

Commonwealth Educational Cooperation and Cultural Development: Future Directions



Stakeholders Forum

*18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM)
30 August 2012*

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In an era characterised by rapid changes in technology, significant effects from climate change, dramatic changes in the world economy, the interconnectedness of small and developing countries with large developed states, countries and economic blocs, a critical human requirement for survival is the nurturing and sustaining **learning societies**.

While one accepts the validity of an **information society** and a **knowledge society**, my choice of the designation **learning society** recognizes the importance of process, the need for lifelong learning, flexibility of thought and decision making, liveness and the ability to respond to change or to initiate change.

The education systems, objectives and processes themselves, therefore, have to be appropriate for the times in which we live and for the future we contemplate – as individual nations, as members of the CW, and as shapers of a world view, contributors to international peace, good order and prosperity.

Even in 2012, or perhaps particularly in 2012, despite significant movement towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for enrolment, the qualitative elements of education need to be addressed. The four pillars identified in the deLors Commission Report of 17 years ago still hold good: (even while we set the stage for a review of the philosophy and goals emerging from it....addition of the role of technology...global education?)

Learning to know

Learning to do

Learning to live together

Learning to be

Indeed the conditions we experience now and for the foreseeable future were identified as the basis for establishing these four pillars for the construction of a relevant education framework. These included

“An increasingly crowded planet, the globalisation of human activity, universal communication, an uncertain world, understanding the world and understanding others” (deLors)

Today we discuss Education and Culture, which in many national administrative configurations are placed together, and which belong together on the basis of any reasonable analysis of the inter-relationship between the two.

I would make another suggestion, that we look at the Commonwealth concern with Culture, recognizing Culture in two dimensions - with an uppercase C and with a lowercase c.

I identify with the **lowercase c** the broad Commonwealth culture best exemplified in our promotion of Respect and Understanding, in the fostering of the Commonwealth values of Respect for the Rule of Law, Transparent Government, Dialogue rather than Confrontation, Democracy in both substance and form. That is an area for continued investment by the Commonwealth if we are to preserve the CW itself and enhance its reputation in the world.

The large C is more specific to each country and very often defines it in terms of its reputation, its brand, its expression through the visual and performing arts, its literature and what are broadly known now as its creative and cultural industries. More and more countries are seeking to convert the tangible and intangible cultural products which they have generated or which exist otherwise into job creating and income earning opportunities.

While a focus on this second dimension of Culture, which also has educational implications, might not appeal to the conservative or traditionalist element in the community of cultural actors and policy makers, it is a significant part of present social and economic reality.

In this scenario, the future directions of Commonwealth treatment of Education and Culture could be somewhat different from the past, but grounded in the enduring principles of Partnership, Respect for Sovereignty, Responsiveness.

I suggest the following:

1. CW has a role to play in facilitating on-going dialogue and discussions around
 - a. The development of national policies in both Education and Culture and the connection between the two defined areas in the light of changing operating environments,
 - b. The sharing of good practices...
 - c. Innovative approaches...adaptation
2. Com Sec can assist in identifying technical expertise in specifically agreed areas of need, especially in the developing countries of the CW. The approach could be to fill gaps not being addressed effectively or at all by other international organisations. CC can go some way

towards meeting this need....refining needs, identifying critical path, prospects of successful outcome...but on the ground presence is often a necessity..assessment of sustainability

3. Consideration should be given to using the Com Sec resources to support national, regional or professional education and culture programmes which relate very directly to the promotion of the values of the CW through interventions which support the **Respect and Understanding** dimensions of development as contained in the Commission Report (Amartya Sen) and what is advocated therein.
4. As a contribution to social and economic development, ComSec should also support technical assistance in improving the capacity of countries to create robust economic enterprises on a platform of the cultural and creative industries, as well as of the sports sector.
5. Given the greater role being played in economic development by information technology and services, Commonwealth Ministers of Education might wish to establish or identify a permanent technical team of professionals who would advise on future directions and cutting edge applications which would have a bearing on the shaping of national education and training curricula and methods – given the length of time involved in the pass through from concept to output.
6. Partnerships within the Commonwealth organisations could be brought to play a greater role in the future as Member States seek to increase the rate of improvement in their education systems and their economies - often in a situation of competing priorities. Material resources and innovative ideas reside in Foundations, Think Tanks, Civil Society/NGOs etc..
7. While the MDG approach necessarily focuses on numbers/quantity, it is also understood that the quality component of education remains a compelling challenge. The responsibility for access, relevance and quality is firmly within the remit of national governments, and it is important to strengthen national capacity to achieve national objectives.

There is need for greater use of South-South exchange, more opportunities for sharing relevant innovations, and for more professionals/consultants within the developing states of the CW to bring their expertise and experience to bear on the quality element of the MDGsand on the programmes beyond 2015.

8. Perhaps presumptuously, I suggest that given the interconnectedness of the world economies, the political and social challenges attendant on migration – within the CW as much as anywhere else – the CW might give the CCEM a remit to examine ways in which culture and education may be used within countries to advance the acceptance of multiculturalism as a social and economic enhancer by using both evidence and judgment in “speaking truth to power” where that power can make a difference.

For what they are worth, I make these suggestions, as I continue to reflect on what the CW has meant to me, my country and the CW organisation with which I have been growing for more than a decade, the Commonwealth of Learning, and to contemplate the future which is as promising as it is challenging.

I believe the CW has relevance, meaning and a major role to play now and for the foreseeable future.

I dare to hope that it can indeed make a real difference to its vast membership by helping us to “understand the world and to understand others” as culture (big C and little c) and education intersect.