

# *COL's Perspective on Open Education*

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## *Video Presentation*

### *National Symposium on Open Education Wellington, New Zealand*

*8 November 2012*

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Greetings to everyone at the National Symposium on Open Education from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Vancouver. I thank Dr Wayne Macintosh for giving me this opportunity to be virtually present to give you COL's perspective on Open Education.

As you know, COL believes that knowledge is the common wealth of human kind and that all educational content developed with public funds must be made available under open licenses, so that more people are able to benefit from the initial investment.

This is very much in keeping with the spirit of the 2012 Paris OER Declaration, that was recently adopted, under the leadership of our former President Sir John Daniel in June.

COL and UNESCO came together to work on a project 'Fostering Governmental Awareness Internationally' funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Both partners carried out a worldwide survey on the use of OER. The report shows that 'there appears to be a great interest in OER across all regions of the world with several countries embarking on notable OER initiatives'. The report also signals the need for continued advocacy, as there is still a great deal of confusion regarding the 'concept and potential of OER'.

The Paris Declaration makes 10 recommendations. Let me just refer to three key recommendations

- Foster strategic alliances for OER
- Encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts
- Encourage research on OER

This is an important development as governments tend to take such internationally-agreed documents led by international organisations such as UNESCO and COL seriously.

OER also featured in the Communique issued by the Commonwealth Education Ministers when they met for their triennial conference in Mauritius in August this year. Ministers recommend that ‘a common platform for OER materials be set up for ease of access’ and ‘the development and use of OER in providing quality teaching and learning for all’ be promoted. This again is an influential document that is taken seriously by policy makers across the 54 Commonwealth Member States.

What will COL do to take these recommendations forward? COL will continue its partnership with UNESCO and other like-minded organisations to focus on four areas: one, advocacy and awareness generation regarding the benefits and availability of OER; two, policy development on OER at the national and institutional levels; three, capacity building so that more governments, institutions and individuals are able to effectively harness the potential of OER and four, promote research through its publications on OER and its Chairs programme.

Underpinning all these efforts is COL’s fundamental commitment to promoting south-south collaboration. This is done through its Virtual University for the Small States initiative, which is a consortium of 32 small states which have come together to develop capacity in online course development. Several need-based courses on “Disaster Management”, “Tourism” ‘Entrepreneurship’ ‘Fisheries’ etc have been completed and are available on COL’s website. Teachers who had never developed online courses are now training other colleagues. COL is supporting the Teacher Education in Sub Saharan Africa or TESSA consortium, another partnership of 12 African countries, for developing and deploying teacher training materials. But COL recognises that OER are not only about tertiary education but need to be promoted for schools as well. Through a six-country partnership, COL has developed 20 sets of course materials in print and online formats, based on the secondary curricula of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. This has not only established communities of practice but has helped teachers and institutions save time and money by collaborating on the content development across different countries and cultures.

We believe that teachers and students are the fundamental stakeholders in the OER movement. How can we reach them in remote and marginalized communities? It is these communities that need most help to improve the quality of education. Many of them have not heard of OER. How can we make them active partners in this movement?

The OER Foundation is playing a leadership role in promoting OER worldwide. COL has been a fellow traveler and we will continue to accompany you on your journey as you venture into uncharted territories and reach for new horizons.

On that note, let me wish you all a very memorable symposium.