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## Chapter X

# Virtual Vignettes and Pedagogical Potentials: Insights into a Virtual Schooling Service

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## ABSTRACT

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*In 2002 a review of the educational and technical performance of the Virtual Schooling Service being tested in Queensland, Australia, was conducted. The service utilised synchronous and asynchronous online delivery strategies and a range of learning technologies to support students at a distance, who may otherwise have restricted choices in their selection of subjects to study in Years 11 and 12—the final and non-compulsory years of schooling where students are typically aged 16 to 17. An account of how Activity Theory was used to conceptualise the evaluation*

*is provided. A focus on one element of the evaluation—pedagogical effectiveness—with case studies of actual delivery and receiving classes is incorporated to highlight the pedagogical limitations and potentials of the service. The “productive pedagogies” schema is introduced as a framework for the evaluation of pedagogical effectiveness of the virtual classes. Critical success factors for pedagogical effectiveness are documented, along with a reflection on these elements using Activity Theory. The chapter concludes with an update of the current initiatives being undertaken to enhance the pedagogical effectiveness of the Virtual Schooling Service.*

## **CONTEXT— QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA**

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Queensland is the north-eastern state of the Australian continent with a population of around 3.5 million and a land area of 1,727,200 square kilometres. Brisbane, the capital city, is located in the south-eastern corner of the state. Almost half of Queensland’s people live in the Brisbane metropolitan area. Roughly half of the state is in the tropical zone, with rain forests on Cape York Peninsula in the extreme north. The remaining land area is arid or semi-arid, where annual rainfall is as low as five inches (13 cm), compared to 160 inches (406 cm) in parts of the northeast coast. The Great Dividing Range separates the fertile coastal strip from vast interior plains. The high population concentration in the southeast corner of the state leaves much of the remaining areas sparsely populated with small remote communities, presenting challenges for the provision of services such as school education (<http://www.lupinfo.com/encyclopedia/Q/Qunslld.html>).

Education Queensland is the government department with a mandate to provide quality education for all students across the state of Queensland, ranging from the isolated, vastly inhabited zones, to the densely populated urban centres. To support this goal, Education Queensland operates a large decentralised organisation whose facilities and services span the entire state. The organisation operates some 1,320 primary, secondary, distance and special education schools, which are supported by 35 district offices, four facilities service centres, and a central office located in Brisbane. Central Office

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