Asian countries. The multi-national and multi-cultural environment in which students study would benefit both Australian and Japanese students. They will be better trained to meet the demand of a globalised community, that of the Asia Pacific in particular. If the graduates of the 21st century are better equipped to deal with the affairs of the globalised community, the whole world will be the beneficiary.

6.2 Teaching in Flexible Mode

The concept of Flexible Learning is a revolution in education, which started in the 1990s and will certainly continue into the 21st century. The ideology behind the concept is to make education accessible to a larger population by removing time and distance barriers, and thus meeting the requirements of diverse student populations. Students do not have to be on-campus regularly. They will be able to carry on their study off-campus, in remote locations in the country, or even while travelling overseas.

The concept became applicable to education with the advent of information technologies, especially the World Wide Web. By integrating the Web facilities into teaching programs, it is now possible to expand teaching methods in a variety of ways. The Web facilities make it possible to deliver information, provide academic content, manage students' learning, and make an assessment of individual student's performance, all on-line. In addition, collaborative learning experiences and general communication can be provided through e-mail and bulletin board facilities. Advanced information technologies applicable to education are not limited to the World Wide Web. Usage of video conference systems, for example, widen the scope of education and facilitate interaction between academic staff and students, or between student bodies located in distant places, even in different countries.

In terms of teaching quality, flexible mode teaching bridges the gap between on-campus courses and the traditionally termed 'distance education'. By combining a variety of flexible delivery modes, providers of education can now aim to offer all students substantially the same quality in teaching content and in learning experience.

Through the Web it is now possible to provide a virtual learning environment that can cater for all aspects of delivering a modern education program. (Gosper 1997:1)

The concept of internationalisation of education and the concept of flexible mode teaching are mutually beneficial partners. Flexible mode teaching thrives well in the climate of internationalising education. The expansion of flexible mode education, on the other hand, will help quicken the pace of internationalisation and widen the scope of education in the global context. Students will be able to access courses offered in a university overseas without leaving their own country. Academic members in different universities in different countries will be able to collaborate more easily and academic resources can be shared. Students will benefit from increased accessibility to a wider range of academic expertise and source materials, wherever they are located.

Students who study about another country and culture, such as students of Japanese studies, are particular beneficiaries from the increasing availability of flexible learning. They will have more opportunities to have direct exposure to, and interaction with academic members and fellow students in the target country. Primary information originating from the country will be easily accessible.

The progress being made in flexible mode teaching is certainly eye-opening. It is expanding the scope of education, opening possibilities to a variety of teaching methods hitherto unthinkable. It has to be recognised, however, that we are still at a very early stage in applying the concept to educational practice. The potential of flexible mode teaching is far from being fully explored. Consequently, the level at which flexible mode teaching is adopted at institutional level varies greatly from one university to the other.

The concept of computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been around for some time. According to Levy, the development of CALL began as early as in the 1960s (Levy 1997). In the area of Japanese studies in Australia, experiments in the usage of CALL occurred sporadically in the

1980s. During the 1980s, however, the environment was not quite ready to apply CALL to general teaching. Such factors as the lack of computer facilities for both academic members and students, insufficient computer literacy among Japan scholars, and the absence of adequate software, prevented CALL from becoming a major tool in language teaching.

In the 1990s, however, the picture has totally changed. In all Australian universities, computer facilities are readily available to academic members and to all students. Academic members have little alternative but to increase their computer literacy. Many universities provide a support team for computer based learning. Quality software suitable for Japanese language teaching is increasingly available. All this drastically improved the environment in which CALL can be utilised more readily in teaching. By far the most influential factor in changing the environment was, however, the advent of World Wide Web.

The creators of teaching programs in academia now have a greatly expanded scope in curriculum development. By integrating the newly available tools that emerged with the accessibility to the Internet, programs can be created for multi-mode teaching, which will add further dimension to the teaching content. Program creators can now use Internet facilities for such purposes as information gathering, electronic delivery of course content and assignments, interaction with individual students by e-mail, and transmission of general information through a bulletin board. The collaborative activities amongst students are also possible through the use of the Internet. Students can be linked with other student bodies located at a distance or overseas. The scope of innovative teaching programs through the application of advancing information technologies now seems to be limited only by the imagination of the program creator.

In the 1997 *Directory of Japanese Studies in Australia and New Zealand*, a number of Japanese studies departments in Australian universities listed technology-aided teaching as their major development in recent years. In this area, Japanese studies departments seem to be focusing their efforts in two major directions: first, to integrate existing technologies, including software, into immediate teaching activities; and second, to conduct

research into and development of innovative teaching resources that would enhance IT-based teaching in coming years.

In 1996, a major project was undertaken in collaboration between Macquarie University and the National Institute of Multimedia Education (NIME) in Japan. Through the use of video conference systems, the project linked Australian students of Japanese studies and Japanese students studying about Australia. The two groups of students jointly participated in a series of collaborative activities, including presentations and discussions, in a real-time frame. The project was the first such undertaking between Australia and Japan, and so far remains the only one. Building on this experience, Macquarie University now offers, since 2001, a postgraduate research program off-shore in Japan, using videoconference system as a major tool to facilitate seminars and research supervision.

The second area of major activities is the research and development of new teaching resources applicable for IT-based teaching. At several universities in Australia, the Japanese studies department is focused on this area of activities. At Monash University, for example, a set of software is being developed in the form of a CD ROM. This is to accompany the two textbooks and off-campus study guide previously produced for Monash's distance education program.

The Queensland Program for Japanese Language Education offers funding assistance to universities in Queensland and the Northern Territory for the creation of innovative IT-based teaching resources. Under this scheme, several universities are developing purpose-specific multi-media teaching resources.

The Macquarie University Japanese Studies Centre (MJS Centre) undertook a large- scale project in 1995 with the aim of creating a comprehensive Japanese language course deliverable entirely on-line. The five year project was supported by a number of Macquarie's internal grants, the Nippon Foundation Fund, and technical consultations given by both Fujitsu in Australia and Japan. Technical implementation of the academic content into the CD ROM was undertaken by Fujitsu Australia. The first

stage of the Project was completed at the end of 1999, with a set of CD ROMs titled *Gengoro* and a designated Website to link with the CD ROM content. As a result, since 2000, Macquarie offers its entire introductory level Japanese language program on-line, making it accessible from anywhere in Australia, or overseas.

As the concept of flexible learning is very new, the full extent of its potential is not yet known, even by those who are involved in the creation and operation of flexible mode teaching. The challenge now is to what extent can each institution, and each individual academic member involved in teaching, exploit the newly available IT technologies to create an innovative teaching mode that is educationally sound.

Flexible mode learning provides in many ways an answer to today's changing needs in education. The largest advantage provided by flexible mode learning is its capacity to overcome time and distance barriers. People will be able to continue their education and training after graduation, while working full-time, and even when travelling from one country to the other. People in remote areas will be able to access a variety of courses offered by city universities and even universities overseas. People in specialised areas will be able to search world-wide for expertise in their specific area, and for the training programs which meet their needs.

For students who have grown up in the computer era and are reaching university now, flexible mode learning is a welcome learning medium. They are at ease with the computer and draw much enjoyment from computer-enhanced learning materials. For course designers in academia, flexible learning provides many opportunities to enhance the course materials with readily accessible information. Multi-media facilities that IT provides will also enable them to create a variety of learning environments and add extra dimensions to teaching.

Advantages that the flexible mode learning offer are irresistible both to learners and educators. It is certain that this mode of teaching/learning will see further expansion. And yet, the fundamental question remains. The question asked is what university education is all about. The

university provides learning. The learning that the university provides, however, is not confined to the acquisition of knowledge and specialist training. It goes much further. Campus life, peer interaction in and out of classrooms, personal contacts with academic members and mentor-learner relations, all these and many more take place in the framework of university education.

Unbridled expansion of flexible mode learning/teaching poses a danger to the fundamental values of university education. The long cherished academic value of university education has to be preserved into the 21st century. Yet there is no way to stop technological progress. A large issue is looming over those academic members of today who value the true meaning of education. That issue is how to take advantage of advancing information technologies to enhance education, without compromising the educational value that a university offers. To find a balance between these two values will be the quest for all academic members moving into the 21st century.

As this Chapter has highlighted, the internationalisation of education and the development of flexible mode learning, will be two of the largest challenges that universities in all over world will face in the 21st century. In both of these areas, Australian universities are in a very good position to face such challenges.

Distance has always been Australia's challenge. Geographically, the country is isolated in the southern hemisphere. Within the country, there are many isolated communities. How to overcome distance and provide quality education equally to all Australians has been a perennial issue. Internationalisation will link Australia ever closer to the intellectual resources existing in other parts of the world. Flexible learning will provide the technical means to do this task. The technologies developed for this task will also provide educational equity to isolated communities within Australia. If the challenges are met in earnest, Australia as a whole will benefit from the advancing mode of education in the 21st century.