

# *ICT in Education in the Caribbean: Achievements and Challenges*

---



## *ICT in Education Leadership Forum in the Caribbean*

*Barbados*

*25-26 January 2012*

*Sir John Daniel & Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić  
Commonwealth of Learning*

**Sir John Daniel**

Minister: The Honourable Ronald Jones; Colleagues from the across the Caribbean, Greg Butler and colleagues from Microsoft, colleagues from the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNESCO and the Development Partners; Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to follow the Minister. Our topic is *ICT in Education in the Caribbean: Achievements and Challenges*.

I shall begin by listing some of your achievements, as revealed by a survey that the Commonwealth of Learning has conducted with you. Later my colleague Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić will talk to you about the exciting opportunity and challenge of Open Educational Resources and explain a project that we shall be interacting informally with you about during the breaks in the meeting.

We shall be followed by Janis Karklins, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information at UNESCO, who will talk about the ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, and then by Mr. Everest Phillips of the Commonwealth Secretariat who will address the vital role of partnerships in driving forward the ICT agenda in Education.

Let me start by saying how pleased we are that the Commonwealth of Learning is so well engaged with you in advancing the application of ICT in Education in this region. I commend my colleague Trudi van Wyk for her work in Guyana and the Bahamas, in particular, and more generally for her central role in organising this meeting.

COL's mission is to help governments and institutions expand the scope, scale and quality of learning by using new approaches and technologies. We try to help people like you understand the integration of ICT into Education and implement it using technologies that are practical, cost-effective and relevant.

In order to be able to propose technologies that are practical, cost effective and relevant, my COL colleagues and I first ensure that we are well-informed about the priorities of our Member States and, second, fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of educational technology.

Our Focal Points in each Commonwealth country do a splendid job in helping us with the first task. At the end of March last year we brought all our Focal Points from the Caribbean together in Port of Spain for a three-day meeting to help us prepare the Caribbean component of our Three-Year Plan for 2012-2015. Here is the photo for 2011 and here, so that you can see the continuity, is the photo for the previous meeting in 2008.

Second, to update ourselves with the use of ICT in Education in the region we recently conducted a survey, *ICT in Education in the Caribbean: A Review of Achievements and Challenges*, which is available to you.

Let me reflect with you on some of the findings of that *review*. It looked at how ICT is being integrated into education by asking Ministries of Education about three things: policies for ICT in Education; ICT in the schools; and ICT and Teacher development. The replies of the eight countries that responded do not give us a complete picture of the region, but they do give some pointers.

First then, let me talk about policy. At COL we believe that policies are useful. They give continuity to government actions and help to make initiatives such as ICT sustainable. You obviously agree with us because all governments in the region said that they were committed to having ICT policies. Many of those policies have remained in draft form for a long time, but then policy is a living process and ICT is a moving target.

You said that you have developed policies for ICT in Education for five reasons: to emphasise your countries' participation in the knowledge society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; to increase competitiveness; to recognise that familiarity with ICT is today a core skill; to improve the quality of teaching and learning; and to make government and society more efficient.

Second, the survey looked at implementation strategies. Not all your countries have formal implementation strategies for ICTs in Education, but you all have projects. A weakness is that little attention seems to be paid to the monitoring and evaluation of those projects or to the sustainability of projects carried out with development partners and the private sector.

One challenge that emerged is to ensure that policy and implementation are in sync. At one point the report comments that: "the unevenness of ICT access and use in Caribbean Schools is demonstrated by the continued application of technology access models that are outdated alongside attempts at distributing the latest available devices, software and access solutions".

This issue of synchronisation and integration is crucial. Policy and implementation have to bring together three vital elements if ICT is to add value to schooling. The first is access to appropriate equipment; the

second is teachers who are trained to make good use of it; and the third is learning materials for teachers and children to work with.

The most common problem, as in the quotation I just read, is that the challenge of introducing ICT in schools is too often reduced to “attempts at distributing the latest available devices”.

Focusing on this alone has produced so many expensive failures, like the sorry tale of the One-Laptop-Per-Child initiative in various countries, that there is no excuse for making that mistake again.

The evidence shows that the most vital element, in the three that I just listed, is having trained teachers, which is the focus of this Forum. Guyana is enjoying considerable success in integrating ICT into education where a recent case study “*demonstrates that digital resources and technologies can be used effectively as a catalyst for educational change.*”

The key to Guyana’s success is that it has emphasised primacy of training teachers and education sector staff. To quote the strategy:

*The long-term outcome of this strategy is to ensure that all Ministry of Education officials, teacher development management and staff, school principals, and teachers are competent to harness ICT effectively to support high quality teaching and learning in Guyanese schools, with most of them able to integrate the use of basic ICT tools into the standard school curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom structures, knowing how, where, and when (as well as when not) to use technology for classroom activities and presentations, for management tasks, and to acquire additional subjects.*

For this purpose Guyana is using the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, about which UNESCO’s ADG for Communication & Information, Janis Karklins, will talk to you shortly.

COL is building its Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration around UNESCO’s ICT Competency Framework for Teachers. This certificate programme, like the competency framework itself, is not just about giving teachers basic ICT literacy, vital though that is, but going beyond that to show how ICT can improve and enliven the teaching of the whole curriculum. We call it deepening teachers’ ICT skills.

The Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration is an open educational resource that you can adapt to your needs.

That brings me to the third element that I mentioned, namely learning materials: good learning materials, appropriate learning materials, relevant learning materials for pupils and teachers.

This is the theme that we want to discuss with you in the corridors during these two days and at the final session tomorrow. My colleague Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić will explain in a moment how we are taking advantage of this Forum to consult you about Open Educational Resources.

Many of you will know Stamenka as the former Head of Higher Education at UNESCO. She is now the Senior Consultant on a joint COL/UNESCO project called *Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally*. Your Ministers all received a questionnaire about your governments’ policies on Open Educational Resources or OER at the end of last year.

Open Educational Resources (OER) are simply educational materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared. Some people associate them with open and distance learning, but they are just as valuable in the classroom. Usually they are in digital formats, although they can, of course, be printed.

We believe that they can make a very significant contribution to the integration of ICTs in Education in your countries because they represent free learning content of quality that you can adapt to your own curriculum needs.

I invite Stamenka to take up the story.

## Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Let me take you back to 2002, when UNESCO began its involvement in OER.

At the beginning of the century an important trend began to develop.

In 2001, MIT announced its OpenCourseWare programme and began putting some of its course material free of charge on the web, an initiative that sounded too good to be true, coming from such an eminent institution.

As a consequence of the enthusiasm generated by MIT's OpenCourseWare project, which declared that it would make materials from all its courses freely available online by 2007, UNESCO organised a Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries in Paris in July 2002.

The Forum brought together major partners, MIT, the Hewlett Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and HEIs from the developed and developing worlds to explore this new approach to making teaching materials available and suggest how it might help developing countries to access knowledge and educational resources of quality.

This Forum was a major milestone for the OER movement. The term Open Educational Resources was coined at that meeting.

The participants adopted a Declaration which expressed “their wish to develop together a universal educational resource for the whole of humanity, to be referred to henceforth as Open Educational Resources”.

This 2002 Forum on Open Courseware and OER stimulated a series of developments and created a global movement for the open licensing of educational and creative works.

Larry Lessig, in his seminal book “Free Culture” wrote in 2004: “This movement must begin in the streets. It must recruit a significant number of parents, teachers, librarians, creators, authors, musicians, filmmakers, scientists – all to tell this story in their own words...Once this movement has effect in the streets, it has some hope of having effect in Washington.” And later: “We have a long way to go before the politicians will listen to these ideas and implement these reforms. But that also means we have time to build awareness around the changes that we need.”

Through an internet discussion forum led by UNESCO's Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in 2007 an OER community was developed bringing together some 500 individuals from 90 countries to chart the future of OER in education.

In 2010 UNESCO's Communication Sector developed this into the World Summit on the Information Society Platform OER Community, which now has upwards of 1,600 members.

Despite all the enthusiasm and idealism, however, the reach of the OER movement remained limited to the grassroots level. The 2002 Forum at UNESCO, building as it did on the MIT OCW experience, focussed only on higher education. By 2009 it was easy to get the impression that the Open Educational Resources community had become, paradoxically, a somewhat closed group of enthusiastic producers of OER with much less attention to their crucial value, which is their re-use, adaptation and re-purposing.

In 2009 UNESCO held a World Conference on Higher Education, of which I had the honour to be Executive Secretary. It brought together close to 2,000 participants representing higher education worldwide. In its Communiqué it urged governments to give more attention to the roles of ICT and OER.

As a result, later that year a resolution was presented at UNESCO's General Conference, requesting it to promote OER further, and arguing that the time was now ripe to bring OER to the attention of politicians as Lessig had suggested in 2004.

UNESCO and COL took up this challenge with a project called *Taking OER Beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity for Developing Countries*, led by UNESCO's Zeynep Varoglu and COL's Trudi van Wyk. The project took us through 2010 and 2011 and achieved some useful outcomes.

We held nine workshops on OER for education leaders in Africa and Asia along with three online forums and a policy forum in Paris. Taken together these workshops reached hundreds of decision makers from many countries, most of whom previously had only a vague idea of OER and their potential.

Following the advice from those meetings UNESCO and COL have produced two documents late last year that are available to you: *A Basic Guide to OER* and *Guidelines for OER in Higher Education*.

The project has now evolved to focus primarily on governments. It is called *Fostering Governmental Support for OER Internationally* and is partially funded by a grant from the Hewlett Foundation.

It has three interlinked activities.

First is a survey of all the world's governments, being conducted collaboratively by the OECD, COL and UNESCO to find out whether they already have, or intend to develop, policies on OER. All the governments represented here will have received a survey questionnaire from COL in November of last year. We are most grateful to those who have already replied and invite you to send in your reply if you have not done so.

This questionnaire survey is linked to the second activity, which is one aspect of this meeting. Questionnaires only take you so far, so Sir John and I will take advantage of this meeting to discuss with you individually, in the breaks, what is the state of play as regards OER in each of your countries. Then, in the final session of the conference, we will have a general discussion and pool ideas.

The discussion here in the Caribbean will be the first of a series. Between now and June we will hold Regional Policy Forums on OER in all UNESCO regions: Africa next month, Latin America in March, Europe and Asia/Pacific in April and the Arab Region in May.

One focus for those meetings – and for the discussion here – will be the third activity, which is the drafting of a Declaration on OER that will be presented to the World OER Congress in Paris in June. A very preliminary text was developed last month after a meeting of the project's International Advisory and Liaison Group and yours is the first region to get a chance to develop the draft Declaration further.

You have a copy of the first draft of the Declaration in your packages and we look forward to your feedback in the last session tomorrow.

The aim of the Declaration is to get greater buy-in from governments to the promotion of OER and of open licences generally. OER have great potential for reducing the cost of expanding quality education, so we hope that governments will adopt a Declaration urging that educational materials produced with public funds be made available under open licences. Government backing for open licensing of public educational materials is essential if we are to make OER the normal way of doing business instead of a marginal, donor-driven phenomenon.

This is part of a wider campaign to ensure that the public benefits from what the public has paid for.

It will be a robust campaign and already the battle lines are being drawn. Last week Wikipedia – the huge free encyclopaedia – was shut down for a day to protest against legislation introduced into the US Congress to limit the sharing of educational material.

As Lessig has said “a technology has given us a new freedom”. As educational policy makers, we must use this new freedom to expand quality education and OER are one element of that task.

We believe that this joint UNESCO – COL project will support you in getting the concept of open availability of materials into the mainstream of education.

Thank you. We look forward to discussing these ideas with you.