

Celebrating Open Schooling



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Sir John Daniel, Commonwealth of Learning

Transcript

Good day to you all!

I'm sorry that I can't be with you in person, but since your conference is about distance education and COL's mission is to help people use technology for learning, it's appropriate that we make use of the media on occasions like this.

My topic today is 'Celebrating Open Schooling'. PNG is a strong exponent of open schooling, through both the Open College of UPNG and the Ministry's unit for Flexible Open and Distance Education (FODE). I'm not going to tell you how to do open schooling, because you know that, but to put your work in a global context. COL is investing great effort in supporting open schooling under the dynamic leadership of Frances Ferreira. What you are doing in PNG is very important.

I wrote a book about Open Schooling last year called *Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All* and it includes a profile of your good work in PNG. Let me just mention some of the points I made in that book.

The first is that whereas ten years ago Universal Primary Education was at the top of the educational agenda today the challenge is the 'youth bulge'. Almost thirty per cent of the world's population is under 15 and in PNG where half the population is aged under 19.

I am not saying that the world had achieved Universal Primary Education. That's not true, and it's not true in PNG where, although 90% of children make it into elementary school, only 7% reach the upper secondary level. However, we cannot wait for the time when all children go smoothly through the school system from age seven, we have to increase access and success at all levels of education simultaneously.

Let me concentrate on secondary education. Worldwide there are 400 million children between the ages of 12 and 17 who are not in school. I estimate that about 700,000 of them are in PNG.

Why is secondary education important for these youngsters? There are many arguments but the only one I shall use today is that secondary schooling is the world's best weapon against climate change. That is

because the most powerful driver of climate change is increasing population. PNG is one country where population growth is still rapid, at 2.7% per year.

Since the industrial revolution the world population has grown by a factor of seven and each human being today, on average, makes seven times greater demands on the earth's resources. That's a fifty-fold increase in humanity's impact on our planet in two centuries.

Slowing population growth is one way of limiting that demand. Women with secondary education have, on average, 1.5 fewer children than those without. A difference of one child per woman means 3 billion more or fewer people on the planet by 2050. Secondary education for girls must be a priority.

Expanding secondary education is the key priority for many developing countries, including Papua New Guinea. That will not happen if we wait for conventional schools to be built. All alternatives must be exploited but open schooling is the most promising. But I do not simply propose the creation and expansion of open schools as a separate and distinct element within national school systems.

Open schools should be seen as catalysts for integrating all elements of schooling into an educational ecosystem fit for the 21st century that includes the Ministry of Education, Teacher Education and the community

Open schooling can be integrated with other approaches to make them more cost-effective and cost-efficient. An integrated approach also holds the promise of providing education that is better adapted to the needs of the 21st century.

It can blur the unhelpful distinction between formal and non-formal education; build a bridge between knowledge acquisition and skills development; and has the potential to reduce the inequalities of access that are a big problem in most countries. Very importantly, open schooling is less expensive than conventional schooling and the differential is increasing.

The Commonwealth of Learning promotes the concept of an integrative open school that is placed at the heart of the whole school system in order to improve the quality and reach of that system, to be a source of innovation, and to act as a catalyst for reform.

UNESCO has made a list of what makes for quality schooling and effective learning. Having open schools as a resource for the whole school system can help the national school system with many of the items on this list:

- good learning materials
- focus on the curriculum
- regular, reliable, and timely assessment of learning
- pedagogical materials for teachers
- relevant content
- structured teaching: direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning

- larger classes if accompanied by better inputs (assistants, materials, etc.).

Having a source of good learning and assessment materials is a particularly important foundation of effectiveness that supports other elements of quality, such as focus on the curriculum and pedagogical materials for teachers.

Today learning materials can be produced and shared in a very modern way as open educational resources and, more generally open schools can be a haven for the entire school system.

At the moment COL is working with open schools in six countries to produce 20 sets of self-instructional learning materials on the senior secondary curriculum. Those countries are Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. When the materials are ready later this year they will be available worldwide and will be suitable for use in both open and conventional schools. I hope you will find them helpful in PNG.

Collaborative projects in OER curriculum development like this one can help to create locally adapted eLearning materials of quality that are always in short supply.

So my message to you today is that we are seeing the beginnings of a process that will lead to much closer integration between open schooling and conventional schooling. The Open College of UPNG and FODE are tremendous assets to the country. Your value will be appreciated more and more as PNG works at expanding secondary and tertiary education.

I wish you well and it has been a pleasure to talk to you.

Thank you.