976 the

Department of Education opened the first permanent school building for The Correspondence School. Before that it was housed in various buildings in Wellington. Initially, the school was poorly staffed with no set salary scales, obsolete printing equipment, and no regular per capita grant. The school operated in Clifton Terrace in Wellington, but in 1967 the Department relocated it to an old and dilapidated house that was due for demolition to make way for a motorway. The school did not find a new home until arriving at the purpose-built premises in Portland Place in 1976. The building was poorly designed and not large enough to accommodate the staff, who worked in crowded and stuffy conditions, but the school continued to make significant progress in developing teaching strategies. It adopted emerging digital technologies and regionalised over the years to meet students' social needs. The value of the correspondence system was demonstrated again in 2011, when the school responded to the Christchurch earthquakes by sending learning materials to students who could not attend badly damaged schools.

When troops arrived back in New Zealand after serving in World War II, the passage of education laws in the United States of America for the education and training of servicemen and women, and the establishment of a Technical Correspondence School in each of the Australian states, as well as reports on further education in the United Kingdom, created significant pressure in New Zealand to expand the educational outreach services. Developments included enhancing The Correspondence School, creating a Technical Correspondence School, and further developing Massey University's extension system. Each of these developments separately and then collectively made education more widely available in New Zealand for students. However, as the men and women who created these changes moved away or retired, it became apparent that there was a need to create a more formal arrangement for those involved in distance education.

The Technical Correspondence School, created in 1946 and a major player in the post-secondary educational sector, focused mainly on the education and training of returned servicemen and women after World War II. Prior to this school's creation, the question of having specific provision for technical education at all (outside the formal apprenticeship schemes) was vigorously debated, with many employers favouring on-the-job skills training. The Adult Education Act of 1947 established and administered a framework for adult education in New Zealand, and soon the effectiveness of both academic and skills training began to gain traction, despite the increased cost.

In the university sector New Zealand created a "University of New Zealand", which operated from 1874 to 1961 as the only degree-granting body. Its constituent members were designated "colleges" except for the University of Otago. At the end of this period, Massey University became the major provider of distance education. Other universities were constrained and discouraged by policy (which affected funding) and Extramural Statute. Only Massey was bulk funded to provide extramural study nationally and, in general, only Massey had authority to offer exemption from lectures. Consequently, other universities did not become involved in distance provision in major ways. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that some senior academics, education administrators, and parents believed that distance education was (or is) a second-rate option. Even today, students at any level are usually taught with others of a similar age, by a teacher with them in a classroom. In one sense this is a fundamental paradigm of education (i.e., the co-location of students of similar age at a known location in the presence of a teacher).

Anything that omits these three elements might well be seen to be deficient to some. For example, in 1937 Professor J. Rankin Brown wrote:

The existence of exempted students (from attending lectures) may be a necessary excrescence on a university now-a-days, but many of us in New Zealand consider it [to] be

an evil, and several attempts have been made to get rid of the system or to palliate it some way or other. These attempts have so far failed, and, I believe, will always fail owing to the pressure of public opinion as represented on the senate of the university. (Owens, 1985)

Distance education often occurs without an individual student being in the physical presence of a teacher or a school. Hence the system of education is perceived to be less than it ought to be. It is obvious that students live in the distance context, so what does this mean for the standard paradigm of education? Perhaps it means that the paradigm does not explain very well how, when, and where students can learn successfully.

Who are the main beneficiaries of distance education systems? They are people of any age or circumstance who cannot attend a particular place for learning, whose circumstances do not allow them to come together in the presence of a teacher, and who cannot often meet with similar learners. They are too far from a place of learning, or their circumstances are such that there are not enough learners nearby with whom they can join. Some travel, live overseas, or need to progress their learning while away from home. Some people are unable to access learning facilities for medical reasons (e.g., a long-term stay in hospital). Some students are approved by, for example, a Minister for Education (e.g., home schoolers or those who are incarcerated in prisons). Some students, although within geographical reach of an institution, cannot attend because of family circumstances or responsibilities.

It is apparent that there is continuing demand for the provision of education to students, of whatever age or circumstance, who cannot (in the normal course of events) attend an educational facility. But even at this point in the 21st century some people believe that nonparadigmatic education is lower quality than the face-to-face variety.

Because there is a difference in educational provision for these students, there is a need for them to have representation recognising that difference. The aims of the pillars of the western social justice system (equity, access, and participation) are not always met with similarity of provision, but with diversity that leads to equality of outcomes rather than consistency of inputs into the educational venture. This is one reason for DEANZ's existence—to help all of those engaged in the provision of education to cater for the differences among non-traditional students.

Part 2: DEANZ Foundation

The second part of the DEANZ history documents the events leading up to the foundation of the Distance Education Association of New Zealand.

The late 1970s saw a revival of interest in rural education. In 1976 there was a meeting held to discuss secondary-school distance education in South Australia. In 1983 The National Centre for Research in Rural Education (University of Western Australia, 1980–84) in Perth held a conference on distance education with the state's Education Department. As in 1976, the 1983 meeting included representatives from all of Australia's states and New Zealand.

Recommendations were made about the use of technology and of staff development in distance education. In general, the school sector sought to personalise tuition for students. An additional outcome involved the re-activation of the Australasian Association of Distance Education Principals. Technologically, the West Australian broadcaster, Golden West Network, began to use an Australian domestic satellite to reach remote and isolated students with two-way communication (ASPESA, 1983).

One reason for the growing interest in rural and distance education was the design and development of a national satellite system in Australia. The national Australian Satellite Users Group published a magazine, *Satuser*, which highlighted the potential uses of satellite communication for both education and local government in remote areas. A national group, the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association, held its 10th annual conference in Bourke (NSW) to discuss these issues (ICPA, 1980).

The Association persuaded the then Federal Minister for Communications (Hon. I. Sinclair), to ensure appropriate transponders were added to the satellite specifications. Experience in using satellite for educational purposes arose from the use of the United States' Peacesat satellite which was operating from the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, serving the Pacific communities. In the 1980s, educational transmissions in the Pacific region could be accessed from as far as Western Australia until the satellite was decommissioned (Higgins, 1985).

The establishment of the National Centre for Research in Rural Education raised an undisclosed but significant issue for both Australia and New Zealand; namely, that of serving indigenous communities via distance education. Most educational provision at that time (and still today) was not aimed at indigenous populations. The National Centre for Rural Education's inaugural Director (who had Inuit origins) and the Board of Management (dominated by pastoralists and grazier interests) could not agree about educational provision to Aboriginal people. Similarly, The Correspondence School in New Zealand did not cater for Māori students learning on marae. Nevertheless, the educational climate favoured a better form of provision, using non-internet satellite and land-based communications technologies. Although US-based universities used a network protocol in the 1980s, the internet as it is understood today did not come into being until the mid 1990s, some 15 years after educators sought to use technology systems to enhance rural and distance education.

Specifically in New Zealand, the spread of distance education activity across the sectors of school, technical, and university education meant that each sector developed different ways of communicating with others in their sector. For example, the university sector focused on research and journals for publications and conferences. The technical sector—usually controlled by The Ministry of Education or The Ministry of Employment—had drivers to meet employer or business needs. The school sector—notably The Correspondence School—had no funds for travel or for research, even for school principals or senior managers.

New Zealand's response to the revived interest in distance education was to plan an inaugural conference to traverse the topic "Distance learning: What is wanted?" (Hansen, 1985). The theme was aimed at students studying through distance education. As a result of this gathering, Michael Childs of The Correspondence School moved a motion to create a distance education association of New Zealand at the conference. Its intentions were to coordinate and organise distance education activities, publish a newsletter, and form a communications network of those involved in community and distance education. The meeting agreed that it would create a constitution and an interim executive was established (ASPESA, 1984).

Executive members included:

- Michael Childs, The Correspondence School
- Judy Southworth, The Correspondence School
- Dave Nicholl, The Technical Correspondence School
- Donald Bewley, Massey University
- Janet Williams, Extramural students, Massey University
- Maureen Williams, Extramural students, Massey University
- Atholl Forrest, Advanced Studies for Teachers Unit
- Peter McMechan, University of Otago Extension Studies
- Jens Hansen, REAP, Hokitika
- Beverley Elder, Waiariki Community College
- Heather Mulholland, Trade Union Postal Education Service.

By the end of September 1984 the draft constitution had been created by the interim executive committee. This draft closely followed that of similar incorporated associations but the members did not seek incorporation itself, although this draft contains a crucial financial winding-up clause that was required for incorporation (Renton, 1991).

The constitution redefined and extended the aims created at the initial meeting. They included activities in the interest of distance education in New Zealand, such as:

- advising and making representations on any matter relevant to distance education in New Zealand
- establishing liaison with related organisations in New Zealand
- promoting discussion about research and development in distance education
- disseminating the results of relevant research and identifying areas in which research and development is particularly needed
- establishing liaison with the international distance education community
- organising regular conferences for the discussion of distance education
- organising special interest seminars and workshops in distance education
- publishing a newsletter at regular intervals and such other publications as the Association determined from time to time.

Membership was open to any person in New Zealand who was interested, or involved, in distance education. Associate membership was open to non-residents who were interested or involved in distance education, and institutional membership was open to institutions or organisations that were involved in distance education. Institutional membership gave the organisations one delegate each. The constitution allowed for a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and five other elected members or co-opted ex-officio members. The executive had to meet or teleconference at least once each year. In general, this draft constitution replicated the Ministry of Justice (or its equivalent) model. On 4 December 1984 the DEANZ interim committee conducted a teleconference to discuss the association's future development. It agreed to circulate the draft constitution for comment, and for final adoption at the proposed 1985 inaugural conference (DEANZ, 1984a; DEANZ, 1984b).

Ormond Tate, Principal of The Correspondence School, made his views about distance education known in his notes about distance learning support systems at the ASPESA meeting of August 1984 (ASPESA, 1984). His concerns extended beyond correspondence education. Tate recognised that the learning systems and materials used in correspondence education were a major supplement to conventional formal education, and their use could foster more equal educational opportunities for all. The result could be achieved because the materials and strategies supported the curriculum of teachers in conventional schools (Tate, 1984).

Tate argued that the distance education function would contribute substantially to the viability and scale of dual-mode institutions:

Any resultant increases in size may have led to an expansion of courses offered, upgrading teaching positions, attracting more able staff, and enabling more research time and grants which would lead to economies of scale. (Tate, 1984)

Teachers in rural schools could enrol in The Correspondence School to improve their knowledge of teaching and become more versatile in other subjects. Unqualified teachers could also become qualified through distance education courses and receive in-service training (Tate, 1984).

Tate took care to suggest that students in conventional institutions could benefit from distance education if their participation in school was hampered by health issues (e.g., asthma).

Correspondence materials could be used for gifted students, or for special education, through carefully coordinated support programmes. At the secondary level, correspondence materials could support the viability of secondary education in small rural schools, expand the range of subject offerings, and maintain continuity of study for students who changed schools. Significantly, Tate encouraged education through correspondence for prisoners, armed services personnel, children in hospitals, and young women who were forced to leave school because of pregnancy. It is significant that Tate identified many of the benefits that distance education methods could bring to schools and institutions more generally. Over the next 10–15 years many of these strategies were implemented in both New Zealand and Australia. For example, Walton and McShane demonstrated these issues in “Think Tank on Research into Rural Education” (McShane, 1990). However, in common with many people working in distance education, Tate did not address the concerns held by many teachers and administrators at the time; namely, that somehow distance education was the second-best option—to be used if face-to-face teaching was not available.

The DEANZ committee applied successfully to the National Council for Adult Education for support to manage the 1985 conference. The Minister of Education declined to attend. The committee met on 15 March to finalise its conference arrangements. The programme had several themes, such as receiving services, under the general heading or conference theme of “Students: What do they want?”. The conference was opened by the local mayor. Tate referred to the issues he had raised in the previous year, and a number of distance students delivered papers outlining their experience of distance learning. Tate also highlighted how distance education was used in the wider world, citing experiences in Russia, China, and in many developing countries supported by the ICDE, the Open University of the United Kingdom, and UNESCO (Tate, 1985). Only New Zealand and Australia offered learning opportunities “from cradle to grave”; that is, from early childhood to adult education. In terms of New Zealand’s performance, Tate noted that the Department of Education was satisfied with the standard of performance achieved by the country’s distance education students, although officials appeared to resist the uptake of new technologies such as videotapes. Tate quoted a former Minister of Education, the Hon. Peter Fraser, that the government’s objective:

. . . broadly expressed is that every person what ever his kind of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he lived in town or country, has a right as a citizen to a free education for which he is the best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers. (Tate, 1985)

In his conclusion, Tate recognised that the formation of DEANZ would do a great deal towards improving distance education services in New Zealand. After listing distance education institutions he wrote:

. . . there is only one Correspondence School among thousands of conventional face-to-face classroom teaching schools. This anomalous status means that we may be seen as different, second best, not the real thing. We are often left with the feeling that our work is not appreciated or its possibilities understood. (Tate, 1985)

1987 to 1988

During 1987 and 1988, DEANZ consolidated and extended its influence in New Zealand. But despite its best efforts, DEANZ was unable to influence the Picot Report, which was responsible for dramatically changing the Department of Education and created schools as quasi-independent bodies governed by boards. It would be fair to comment that this report ignored the concerns of over 70,000 distance students in New Zealand. Nevertheless, DEANZ membership rose to 220 individuals and affiliated institutions. Partly as an outcome of high membership, the association’s financial position improved and costs were minimised because member institutions covered many of the administration charges. DEANZ also conducted four small annual conferences

through its local regions. In 1989 the base individual memberships changed little but institutional membership grew, resulting in a very healthy income and bank balance. DEANZ members' interest grew in particular directions during this time, firstly in the use of technology and, secondly, in creating special qualifications in distance education.

The executive decided to employ a part-time person to help with administration and organisation, and at the same time encouraged member institutions to designate a DEANZ liaison person. DEANZ's profile rose internationally at this time with its contacts with ICDE and the newly formed Commonwealth of Learning. These liaisons and the ability of academic members to publish research papers and oversee masters and doctoral studies further enhanced DEANZ's reputation (DEANZ, 1988).

1990

One of DEANZ's aims included advising and making representations about distance education. In March 1990 a delegation of senior distance educators met the Minister of Education. The DEANZ executive consisted of:

- Prof. T. Prebble, Massey University, DEANZ President
- Ormond Tate, The Correspondence School
- Annette Mackenzie, The Correspondence School
- Shona Butterfield, New Zealand Technical Correspondence Institute
- K. Broadley, Advanced Studies for Teachers Unit.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring distance education out of the shadows and to address some issues raised by the Minister, namely:

- the government's aim to broaden access and ensure equity through distance education and open learning
- how to fund continued expansion of distance education
- the challenge of delivering distance education with optimum efficiency or minimum cost
- the need to explore and exploit the potential of new communications technology in distance education
- the international dimension of distance education.

The Minister expressed interest in focusing on outcomes-led services rather than input-driven ones. He asked DEANZ to prepare a submission to feed into the development of a national policy on distance education.

The proposed national policies should:

- state clearly that distance education is credible and comparable, and not second-best or a last resort
- recognise that distance education is applicable from early childhood to university
- recognise that distance education is supplementary and complementary to face-to-face education
- recognise distance education's contribution to retraining and re-equipping people for economic change and help women and girls contribute to society
- recognise that distance education is the only practical educational option for many groups of disadvantaged New Zealanders, including those who are rural and housebound, and that it performs a unique service for these equity targets (DEANZ, 1990).

The DEANZ executive recommended establishing a task force on distance education. It proposed membership that included people from:

- Auckland Institute of Technology
- Christchurch Polytechnic
- The New Zealand Correspondence Institute
- Massey University
- The New Zealand Technical Correspondence Institute
- De Loittes.

1991

The year of 1991 proved to be significant for DEANZ in several respects. The Association conducted a conference and responded to a UNESCO request, reported on regional services and student support and, significantly, began the process of transforming its bulletin into a professional journal. Ormond Tate produced a most interesting paper on the question of efficiency and effective outcomes of education, and distance education in particular (Tate, 1991). It might be surmised that these terms, originating from the world of business and economy, would eventually have a major impact on educational thinking. Tate made the point that those who try to use these terms in an educational context mean the level of outcomes divided by the cost of input. He noted it is very hard to measure outcomes, while it is easiest to measure inputs. A modern analysis might claim that inputs are to outputs as strategies are to outcomes.

Workshops at the 1991 conference produced a number of papers for the design, development, and implementation of distance learning materials and strategies. Executive member Andrea McIlroy developed a proposal to transform the DEANZ bulletin into a professional journal. Early in its life this publication performed the function of a flier, circulating news items on papers to members. DEANZ did not have any professional research publication capacity of its own, but its members needed this outlet—partly because academic publication had become a very important part of university performance measures, both individually and collectively. McIlroy described the purpose of the journal—including broad general articles and, from time to time, articles on specific themes. Production and distribution costs would be part of the subscription. DEANZ would find costs related for annual editorial board meetings. McIlroy suggested the titles: *New Zealand Journal of Distance Education* or *Journal of Distance Learning and Teaching* (McIlroy, 1991).

The final DEANZ activity for 1991 was a seminar on regional services and student support. This comprised an overview of New Zealand's major distance education institution services and support students. The seminars identified a commonality of issues and concerns and the willingness to be involved in cooperative ventures (DEANZ, 1991).

1994

In 1994 DEANZ conducted a joint ICDE/DEANZ conference. Despite the success of this event, the President reported that DEANZ activity had reduced, perhaps as a consequence of members' additional workload. The meeting contemplated moving to a biennial DEANZ conference with regional meetings being conducted in alternate years. DEANZ published the first edition of the *Journal of Distance Learning* in 1994. The association also made its first "DEANZ Award" for an investigation into how distance education approaches could be integrated with the staff development needs of art and design teachers. For its international outreach, DEANZ sought the support of the Commonwealth of Learning for a New Zealand Fellowship in distance education. Despite a detailed submission there was no evidence that this proposal succeeded.

1995

The 1995 DEANZ conference focused on the use of emerging technologies in distance education, and drew presenters from around New Zealand. The Annual General Meeting held at the conference reported that DEANZ had accumulated a considerable fund of \$21,000. DEANZ awarded Ormond Tate a lifetime membership for his contribution to distance education following his retirement from The Correspondence School. A long-term aim of DEANZ had been the establishment of a specialist qualification in distance education. A survey conducted in 1994 and reported in 1995 demonstrated that the market in New Zealand was insufficient to sustain such a specialist qualification. DEANZ recommended the exploration of options for study with existing tertiary teaching qualifications and sought to establish a database of appropriate qualifications and their providers (DEANZ, 1995).

1996

DEANZ took a major step in 1996 by appointing a new administrator who provided an excellent service for several years. The Association began to translate its constitution into Māori to meet its treaty obligations but there was no record of this having been finished. Meanwhile, Massey University extended its outreach service by publishing the specialist newsletter. DEANZ appointed two members to represent distance students to produce open and distance learning unit standards for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority framework, with primary user groups being the primary and secondary school sectors.

1998

The increasing presidential workload in 1997 caused the DEANZ President to step down in 1998. The Association's focus moved towards servicing those aspects of distance education characterised by diversity. As noted earlier, DEANZ had a constitution but was not incorporated. As an incorporated charity it could better manage its taxation obligations for funds gathered at conferences. Incorporation served to protect the executive committee of the outcomes of any legal actions. In addition to being incorporated, DEANZ had to conduct meetings at regular intervals, and have its accounts audited and its business reported to the relevant Ministries. As an incorporated society DEANZ became eligible to receive funds from agencies or governments.

The 1998 conference occurred in a climate of tertiary sector job losses and fears for the future involving much more technology in teaching and learning than had been the case. Significantly, as technology became more wide-spread in the tertiary sector, the skills of distance educators moved towards centre stage as students themselves took up new technologies. It is also notable that one DEANZ executive member represented the organisation at the Commonwealth of Learning workshop on distance education in Harare, Zimbabwe.

1999

By the end of 1998 DEANZ voted to become incorporated. It sought to establish a website and advertised for a person to fill the role of manager for that site. DEANZ also began to increase its presence on the national scene. The Teacher Registration Board sought its advice about programmes of teacher preparation conducted at a distance. Attendance by DEANZ members at Australian, Australasian, and other conferences further raised the profile (e.g., at the ICDE and the Queensland Open Learning Network conferences).

The incorporation saga concluded with final approval from the Ministry of Justice being granted in early 1999. By the end of the year the website had been completed. The Commonwealth of Learning invited DEANZ to present to the 10th anniversary of its founding. The meeting was held in Brunei Dar es Salaam in March of that year. DEANZ's raised profile was to have a significant effect later on through the Commonwealth of Learning. Sadly, the *Newsletter* carried

an obituary of Ormond Tate who had died that year. It might be claimed that DEANZ would not have existed without his drive right at the start. His loss was severely felt (DEANZ, 1999).

The death of Ormond Tate and the incorporation of DEANZ marked the end of the maturation of DEANZ into a body that commanded respect not only in New Zealand, but also overseas. There were particularly strong links forged with similar bodies in Australia and with the international body, ICDE.

Part 3: From DEANZ to FLANZ

DEANZ grew from an association that had close links to similar bodies in Australia, the Pacific region, South Africa, and Canada. Its main strength lay in supporting distance learning communities, particularly in The Correspondence School of New Zealand (now Te Kura), The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ), Massey University, and other tertiary institutions that had distance learning units, such as the University of Otago.

Public education enterprises such as schools, polytechnics, and universities are subject to change in social and economic philosophy, and events (such as pandemics) that affect the national political landscape. The Picot Task Force (Picot, 1989) resulted in public schools being transformed into quasi-private organisations at the administrative level, with control being invested in school boards. Consequently, the influence of the Ministry of Education changed from administration to policy development (Picot, 1989). The philosophy underpinning the task force derived from the work of Hayek and Friedman (Garrison, 2007). Their work encouraged individual economic responsibility rather than state support. It is also a foundational view for the neo-liberal economic philosophy of the late 20th century. This philosophy found its educational expression in “The Self-Managing School” (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988), which fostered local control of schools. The approach assumed that local communities could support schools in an environment of competitive providers. If a school was perceived to be under-performing in a social or educational milieu, they would be eclipsed by those schools apparently performing better, so the roll of the “better” school would rise, and the roll of the less well-performing school would decline. Not surprisingly, the government of the day sought input from Picot, who built his reputation on reforming supermarkets. This approach to educational administration had little relevance to small and rural communities where the population could not support more than one school; hence, there could be no competition. This is relevant to DEANZ because the organisation researched, advocated for, and sought to support students, teachers, and administrators in small schools.

At the government level, major political parties began to advocate for tax reduction in line with the emerging neo-liberal philosophy. Funding for education was consequently reduced in concert with smaller tax revenue. In response to this reduction, governments encouraged tertiary institutions to expand their income by seeking enrolments from overseas students and charging them accordingly. The approach even extended to some private schools. It also generated a competitive atmosphere between institutions, whereas there had previously been elements of co-operation going as far back as the establishment of the University of New Zealand (1874–1961). The establishment of Ako Aotearoa, The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence (2007) took, as its mission, to build quality tertiary education (New Zealand Government, 2007). The relevance of this to DEANZ emerged when tertiary institutions began to adopt learning management systems such as BlackBoard and Moodle, both of which were used to differentiate institutions, to foster competitive advantage in enrolments and teaching strategies. Similarly, tertiary institutions adopted other technologies—such as Mahara (a New Zealand Government-sponsored e-portfolio system), and its commercial competitor PebblePad. DEANZ, in conjunction with Ako Aotearoa, collaboratively sought funding to foster the development and

use of learning technologies because they made education more accessible to the DEANZ client base (i.e., students and families in remote, rural, or other settings).

DEANZ's involvement included:

- *Highways and Pathways* (Butterfield, 2002)
- *E learning Guidelines* (Ako Aotearoa, 2019)
- *Taking the Lead: Strategic Management for E-learning* (Higgins, 2008)
- *Mahara* (New Zealand Government, 2006)
- *2016 Scenario Guide to Effective Tertiary Education in New Zealand* (Davis et al., 2012).

The reduced government financial support for collaboration between institutions saw a reduction in discretionary expenditure that was not related to core business. At one university that had a distance unit (University of Otago), the then Vice Chancellor claimed in an interview with the *Otago Daily Times*: “After careful consideration, the conclusion was reached that online education would not displace the ‘traditional university experience’” (Hayne, 2013). This view reinforced the standard paradigm of university traditional teaching. A side effect of the view, not uncommon in other traditional universities, saw more attention being given to discretionary expenditures—among which were membership contributions to voluntary organisations such as DEANZ.

During the period 2000 to 2010, almost every teaching institution in New Zealand adopted some form of learning management system, often to gain or retain a competitive edge. Meetings of organisations such as DEANZ, ACOE (Australasian Council on Open and Distance Education), ODLAA (Open and Distance Learning Association of Australasia), and ASCILITE (Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education) conducted meetings and conferences—usually with presentations of academic papers and some practitioner input by way of posters. Some favoured sophisticated options such as BlackBoard or Moodle, and others used simpler technologies such as Lectopia (a static lecture capture, storage, and distribution system). With a plethora of options came a multiplicity of terms to describe them. These included e-learning and E learning (suggesting electronic use), open learning (not confined to a lecture theatre or classroom), and flexible learning (combining various teaching and learning approaches). Blended learning also emerged as a later descriptor. Each term had its proponents but they all had something in common; namely, they adopted a technologically driven disconnect from the lecture, seminar, and tutorial teaching strategies in the tertiary sector. Academics from the field of distance learning used the terms of “flexibility of time”, “place” and “pace” of learning. This approach had long challenged the standard paradigm of learning but had not fundamentally changed it (Higgins, 2015).

It seemed to some DEANZ executive members that the term “distance” did not resonate with emergent modes of learning, such as flexible learning. A statement introduced in the Annual Plan in 2015 proposed to change the name from DEANZ, and to revise the association's constitution, but there is nothing substantial in the records to explain the reasoning behind the proposals (DEANZ, 2015). A video records the adoption of a new name at the Annual General Meeting of 19 April 2016 (DEANZ, 2016) when the Association formally launched its new name: The Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand, at the conference dinner in Matamata. There is also evidence of a video presentation of the name change from DEANZ to FLANZ at the 2016 conference.

With hindsight, the DEANZ committee seems to have underestimated the potential downside to such a rebranding exercise. It is not unreasonable that an organisation would want to change its name, but rebranding is usually associated with an advertising campaign to link the old and new names with some explanation.

On 24 May 2016, the New Zealand Companies Office, Registrar of Incorporated Societies business register shows documents giving the name change and the alteration of the rules (New Zealand Companies Office, 2016).

The term “flexible learning” relates to the flexibility of time, place, and pace of learning as well as the flexibility of teaching strategies that might be employed. Because most, if not all, of the tertiary institutions used learning management systems, they had an opportunity to be more flexible in their teaching and learning approaches. But few took up the challenge to change teaching methods or, if they did, they lacked adequate staff support to help staff make the transition to a new method (Jeffery, 2014).

In the competitive tertiary funding environment, having a learning management system no longer differentiated institutions, but having such technology became vital to teaching when COVID-19 arrived in New Zealand. It seems that, in seeking to encompass teaching and learning in the tertiary sector, the term “flexible learning” may have become diluted.

This dilution took FLANZ’s focus briefly from its core business; namely, providing support, research, and advice for students, teachers, and even families who were unable to access on-campus flexible learning and teaching provisions found in “normal” campus settings, particularly for:

- research about remote and rural students
- New Zealand students travelling or living outside the country
- students in families travelling for extended times within New Zealand
- itinerant families
- students in long-term hospital care
- students living in confinement
- home-schooled students and families.

Positive rebuilding

For FLANZ, the last 5 challenging years have seen some successful rebuilding efforts.

The *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* (JOFDL) continues to offer world-class articles, and a newsletter conveys interesting information to FLANZ members. In the hope of widening the association’s reach, it began to use Twitter (now X), LinkedIn, and weblogs (blogs) (FLANZ, 2017, July 6).

FLANZ has continued to conduct the highly regarded biennial conferences established by DEANZ. These conferences and their sustained success (including attendance, relevance, and ongoing international appeal) provide a foundation for FLANZ to continue to rebuild. Conference proceedings are shared on the website and selected articles are published in JOFDL.

Registration usually included conference costs and membership fees, and this has continued. Some organisations sought to separate the two and, with changes to the legal frameworks issued by the Charity Services, FLANZ executives are always exploring new ways to encourage individual membership.

FLANZ began to rebuild its links to international sister organisations in the distance learning community after a lull in activity (FLANZ, 2019, April). It reconnected with the International Council on Distance Education (ICDE) based in Norway, and it signed a memorandum of understanding with the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australasia (ODLAA,) based in Australia. By the FLANZ meeting of October 2019 these relationships had stabilised (FLANZ, 2019, October). Together these three organisations coordinate to deliver a week of events under the banner of Asia-Pacific Online Distance Education(APODE).

FLANZ has consolidated a fractured web presence into a single website that serves as both the repository for shared insights and membership management. It now produces a regular newsletter which is integrated with the website, drawing more visitors to the single platform.

A series of successful webinars (some held jointly with ODLAA and ICDE) have been notable in recent years. Relevant and contemporary commentary ensures FLANZ can appeal to a broad community while remaining relevant.

Future challenges and opportunities for FLANZ

In February 2020, COVID-19 struck New Zealand. By March, self-isolation was common, and on 25 March the country entered a lockdown that was not fully lifted until March 2021 (New Zealand Government, 2021). The consequence of the lockdown for all New Zealand schools, pre-schools, and tertiary institutions was that every student was expected to receive their learning and teaching via some form of learning management system. FLANZ had, in the meanwhile, lost two notable links it could have used to foster knowledge and skills about how to teach using distance learning strategies.

Firstly, Ako Aotearoa, which was established in 2007, led New Zealand's tertiary sector with its call of "education for all", harking back to Peter Fraser's expression of the 1940s (Peter Fraser, 2023). The Director, Peter Coolbear, retired in 2016 and his successor did not offer the same opportunities; hence there were shifting priorities. Ministry of Education officials who had been very supportive of DEANZ left their roles or changed Ministries. As a result, during the pandemic FLANZ lost access to potential influencers who could provide advice and assistance or research into the educational effects of COVID-19 on relevant students, teachers, families, and school administrators. Te Kura did not have the resources or mandate to work with all the schools, nor did Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (now OPNZ) have influence across the sector. Other agencies took up these challenges.

The revised 2022 Incorporated Societies Act requires membership of Incorporated Associations to be made positively by individuals rather than passively. The effect of this change is likely to make it more difficult to recruit individual members.

Secondly, more stringent rules governing the administration of a voluntary organisation could make it harder for unskilled volunteers to meet new requirements. More generally in New Zealand, persistent long-term underfunding of basic social services such as schools, tertiary institutions, healthcare services, water supply, and roads will mean substantially greater government expenditure in those areas—so there will be probably less money to support voluntary associations such as FLANZ by way of grants or research funds. It might be appropriate to recognise that most teaching institutions such as schools, polytechnics, and universities already engage in some form of flexible learning and (rightly or wrongly) consider themselves to be knowledgeable about it.

So, in the view of this author, there may be opportunities for FLANZ to provide advice and research. However, FLANZ's core business may well move from supporting ubiquitous needs to looking to its more specialised role; that is, to those who are remote or isolated; those who are

travellers, hospitalised or institutionalised—and to home-schoolers whose access to “normal” learning and teaching institutions is restricted or not available. This suggestion should not be seen as an attempt to return to the past, but rather as a challenge to reposition FLANZ and seek to establish a client base that is relevant to the future educational landscape. To do this would require reforging links with Te Kura, OPNZ, and institutions that offer “distance” education in the public or private sector. In doing this, FLANZ can reach out to the otherwise underserved communities and work towards Peter Fraser’s goal of a fair (and equitable) education for all.

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Biographical notes

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Andrew worked and studied as a remote student in Western Australia, at the then Western Australian School of Mines, Kalgoorlie, (now Curtin University). He studied through the University of Queensland's Extramural Studies Department while working as a teacher in remote North Queensland. He later tutored remote and rural tertiary students, and oversaw and taught in the Rural Secondary School Support Scheme via the Queensland Correspondence School before taking up an administrative role. As Manager of Distance Learning, Andrew oversaw the development and implementation of learning programmes for serving officers of the Queensland Police, especially in remote areas. He became President of the Australian Rural Education Research Association and then President of the then Distance Education Association of New Zealand (DEANZ, now FLANZ). He has been Director of E learning at a large New Zealand University, has written widely on rural and distance education and on e-learning, sat on government advisory committees, appeared before parliamentary inquiries, and sat on a Cabinet special purposes committee concerning education.

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