COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Open and Distance
Learning
in a Changing World

*Selected speeches of Sir John Daniel
and colleagues*

2007 – 2008

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Introduction

The policy of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is to make all formal documents and publications accessible via the Internet, including speeches by board members and staff. However, we have found that although – perhaps because – they are all available on our large website, some stakeholders appreciate receiving selections of these speeches in either electronic or paper format.

This booklet contains an open letter to the next US president – written before the election – and six speeches delivered in different countries at various events. In giving the selection the title Open and Distance Learning in a Changing World we have tried to show how the core principles of open and distance learning (ODL) are being implemented in new ways to meet emerging development needs.

2009 marks the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the UK Open University, a seminal event in the history of ODL. In the speeches given in the USA and Malaysia we recall the memorable words spoken on that occasion by the UKOU's founding Chancellor, Geoffrey Crowther, when he charged the new institution to be 'open as to people, open as to places, open as to methods and open as to ideas'. The principle of openness has since been implemented in many ways around the world and distance learning has become a mainstream activity in the majority of postsecondary institutions.

Today COL complements its work on open higher education with an important initiative on open schooling. The increasing success of the global campaign to achieve universal primary education means that even to achieve a net enrolment ratio of 80% at the secondary level, some 200 million extra children will need opportunities for secondary schooling over the next decade. Just as open universities have contributed significantly to enhancing access to higher learning for forty years, so open schools can answer some of the huge demand for secondary education. Much attention

was paid to this development at the 5th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5), the outcomes of which are summarised in one of the speeches.

PCF5 celebrated the 150th anniversary of London University's external degree programme, which reminded us how global openness to people and places was first achieved through an examination-based system. Our address in China to the Asian Association of Open Universities explores how this approach might be modernised to reach the billions at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

The recent phenomenon of Open Educational Resources (OERs) is a new manifestation of the principle of openness. The topic of OERs recurs regularly through these speeches and is discussed in some detail in the speech reproduced from Malaysia. If the OER movement flourishes it will speed the achievement of the ideal of a global intellectual commons as well as reducing the cost and improving the quality of learning materials. The speech delivered in Jamaica reports on the role of OERs in the strategy for creating the collaborative network for eLearning known as the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

Implementation of the principle of distance learning is benefiting from the host of new information and communication technologies that can be used to take advantage of expanding connectivity in offering eLearning and mLearning (mobile learning). Cross-border education based on these developments inspires both enthusiasm and fear: enthusiasm because of its potential to augment national education systems and fear because it gives new opportunities to bogus providers and degree mills. We urged the new American president to lead a global attack on degree mills because of their potential to bring eLearning into disrepute and confuse students.

COL's guiding principle is to help countries and institutions to apply ODL to the challenges of development. The speech given to a conference on environmental education in India reports two nice examples: making a Green Teacher diploma available to much larger numbers of teachers than could follow it in face-to-face mode; and the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme that is increasing the prosperity of the villages where it has been implemented.

These are just some of the themes explored in this selection of addresses. We have published the speeches just as they were given without attempting to update any statistics. We have also left references to slides in the text. Those wishing to see the slides – for example the tables mentioned in the speech on the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth given in Jamaica – should go to www.col.org/speeches where the speeches are arranged in chronological order and include the slides that accompanied them.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to thank all my colleagues for the enthusiasm and professionalism with which they promote learning for development. It is exciting to talk their excellent work to audiences around the world. Particular thanks are due to those who helped me prepare the addresses in this particular selection of speeches: Asha Kanwar, Krishna Alluri, Mohan Menon and Paul West at COL and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić at UNESCO.

Sir John Daniel
March 2009

Distance Education Across Borders

Keynote Address at the Asian Association of Open Universities Annual Conference

Tianjin, China, October 14-16, 2008

Sir John Daniel, Professor Asha Kanwar and Paul West (Commonwealth of Learning) and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić (UNESCO)

It is a pleasure to be back in China and to attend another AAOU conference. I have long considered that AAOU is one of the world's most effective associations for distance learning. That effectiveness continues to grow as AAOU's membership, and the institutions that make it up, expand and diversify.

It is good to be in Tianjin for the first time. This is China's year for hosting important events. I congratulate our Chinese colleagues on the success of the summer Olympics. I come from Vancouver, where we shall host the winter Olympics in 2010. The citizens of Vancouver intend to produce an event that is a worthy successor to the event that you held in Beijing in August. We just hope there will be more snow!

Along with my co-authors and the Commonwealth of Learning I also congratulate the Tianjin Radio and TV University and the China Central Radio and TV University on hosting the AAOU. It is always a pleasure to come to China. Now that China has by far the world's largest higher education system this is a most appropriate place to hold a meeting of open universities, which are dedicated, above all, to widening access to higher education of quality taking advantage of all the wonderful new tools that are becoming available.

The theme of your conference is New Developments, New Trends and New Missions of Open and Distance Education in Asia and the World.

You have asked me to talk about Distance Education across Borders. Although I am making this presentation I acknowledge the co-authors who have thought with me about this activity: Professor Asha Kanwar, Vice-President and Programme Director of the Commonwealth of Learning; Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Chief of the Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education at UNESCO and Paul West, Director of Information Technology and Knowledge Management at COL.

Our plan is as follows. We shall first point out that education across borders — even distance education across borders — is not a new development. However, there are new trends within this activity that we must explore. We shall focus particularly on three of them: the use of eLearning to strengthen higher education generally; the creation of open educational resources; and the challenges of quality assurance and standards, including the problem of degree mills. As we examine these trends we shall ask, in the spirit of your conference theme, if they create new missions for open and distance education.

Education across Borders

Let us begin with some comments about the history of education across borders.

The origins of cross-border higher education (CBHE) go back many centuries. Early in the 7th century Huen Tsang was one of many Chinese scholars who studied at Nalanda University in India, which can claim to be the world's first international university. Paris was the great international university centre of the second millennium and Erasmus of Rotterdam, who studied there and in other universities around Europe in the 16th century, has given his name to the student exchanges that are re-uniting academic Europe. Despite occasional hiccups — tradition has it that English students thrown out of Paris for rowdy behaviour went home and established Oxford as a centre of study — such academic mobility has been seen historically as a civilising phenomenon.

In imperial days the famous — and relatively few — universities in the home countries were beacons for those bright natives of the colonies who aspired to join the elites. For some this involved travel, but the celebration in 2008 of the 150th anniversary of the External Studies Programme of the University of London, reminds us that staying at home and studying at a distance with a university overseas is not a new phenomenon. The attraction of universities overseas remains strong.

A remarkable book, entitled The People's University 1858-2008, was published to mark the 150th anniversary of London's external studies programme. It is a beautifully illustrated account of a programme that has

> *The notion of conducting distance education across borders by focusing primarily on examinations could become a very modern concept for expanding access.*

DISTANCE EDUCATION ACROSS BORDERS

Is not new, but there are new trends:

1. eLearning

2. Open Educational Resources

3. Quality Assurance

innovated in open education for one and a half centuries and produced five Nobel laureates along the way.

In 1858 the University of London made the radical innovation of delinking access to its examinations from study in any institution. You only had to register for the examination. You did not have to attend a college or pay for study materials. This opened up the possibility of a university degree to those who had to go on earning a living while they studied, making higher education available to a far wider range of social classes and occupations. It broke the link between place and study. A magazine published by the 19th century novelist Charles Dickens coined the term The People's University for the new venture and proposed "the young shoemaker in his garret" as an icon for the new type of student. All open universities have images of the students we are trying to reach.

Since the whole function of OERs is to be constantly changed and adapted for different circumstances, monitoring their quality is a special challenge.

Nearly 40 years ago Walter Perry told the UKOU staff to create a teaching and learning system that could serve "a lighthouse keeper on an island off the Scottish coast"'. What images do your universities have of the students you are trying to reach?

Because the London External Studies programme delinked place and study it became attractive to many students outside the UK and still attracts many thousands today. Although it is over a century old, the notion of conducting distance education across borders by focusing primarily on examinations could become a very modern concept for expanding access. Today, through the Internet, students have access to a huge range of information and learning materials — including the open educational resources that we shall talk about in a moment.

Students are now in a position to choose how much help, in the form of study materials and tutoring, they need from the university that will examine them. Some may decide that if they are given a clear outline of the curriculum and some examples of previous examination papers they can prepare for the examination by themselves and save money.

We shall return to this in our conclusion and ask if such a model could be the answer to the challenges of access, quality and cost that higher education faces in many countries.

Strengthening higher education through ODL

But first we shall explore three trends, starting with the use of distance learning across borders as a means for strengthening higher education generally. This could be seen as a new mission for Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Over the four decades that modern multi-media ODL has

existed it has gradually joined the mainstream of higher education. That is a tribute to the work of your institutions.

Today we are at the point where ODL is helping to expand and enrich conventional higher education in classrooms. Nearly all campus universities are dabbling in eLearning and this is changing the nature of these institutions, the expectations of their students and the role of the academic staff.

THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)

We shall illustrate this trend with the example of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth that the Commonwealth of Learning is facilitating on behalf of thirty of the world's smallest countries. Some of your open universities have student bodies that are far more numerous than the entire populations of many of these countries, but we make no apology for talking about them. We live in a diverse world with diverse needs.

The world's small states tend to have fragile economies and to be especially vulnerable to natural disasters of all kinds: volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, earthquakes and the inexorable rise in sea levels. Like all countries they need to expand higher education to reach a greater proportion of their populations. However, they face particular challenges because they do not have the critical mass of people, expertise or technology to do many of the things that you take for granted.

Thirty of the world's smallest countries have embraced distance education across borders as a way of reinforcing their tertiary institutions and increasing national autonomy by acting collectively. They are doing this through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) which aims to bridge the digital divide through a combination of eLearning materials development and training.

The concept of the VUSSC emerged when the Commonwealth Ministers of Education met in the millennium year, 2000. It was the year of the dotcom frenzy when the Internet began to revolutionise communication between people and create new ways of doing business. Online communication seemed to have potential for transforming education.

"Open Educational Resources are part of the wider movement to create a global intellectual commons"

The ministers of education from the small states wanted to take advantage of online communication in developing their education systems but realised that their individual countries did not have the critical mass of expertise, equipment or bandwidth to engage resolutely with online learning.

However, they hoped that by working together they could nurture an indigenous capacity for online learning and so harness the new ICT developments for the benefit of their peoples. They believed that by working together their small states could create more than the sum of their individual efforts.

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth was the mechanism that the ministers invented for this collaboration. Despite its name, the VUSSC is a collaborative network, not a new tertiary institution. It is owned by the countries and their existing tertiary institutions as a

collective mechanism for producing, adapting and deploying courses and learning materials that would be difficult for any one country to develop alone.

At the same time the VUSSC provides a special opportunity for people to develop expertise in online collaboration, eLearning and ICTs generally. Although the ICT infrastructure in many small states is still rudimentary, especially outside the main population centres, the ministers conceive the VUSSC as a route into the online world. The initial drive in the use of ICTs is to orientate professionals, academics and managers to interact with comfort in a networked, or "web2" world.

Even if its first courses have to be delivered by the traditional means of face-to-face and distance methods to some students, they will be developed in formats that can be shared electronically between participating countries. These thirty small states, which are a blend of island, landlocked and coastal countries spanning the world, have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary skills-related courses, in eLearning formats, in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development for teachers, disaster management and a range of technical and vocational subjects. These non-proprietary, electronically-held course materials, which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in the offering of credit-bearing qualifications in the countries' post-secondary institutions, strengthening their educational capacity and outreach. The materials will be used both for distance learning and in the classroom. Thus the VUSSC is a way of networking the existing institutions so as to expand access, deepen their curricula, improve the quality of their offerings and enable them to operate confidently in the eWorld.

To increase the cadre of ICT-skilled people and launch the development of eLearning materials in each new subject area, COL convenes a three-week workshop in one of the small states. The other states that are interested in developing that subject send experts to the workshop. At the workshop they get training in methods of distance education design and development, collaborative development strategies and tools, and a range of different technologies that are used in eLearning development. Participants acquire these skills while working on real courses.

In order to facilitate the use of programmes offered by institutions in the small states, the VUSSC has worked with the South African Qualifications Authority to develop a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). It aims to promote comparability between countries and regions, and give greater credibility to the eLearning courses developed within the framework of the VUSSC and offered internationally.

During 2008 a portal or hub is being created for VUSSC that will provide access to online programmes offered by accredited institutions in VUSSC countries. These institutions, having already received accreditation from their national system, will be able to promote selected programmes in the international market, through the VUSSC portal. Once eLearning programmes have been provided by these countries and approved by the national and regional structures, they will be posted on the VUSSC website. Posting of programmes on the VUSSC website will signify that the programme is credible, i.e. it accords with national and regional qualifications structures and relates to the TQF.

Clients will register for these programmes with the knowledge that programmes offered through the portal carry the national accreditation of the country in which the providing institution is based. In addition to this, clients will be able to review the comparability of the qualification with their own country by reviewing the qualification's registration in the TQF. This question of credibility is particularly important for small states some of which, advertently or inadvertently, have acquired reputations as safe havens for degree mills.

Open Educational Resources

Our description of the VUSSC leads naturally to the next trend that we shall explore, namely the emergence of the concept of open educational resources. The movement that they represent, which is a vital component of the wider movement to foster a global intellectual commons, holds great promise for educational development. OERs are a fundamental element of the VUSSC because it aims to share learning materials freely not only between the participating small states, but worldwide.

The trend to make educational resources open to all was given momentum in 2001 when the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) surprised people by making the course notes of its faculty available on the web for all to see. This launched the OER movement with all the prestige of a world-class institution. The material on display is information on course curricula rather than self-learning materials, but it is widely consulted as a benchmark by faculty and students around the world, notably here in China.

In 2006 the UK Open University took this concept one stage further with its OpenLearn initiative. This makes self-learning materials, student support and collaboration tools available on the web. OpenLearn receives some 100,000 visits a week and is intended to be of more direct value to students than the MIT material. The site also has a LabSpace where people can mix, match and adapt the materials. If MIT's OpenCourseware shares information and the UKOU's OpenLearn shares learning, then the next step is to share teaching — or course development — which is what 30 countries are doing through the VUSSC as we have just described. So in a short time OERs have progressed from sharing curricular information to sharing learning materials to sharing the preparation of learning materials.

The purpose of an Open Educational Resource is to be freely available for people around the world to use. It is another example of the trend that we just explored, namely to use distance learning — because OERs are a product of distance learning — to strengthen higher education generally. But what do we mean by freely available? How open are open educational resources? How open should they be? This is now a topic of lively debate. Open universities must make decisions about these questions since they will likely become major producers of OERs.

> *Distance education across borders rings alarm bells with governments because it involves foreigners and it often gives a bigger role for the private sector.*

Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education (UNESCO/OECD)

The history of OERs is an example of a development that has become rather controversial as it has progressed. OERs are an expression of the freedom culture, of which Wikipedia is the most famous product. Adherents to this culture are convinced that democracy will yield truth. In other words, they believe that the examination and collaborative revision of an article on, say, solar energy, by all who might have views and knowledge about solar energy, will produce an accurate and reliable statement on that topic. This may be true in many cases but can academic quality assurance always be based on such an act of faith?

In this model higher education is built around credible examination systems run by national or independent bodies or established institutions, such as open universities, which then encourage a market of support providers to develop.

One might define a fully open OER as educational material that anyone can take, adapt and use for any purpose without acknowledgement. Very few creators of OERs aim for this level of openness. Most originators of OERs put them under a Creative Commons (CC) licence, which at a minimum requires the user to acknowledge where the material came from (the "BY" restriction) and to share any derivative work under the same licence (the Share-Alike ("SA") restriction). All material on WikiEducator, an electronic materials development space that COL helped to create must be licensed like this.

However, some creators of OERs find it appropriate to place the No Derivatives ("ND") restriction on the CC licence in order to prevent adaptations of their material. This might be appropriate, for example, with a document listing standards that had been approved by a particular body. Allowing anyone to change the document would negate the notion of approved standards.

More controversy is generated by the use of the Non Commercial ("NC") restriction, which MIT applies to its OpenCourseware OERs and the UK Open University applies to OERs on its OpenLearn website. Their aim is to prevent others from using their materials in profit-making educational initiatives. Others are concerned that individuals who have dedicated substantial time and energy to creating royalty-free materials — without fully understanding the legal consequences — may find that their hard work allows overseas companies to make profits while they themselves earn nothing from their labours. This could apply to academics in developing countries, to whom the production and use of OERs is particularly attractive.

Eventually time and experience will resolve these issues. Meanwhile institutions must tread carefully as they take advantage of the growing pool of OERs to enrich and improve their own teaching and to foster the notion of a global intellectual commons by contributing OERs to it. We hope that the term OER will continue to be used in a flexible way to mean teaching, learning and research resources that are made freely available by individuals, institutions, organisations and governments to others under a range of copyright licenses that permit their use for open and distance learning, without an accompanying need to pay royalties or licence fees.

We are aware of a move to limit the term OER to materials where use is only constrained by the BY and SA restrictions. This would mean that materials with NC or ND restrictions, such as those made available by MIT and the UKOU would not be considered as OERs. Such a move would be silly in my view and we should fight to maintain a broad meaning for OERs. If OER does become a restrictive term COL would adopt another term, such as Open Learning Resources, or OLRs to cover a more flexible interpretation. But these are details. The important thing is that we urge you all to take part in the movement and to contribute materials to it.

Quality Assurance

New approaches to providing products or services tend to raise questions about quality in all areas of endeavour, but especially so in education — particularly when the aim of the new approaches is to expand access. We just asked this question in relation to Open Educational Resources. Since the whole function of OERs is to be constantly changed and adapted for different circumstances, monitoring their quality is a special challenge.

But this is true of all aspects of distance education across borders. It rings alarm bells with governments because it involves foreigners and it often gives a bigger role for the private sector. Some feel that adapted materials and those over which national educational systems do not have control could infringe on national values and impact negatively on people's morals, religions, cultures and traditional knowledge.

One response to these concerns has been for governments to work together internationally through their intergovernmental agencies. For example, one outcome of UNESCO's standard-setting activities was the development, jointly with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), of the 2005 Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education (CBHE). The Guidelines address six groups of stakeholders in HE: governments, HE institutions, student bodies, recognition bodies, quality assurance bodies and professional bodies. They recommend actions based on collaboration, foster mutual trust and confidence and encourage access to reliable and transparent information. The overall aim is to promote quality as cross-border higher education grows.

To foster ongoing attention to the issue of quality in CBHE UNESCO has created a space for policy debate through its Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications that was launched in 2002. The Global Forum was conceived as a response to the ethical challenges and dilemmas facing higher education in an era of globalisation. Its mission was to provide a platform for exchange between different partners and initiate debate on the social, political, economic and cultural dimensions underpinning globalisation and higher education. Its third meeting was held in Tanzania in 2007.

BEWARE
DEGREE MILLS & BOGUS COLLEGES

DEGREE MILLS

Governments are well aware of the challenge created for higher education by the phenomenon of degree mills, a general term for spurious enterprises that sell qualifications without the demonstration of learning competency required by genuine institutions. Degree mills are a consequence of burgeoning demand for higher education allied to global communications through the Internet. They pose a threat to personal and national security.

Most employers, who are lazy about checking the credentials presented to them, think that the holders of phoney diplomas actually have the knowledge and skills they claim. Phoney medical qualifications are particularly alarming to the public but all bogus qualifications are potentially a danger to society. The Internet is giving degree mills new opportunities to deceive people and to change the colour of their operations quickly, like chameleons, when trouble hits.

The Web also makes it easy to attempt to borrow credibility from international bodies such as UNESCO by aping aspects of their websites. However, the Internet is a game that anyone can play and the worldwide quality establishment could do much more to use the Internet to steer people away from the spurious operators.

Small and fragile states are a favourite prey of degree mills and some are perceived as a safe haven for them. However, when a country gains a reputation for hosting degree mills it risks being put on informal blacklists. Governments and bona fide institutions in other countries may refuse to accept any educational qualification from the blacklisted country. Furthermore, because bogus degrees are usually offered over the Internet, some jurisdictions have imposed an outright ban on the recognition of any online degrees.

There is no magic bullet that will kill degree mills. Their suppression requires a concerted effort by all interested parties. Governments should take action, through legislation and enforcement, to close the out-and-out scams. Trade ministries should not give business licences to HE institutions without reference to the national quality assurance systems. Employers, academic admissions officers and immigration authorities should check the authenticity of all credentials presented to them and senior politicians should be more careful about giving photo opportunities to smooth-talking confidence tricksters.

Quality agencies should work from the credible end of the continuum between established universities and degree mills and extend the proportion of credible institutions. The key is to instil a professional quality assurance culture that obliges institutions to internalise their quality processes. All branches of government must back these agencies and see that their remit covers all higher education institutions, private and public.

Once countries know which institutions on their territory are credible and which are not they can list them on the portal of legitimate accredited institutions that UNESCO is creating. The key goal is to establish and develop good quality assurance systems for higher education in all countries.

> "There is no magic bullet that will kill degree mills. Their suppression requires a concerted effort by all interested parties."

STANDARDS

However, despite advances in quality assurance there is now some disillusionment with current systems. This arises because most quality assurance systems try to judge whether an institution or a programme is meeting its declared objectives. Some stakeholders, governments in particular, now ask questions about the objectives themselves. What merit is there in achieving easy objectives?

This scepticism is leading to a greater focus on standards, which means paying less attention to institutional processes and more attention to what students know and can do when they have finished their programmes. Were this concentration on standards to become more general it could give new relevance to the system of examinations pioneered by the University of London 150 years ago. At that time the Member of Parliament for the University declared bluntly, "what I mean by a University is an examination board".

Knowledge Alone

Another of the pioneers of the system expressed it more elegantly when he said: "Knowledge alone must be tested. There is no substitute for it. The University and the public are not concerned to inquire 'when or where' it was obtained. ..Unlike more worldly stores, knowledge can hardly be acquired dishonestly, or without elevating the character of him who has achieved it". We are sure that open universities would empathise with that statement.

A major strength of open universities is that they run examination systems on a large scale, which means that the examinations and their marking are likely more rigorous, or at least less susceptible to personal influence and corruption, than exams set and marked by academics for their own small classes.

A MODEL FOR ACCESS WITH QUALITY AT LOW COST

This suggests a model that would enable higher education to expand rapidly in the developing world by being readily scalable (wide access), academically credible (high quality) and affordable (low cost). It could be achieved by building higher education around credible examination systems run by national or independent bodies or established institutions, such as open universities, and then encouraging a market of support providers to develop. Although the range of examinations would need to match the wide array of higher education programmes on offer, there is considerable room for aggregation and for some existing institutions to act as examining bodies for others.

Open universities could also be support providers, but the essence of the model is that it would allow students to choose how much support they need and are ready to pay for. Some would simply pay for the examination

Open universities could also be support providers, but the essence of the model is that it would allow students to choose how much support they need and are ready to pay for.

and find support for themselves, for instance by using open educational resources on the web.

Conclusion

We have explored developments in cross border distance education, noting the advantages and challenges they bring with them.

We have also noted constructive and progressive initiatives in support of cross-border higher education such UNESCO's Global Forum, its Guidelines on Quality Assurance and its portal of recognised institutions. There is also VUSSC's new portal of online programmes offered by credible institutions in small states. As education changes, institutions need to be cognisant of the implications. Governments should act collectively, through their intergovernmental organisations such as UNESCO and COL, to develop global public goods in support of international education.

Advancing technology continues to provide new opportunities for distance education across borders. Soon, half the world's people will have access to cell phones and access to the Internet grows apace.

Finally, the key challenge for global higher education is still to expand access by providing high quality programmes at low cost. This cannot be done by traditional face-to-face teaching methods and even distance education is still unaffordable to many.

One way of expanding access at low cost would be to develop systems based on examinations that give students the freedom to obtain the support from any source as needed. Open universities, which have great expertise in running large-scale examination systems, could play a key role in such a development.

Advancing technology continues to provide new opportunities for distance education across borders. Soon, half the world's people will have access to cell phones and access to the Internet grows apace.

Looking Ahead: Letters to the Next President from Higher Education's Leaders

Sir John Daniel

For the September-October 2008 issue of Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, seven higher education leaders, including the US Secretary of Education, the President of the American Council on Education and the President of COL, Sir John Daniel, were invited to address an open letter to the next President of the United States.

Sir John's letter is included below. The others can be found on the magazine's website at www.changemag.org.

Given the importance of the upcoming Presidential election, not only to the nation as a whole but to higher education, Change solicited a set of letters to the President-elect from a group of higher-education leaders: Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings; Molly Broad, president of the American Council on Education; Sir John Daniel, president of the Commonwealth of Learning and former vice-chancellor (CEO) of the UK Open University; Johnnetta Cole, former president of Spelman College; Richael Young, an undergraduate from the College of San Mateo; Gerald Graff, president of the Modern Language Association; and Robert Connor, president of the Teagle Foundation. From their various perspectives, each offers a view of the critical issues facing higher education in the coming four years and suggests what role the next President, as well as we, might play in addressing them. The letters are followed by a longer statement from the heads of the coordinating and governing boards in the states (known collectively as the SHEEOs) that addresses the same questions.

– Margaret A. Miller, Executive Editor, Change.

To the next President of the United States:

I write as a friendly foreigner to urge that you act to strengthen and sustain higher education in the United States. You might ask: Why, with the stack of pressing issues on your desk, should you worry about higher education, where there is only a limited role for the federal government?

In his book The Post-American World, the editor of Newsweek International, Fareed Zakaria, shows that although the U.S. is not declining, other countries are rising and challenging its preeminence in many fields. A long-term change in America's relative position was always predictable, but, because of the previous administration's inept economic management and callous diplomatic incompetence, the shift is happening more quickly than anyone expected. In this environment, America must nourish its strengths. Two of these, which complement each other well, are higher education and the armed forces. I offer you no advice on the military, except to suggest that you trade your predecessor's motto, "In arms we trust", for a more effective blend of hard and soft power.

> *The tremendous worldwide influence of U.S. higher education gives the country an abundant source of soft power.*

The tremendous worldwide influence of U.S. higher education gives the country an abundant source of soft power. It is not only America's research universities that the world envies. Your real treasure is the diversity of a system that gives opportunities for tertiary education and training to a large proportion of the population from all socioeconomic groups. Other countries are keen to emulate U.S. higher education, using your model of the community college, your mix of public and private institutions, and your huge array of available programs.

How can you, then, as President, strengthen the system and enhance its international influence? I suggest action on three fronts.

Step 1, which will no doubt inspire your stance in international affairs generally, is to show that America supports multi-lateral approaches and can work effectively within them. At a time when Americans are touchy about the apparent decline in their international influence, this will take guts – but your courage will be well repaid, not only in goodwill, but in real influence. Although UNESCO might seem an odd place to start, it gives you a platform to show – in education, culture, communications, and science – that the era of "my way or the highway" – style diplomacy is over. As a recent article in the German magazine Der Spiegel noted: "With this attitude the U.S. often finds itself as isolated as only North Korea and Myanmar are in other forums... . Sometimes it seems that America only rejoined UNESCO to blow up the whole organisation from the inside."

In a world where demand for higher education is booming, where the international movement of students will triple in a decade, and where e-learning is challenging the notion of borders, America has nothing to fear and everything to gain by leading the development of international rules of interaction. Where the previous administration fanned the embers of xenophobia and paranoia, you must lead the world's most multicultural nation to engage confidently with other countries – a much more natural stance.

Step 2 is to work from the good principle, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". Just as other countries begin to accept that universities perform better autonomously, with a light touch from the state, America is moving in the opposite direction through attempts in Congress to suck the accreditation system more deeply into the federal ambit. This will do damage. The current regional and national systems of accreditation may not be perfect, but the federal government should push to correct their perceived weaknesses rather than launch a hostile takeover.

For example, robust action – including legislation – by your administration to suppress degree mills would be very welcome. These bogus operations, and the equally phony accreditation mills behind which they hide, undermine the credibility of U.S. accreditation and have a negative influence on higher education worldwide. Through the Bologna process, Europeans are trying to raise the quality and standards of higher education across 46 countries in Europe. They face an uphill struggle because of the hodgepodge of national legislation. The U.S., already well ahead on this front, should now lead the international community in freezing these fraudulent and dangerous scams out of their safe havens around

Robust action – including legislation – by your administration to suppress degree mills would be very welcome.

the globe. A war on degree mills is winnable, presents no risk of collateral damage, and would earn America international plaudits.

Step 3 is to achieve a better balance between the recruitment of foreign talent for the U.S. economy and the strengthening of universities in developing countries. Under current trends, including the external dimension of the Bologna process, more students are becoming global nomads. This increase in mobility is a force for peace. However, poorer countries lament the loss of their brightest people through brain-drains to the U.S. and Europe. Thirty percent of Africa's tertiary-trained professionals live outside the continent, which loses about 20,000 professionals annually. Because the U.S. economy needs a steady influx of trained workers, it is in America's interest to strengthen universities in developing countries as well as to promote mobility. It could do this by encouraging U.S. universities to help local universities in poorer countries develop solid Ph.D. programs in situ, which would allow more people to train as researchers without going abroad. Substantially increasing the number of doctorates awarded in these countries would provide a pool of highly qualified people to contribute to their national development without decreasing the overall availability of talent to the U.S.

This would be an excellent and much-appreciated form of soft power. What better way for America to extend its long-term influence for good than by nurturing the universities across the world whose graduates will create the future? To adapt the well-known Chinese proverb: if you educate foreigners in the U.S., they will benefit for a lifetime; if you nurture foreign universities, the benefits will extend to future generations.

My Tip of the Iceberg

Closing Keynote Address at the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning

London, United Kingdom, 17 July 2008

Sir John Daniel

Colleagues:

It is a privilege, as well as a huge challenge, to try to summarise the discussions of the last four days.

We have enjoyed an incredibly rich programme. My first tribute must be to our programme chair, Roger Mills, who personally read every paper submitted and with the help of the theme leaders put together such a diverse and stimulating programme.

Roger has been backed by an amazing team from the University of London. They also have worked very hard for us, so hard that I was worried when I saw a demonstration about working conditions outside the building yesterday that they might have rebelled against all the 15-hour days that they have put in – but they are far too conscientious for that. I thank them on your behalf.

The programme has been so rich and extensive that each one of us could only experience a small part of it. We each saw our own tip of the iceberg. All I can do in this short address is to give my view of the tip of the iceberg. That is risky because your highlights of the conference may be different from mine, so I hope, as the saying goes, that I don't open a can of worms with the tip of my iceberg.

Who is here?

Let me start with the easy part – some statistics about the conference. This has been by far the biggest Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning.

Some 729 people have registered and they come from 70 countries. Since there are only 53 countries in the Commonwealth I suppose we should call this the Pan-Commonwealth Forum ++. The eight countries with the highest attendance have been, in order: India (with exactly 100 delegates); the UK; Nigeria; Canada (that's excluding non-Canadian COL staff); Uganda; South Africa; Kenya and Malaysia.

You will agree that the very strong presence from India augurs well for PCF6 and we look forward to being in India in 2010. By putting the focus on learning for development we have attracted a very diverse participation, most of whom are not from the tertiary sector.

But despite the tremendous diversity of the participants I have been surprised by how many people share the same name. In particular, I had no idea that Forum Gala was such a common name across the Commonwealth.

Celebrating with the University of London

But I must be more serious. It has been a tremendous privilege, through PCF5, for us to share in the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the University of London's External Studies Programme.

Please explore the wonderful book about The People's University that Sir Graeme gave to you on Monday. It is an inspiring account of how one institution has opened up learning. It tells us how, in creating its External Studies Programme one hundred and fifty years ago, the University wanted to reach the "shoemaker in his garret". Even though we all have different icons for the people we are trying to reach, we are each, in our own way, trying to open up the possibility of learning to all people.

We are inspired by the University of London External Programme. The five Nobel prize-winners among its alumni is proof that quality achievement and learning at a distance are entirely compatible.

> *It has been a tremendous privilege, through PCF5, for us to share in the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the University of London's External Studies Programme.*

The Programme

On the first evening Roger Mills explained to us that the Forum programme "addressed the core elements of the COL three-year plan, which in turn is linked to the Millennium Development Goals. It moved away from papers which described process to those which provide evidence of how ODL has been used and whether or not it has been successful in a particular context."

We were led into the programme by three excellent speeches at the Opening Ceremony. Speaking for President Musaveni the Prime Minister of Uganda stressed the need to harness both formal and informal education to development and, in a recurring theme of the conference, noted that he was talking about "the development of the individual and also the development of communities". He also reminded us that "we need to learn from informal education structures so as to address some of the weaknesses in the predominant formal education sector".

Following him the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Kamalesh Sharma, urged that "our primary focus be on those who will inherit and inhabit this century, and those who will have to deal with the legacy – often the wretched legacy – of what people of my age have left behind them." He added:

"I believe strongly in young people. The effects of globalisation, positive and negative, flow above all through young people. If today's challenges are to be met, it is by them, and if any enlightened knowledge society is to be created, it will be created through them."

Completing this opening session the Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO, Nick Burnett, reminded us that our aim must be quality learning for development and gave us figures about both the progress and the lack of progress in achieving expanding education. He stressed the extensive interrelationships between education and global trends and urged that our goal must remain Education for All.

On Tuesday morning we were privileged to hear the Briggs Lecture by Professor Brenda Gourley in the presence of Lord Briggs himself. She began by remarking that "we live in a century of extremes – extraordinary extremes" and held out the hope that technology might help us narrow the gap between those extremes.

She evoked the importance of mobile phones and open education resources and suggested how the various Web2 technologies can help us to "leverage what is happening in cyberspace, leverage this gift culture and mobilise people's natural propensity to connect, collaborate, volunteer their time and engage in both teaching and learning activities."

Later that day Carol Bellamy launched one of the four themes of PCF5, Children and Young People, with her keynote address on The Role of Open and Distance Education in Providing Access to Learning for Children and Young People. She told us that in spite of the tremendous developments in technology, "quality education remains elusive" and that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) provides tremendous opportunities for marginalised communities, even in the developing world.

Fifteen sessions were held under the theme of Children and Young People. There were many recommendations. Some were: to ensure that appropriate technologies are used; to take advantage of public-private partnerships; to develop Vocational Education and Training; to exploit the potential of Open

> *Perhaps the most important key to development is to help the billions of young and not so young people around the world secure livelihoods that can support them. This was an important theme of the conference.*

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (15 SESSIONS)

- Ensure technologies are appropriate
- Make use of public-private partnerships
- Develop Vocational Education and Training
- Exploit the potential of OERs
- Explore South-North collaboration

Educational Resources and to explore possibilities of South-North collaboration, especially in open schooling, where the North can learn from practice in the South.

One of the traditions of these Pan-Commonwealth Forums is the conferring of the title of Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning on persons who have made especially distinguished contributions to the development of open and distance learning. I am sure you will all agree that this year's ceremony was particularly special and I ask you to show your appreciation once again for those COL has honoured in this way.

Perhaps the most important key to development is to help the billions of young and not so young people around the world secure livelihoods that can support them. This was an important theme of the conference.

The twenty sessions on livelihoods generated many examples of good practice. Some of the key recommendations were: that access to finance (e.g. micro-credit) is a crucial element in improving livelihoods; that we should focus on community learning as much as on individuals; that in this context we must find ways to scale up the creation of the "social learning capital" that makes communities pull together to increase their incomes; and that one way to do this is to work with existing self-help groups.

The additional theme of appropriate learning technologies was never far from the surface in much of our discussion and Astrid Dufborg, in her keynote, helped us to question some of our assumptions. Do we want one laptop per child, or one laptop per teacher, or one mobile per child? In looking at these questions she urged the absolute importance of taking teachers with you. She stressed that technology is there to empower the teachers, not to make them redundant, although of course we were also reminded of the "hole-in-the-wall" project, in which children learn autonomously.

The technology that attracted most attention throughout the conference was Open Educational Resources, which we can think of as a sort of academic putty that allows us to create learning materials collaboratively and then shape them to our own institutional or individual needs. You saw applications for OERs in every area of learning and it will be particularly interesting to pick up this story at PCF6.

OERs raise important questions of intellectual property and the degree of openness that best suits users and providers. Sessions on copyright attracted a capacity attendance, where we learned that there is no clarity yet about some of the details of the Creative Commons licenses that many institutions are being encouraged to use for Open Education Resources.

LIVELIHOODS (20 SESSIONS)

- Access to finance (e.g. micro-credit) is a crucial element
- Focus on communities as much as on individuals
- Find ways to scale up the creation of 'social learning capital'
- Work with existing self-help groups
- Be alert to possibilities for public-private partnerships

A clarification document on "no derivatives" and "non-commercial" uses of materials was created and published at the Forum. Creative Commons has embarked on a process to clarify the meanings of terms used in their licenses. If successful, this will reduce the danger of "licence pollution",

avoiding the situation where institutions and other content provider organisations develop their own licences.

We celebrated the successful use of OERs in making one of COL's EDEA awards to the Open University's OpenLearn website. Let us give all the award winners another round of applause.

Another initiative that is closely bound up with OERs is the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. Thanks to the meeting of VUSSC interlocutors that took place before PCF5 I believe that the VUSSC has now reached the long-awaited tipping point. The 29 participating countries have taken charge of the project, seeking COL's help as needed, rather than the other way around. I found the presentation of VUSSC at this forum yesterday by the VUSSC representatives particularly impressive.

Another OER project that attracted a lot of attention was WikiEducator, which is the heart of a collaborative community that has, I suspect, attracted many more adherents at this conference.

Finally, perhaps the most successful of all the OER projects we have heard about is TESSA, the consortium of mainly African institutions that are using OERs to empower teachers and change pedagogy in countries all over Africa.

One of the main themes of the conference was health and it was given a dynamic start by Lidia Brito, who told us that current approaches to stemming the HIV/AIDS pandemic are not working, at least in her country of Mozambique.

She drew particular attention to the challenge of helping AIDS orphans find a valued role in their communities. A child who has to be the head of a household at the age of 12 or 14 has great needs, and the world of open and distance learning needs to rally itself to provide self-instructional materials to help this large and growing number of people.

We had ten sessions on health and some of the key conclusions were: that we must use a more holistic and culture-centred approach; that we must raise community awareness and discussion of values; that we must work with teachers and traditional healers; that simple technology works best; and that ODL and OERs have great potential.

Governance is a new area for COL and for discussions at these Pan-Commonwealth forums, but the 12 sessions devoted to this topic showed that there is an important agenda to be taken forward. Among the conclusions about the role of ODL in Governance are: the importance of peer learning to overcome the gaps between connected individuals; the need to link with local culture and so bring together modern and traditional modes of governance; and to create an online forum so that those who met here can maintain contact.

HEALTH (10 SESSIONS)

- Current approaches to HIV/AIDS aren't working
- Use a more holistic and culture-centred approach
- Raise awareness of values in communities
- Work with teachers and traditional healers
- ODL and OERs have great potential

You will agree that we have had an outstanding array of keynote speakers. The series achieved a wonderful finale with Professor Barney Pityana's address this morning which is still ringing in our ears. He brought it all together by reviewing the promise of open and distance learning in Africa after a decade of development and education. He spoke candidly about the shortcomings of ODL in Africa, noting the chequered history of the African Virtual University and treating his own UNISA as a case study.

However, despite all the problems he noted that ODL is a testament to the demise of exclusivity in education.

Although our four main themes talked about development outcomes there was naturally much discussion about institutional matters. The challenges inherent in dual mode universities were explored.

In this context we were encouraged by the conferring of EDEA awards to both the Open College of the University of Papua New Guinea and one of its students. As in many dual mode institutions, the Open College enrols more students than the rest of the University put together and these awards attest to the quality of its work.

Maybe it is time for vice-chancellors of dual-mode institutions to change their perspective by 180° and treat the distance learning unit as the core of the university and the campus as an ancillary activity?

One preoccupation of many institutions, both open universities and dual-mode institutions, is the phenomenon of cross-border distance education that began with the University of London 150 years ago. We had excellent sessions on this. I retain, in particular, the threat that degree mills and bogus colleges pose to those who try to provide cross-border distance learning with integrity. Only the combined efforts of governments, employers and institutions will succeed in removing this global scourge which can so easily damage our own efforts.

Those are some of the issues that have occupied our time at this forum.

What about the dogs that did not bark? What were the subjects that we didn't talk about much? In some cases we must admit that some dogs didn't bark because we muzzled them. The Programme Committee discouraged descriptions of institutional practice, and may have thereby inadvertently reduced the number of contributions on research.

> *Maybe it is time for vice-chancellors of dual-mode institutions to change their perspective by 180° and treat the distance learning unit as the core of the university and the campus as an ancillary activity?*


GOVERNANCE (12 SESSIONS)

- The importance of peer learning to overcome the gaps between connected individuals
- Link with culture to bring together modern and traditional modes of governance
- Create an online forum

But some omissions are more disturbing. A session with the title "Where have all the flowers gone" asked why there was less emphasis on gender at PCF5 despite the fact that we were tackling issues like health where gender is a central factor.

Similarly, we talked a lot about the need to educate and train more teachers, but where was the beef? With one or two honourable exceptions we avoided the practical aspects of the challenge.

DISTANCE LEARNING

STUDENT

support logistics materials

A THREE-LEGGED STOOL

Finally we also experienced the hi-tech, low tech dilemma common at conferences like this. Have we been carried away by fancy technologies when simpler technologies, like schools in a box, books and community media, have more to offer learning for development in the medium term?

That said, I acknowledge that the sessions in our cross-cutting theme of learner support did have a lot to say about the importance of tutoring, which is just as important in eLearning as in older methods. We must remember that the great strength that we bring to the new technologies as distance educators is our knowledge and experience of the basics on which good learning is built, quality materials, efficient logistics and strong learner support.

That, colleagues, is my view of the tip the iceberg that I have seen in the last few days. You will have seen different things and attached importance to other developments. I have not mentioned the Technology Showcase, which has enormously enriched this Forum, and much, much more.
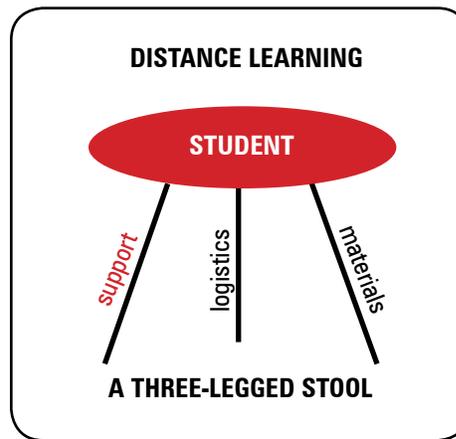
But I hope my account has triggered some memories. Remember that PCF5 is not over when you leave London.

Now is when you start working to sustain the networks that you have developed here. Many of the papers of the conference are on WikiEducator and provide a wonderful resource for you to mine in future.

For our part, the Commonwealth of Learning will reflect deeply on the conclusions and recommendations arising from your discussion as we prepare our next Three-Year Plan for the period 2009-12. The timing is excellent because this process is just beginning and it will culminate in the presentation of the Plan to the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Malaysia next June.

Before I give you my parting quotation, let me thank Sir Graeme personally for chairing this session and, on your behalf let me thank him and all his University of London colleagues for the wonderful conference that they have put on.

I leave you with these words from one of our keynote speakers, Carol Bellamy:

"You are all part of that tapestry of innovation that we so desperately need to weave in order to get the job done. Open and distance learning is about more than closing the digital divide, as real and concerning as that is. It's a critical part of closing the human rights divide between those who will grow up literate – with skills, possibilities, and hope – and those who will not."

We must remember that the great strenth that we bring to the new technologies as distance educators is our knowledge and experience of the basics on which good learning is built, quality materials, efficient logistics and strong learner support.

Open Education

After-dinner Remarks at the The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Grantees Meeting

Pittsburgh, USA, 12 March 2008

Reprinted in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. LXXIV (5)

Sir John Daniel

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you after dinner. Experience has taught me that these assignments can be more challenging than speaking at the conference proper.

The good news is that if your listeners have enjoyed their food and drink they will be in a tolerant mood. The speaker can then turn to advantage Samuel Johnson's observation that one of the disadvantages of wine is that it makes a man mistake words for thought. I shall, of course, be quite content if you mistake my words for thought this evening. Although I must confess that having seen somewhere the remarkable statistic that 80% of US households do not own a corkscrew, I always wonder whether an American audience will have consumed enough wine to carry me through. The 20% of you who enjoy wine should tell the other 80% of your compatriots that they are missing out on one of God's great gifts to humankind.

The bad news is after a convivial evening like this, when conversations at table are well engaged, you may not want to hear a dinner speaker at all. As you know, the Emperor Nero liked to treat the citizens of Rome to bloodthirsty spectacles. He particularly enjoyed making Christians, who were considered seditious folk in those days, fight hungry lions. This was about to happen in the Coliseum. The Emperor was in his imperial seat; a few Christians, armed only with short swords, were already in the arena and the Roman crowd was baying for the fight to commence.

The gate was opened and the lions rushed in, paused a second for their eyes to adjust to the sunlight, and then bounded towards the Christians. At this point one of the Christians was seen to walk calmly towards the leading lion and say something. At this the lion growled and lay down in sand and the other lions followed suit. The surprised crowd shouted even louder for action but the lions would not budge. Finally Nero called the Christian over to his box. "What did you say to the Lion?" he asked. "I said there would be speeches after the meal", he replied.

So after dinner remarks can be a tricky challenge. But this evening at least my choice of topic is easy. We are completing a symposium called open learning interplay. The theme of my remarks will be Open Education and I want to explore with you some of the background to the use of this term and comment later on its present manifestation in the phenomenon of open educational resources.

That of course, gives me two more challenges. First, just as each generation of teenagers think that they are the first human beings to discover love and sex, I find that folk who work in the area of educational technology have a particular tendency to think that educational technology was an oxymoron before they joined the field. They are a bit like the American tourist visiting Windsor Castle in England, who remarked that it was a wonderful residence but he couldn't understand why the Queen had built it under the flight path into Heathrow airport. There is no sense of history.

The second challenge is that when it comes to speechmaking, education is a field that has been over-tilled by a thousand vacuous commencement addresses. I am reminded of Lyndon Johnson, who expressed a similar worry when he said that making speeches about economics is like peeing down your leg, it feels hot to you but not to anyone else.

But enough of this levity! I start with some personal history. I did my full-time university studies in medieval universities that had cloisters – a word derived from Latin, meaning closed. Four years of undergraduate work at Oxford and four years for a doctorate in Paris led me to an appointment as assistant professor of metallurgical engineering at the University of Montreal.

Seeing that my long immersion in full-time study had led me into a career as a university teacher I thought that I ought to learn something about education. Before I realised that this was a deviant, even a perverse reflex for an eager engineering academic, I had enrolled in a part-time master's programme in Educational Technology at another university in Montreal. It was the equivalent of a two-year full-time programme and required an internship and research thesis.

All of it was very stimulating, but the internship changed my life. We were required to spend three months in an organisation that was using educational technology. I started thinking about where to do this in 1971, at a time when the press was full of reports about an amazing innovation, by the Brits of all people, called the Open University. It was clearly using educational technology at scale and they were kind enough to take me on for my internship as an unpaid visiting lecturer

> *Just as each generation of teenagers think that they are the first human beings to discover love and sex, I find that folk who work in the area of educational technology have a particular tendency to think that educational technology was an oxymoron before they joined the field.*

That summer of 1972 in Milton Keynes was a conversion experience. I saw the future of higher education and wanted to be part of it. Everything was hugely impressive and stimulating. First the scale: 40,000 students in its second year of operation. Second the idealism: here were people who walked the talk on access and student-centred pedagogy. Third, love of learning: the students were unbelievably motivated by the opportunity presented to them. I went to one of the residential summer schools where students spent a full day in labs, seminars and field trips and then most of the night in the bar; continuing the academic discourse. Fourth, media and technology: my key task was to help develop computer-marked assignments that tested advanced cognitive skills, but I spent every spare moment viewing the brilliant BBC television programmes.

After this exposure to the open education of the future I was no longer at ease in the old dispensation. I had been infected by the virus of open education. I had signed up to the vision of open education articulated in the greatest speech ever made on the topic. This was the address that Geoffrey Crowther, editor of The Economist newspaper, made in 1969. He was speaking as the Open University's first chancellor at the inauguration ceremony that took place in the week of the first landing on the moon. I quote:

This is the Open University. We are open, first, as to people.

Not for us the carefully regulated escalation from one educational level to the next by which the traditional universities establish their criteria for admission. "We took it as axiomatic," said the Planning Committee, "that no formal academic qualifications would be required for registration as a student." Wherever there is an unprovided need for higher education... there is our constituency. There are no limits on persons.

We are open as to places. This University has no cloisters – a word meaning closed. Wherever the English language is spoken or understood, or used as a medium of study, and wherever there are men and women seeking to develop their individual potentialities beyond the limits of the local provision, there we can offer our help. There are no boundaries of space.

We are open as to methods. The world is caught in a communications revolution, the effects of which will go beyond those of the industrial revolution of two centuries ago. Then the great advance was the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men's muscles. Now the great new advance is the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men's minds. As the steam engine was to the first revolution, so the computer is to the second. Every new form of human communication will be examined to see how it can be used to raise and broaden the level of human understanding. There is no restriction on techniques.

We are open, finally, as to ideas. It has been said that there are two aspects of education, both necessary. One regards the individual human mind as a

> "We are open, first, as to people.
> We are open as to places.
> We are open as to methods.
> We are open, finally, as to ideas."
>
> ~ Geoffrey Crowther, 1969

That summer of 1972 in Milton Keynes was a conversion experience. I saw the future of higher education and wanted to be part of it. I had signed up to the vision of open education articulated in the greatest speech ever made on the topic

vessel, of varying capacity, into which is to be poured as much it will hold of the knowledge and experience by which human society lives and moves. This is the Martha of education – and we shall have plenty of these tasks to perform. But the Mary regards the human mind rather as a fire which has to set alight and blown with the divine afflatus. This also we take as our ambition.

What a happy chance it is that we start on this task, in this very week when the Universe has opened. The limits not only of explorable space, but of human understanding, are infinitely wider than we have believed.

That, you will agree, is a powerful statement about open education. It is hard to believe that it was penned – not word-processed – nearly four decades ago.

Open as to people, open as to places, open as to methods, and open as to ideas. That is a good framework to think about open education. As the virus of open education has spread around the world countries and institutions have naturally emphasised those aspects of openness that were particularly salient for their environments. In the 1970s for instance, the US was less concerned by openness to people, since there was already an extensive system of universities and community colleges, than by opening up the curriculum.

There was a healthy competition, with professionals in the field vying with each other to prove that their definition of openness was the most important. I am reminded of the breathless conversation between two people fleeing a hungry tiger. One gasped to the other, "We can't run faster than the tiger". "I'm not trying to run faster than the tiger" replied the other, "I'm trying to run faster than you".

Recent decades have seen new technologies make tremendous contributions to openness. Already in the 1970s, it was the economies of scale of open and distance learning, based on the technologies of print, television and radio that made it so revolutionary. Never before had it been possible to increase access, improve quality and reduce cost – all at the same time. Open education broke open the iron triangle of access, cost and quality that had constrained education throughout history and had created the insidious assumption, still prevalent today, that in education you cannot have quality without exclusivity.

Each subsequent technology has made those economies of scale even more impressive and recast even more radically the iron triangle. Web distribution of learning materials is almost cost free. Electronic communication between students and institutions means that feedback, a vital part of learning, is faster and cheaper.

The result is that today the major obstacle to open education, because it is the major cost factor, is the creation of good learning materials. Here there are fewer technological short cuts, because the design of courses that are

academically current, intellectually attractive and pedagogically efficient will always require serious investment of human brainpower. The answer is not to skimp on the brainpower, but to make the products of that brainpower more widely available.

This, of course, is what the Hewlett Foundation has been doing so brilliantly through its support of the concept of open educational resources and their development around the world. This is another revolution in education. Clark Kerr once said that universities are a federation of academic entrepreneurs united only by a common grievance over parking. Countering the rush of academe to protect its proprietary back, by promoting instead the ideal of a global intellectual commons, has shown extraordinarily farsighted vision by the Foundation.

The main danger that I see – and this has always been the bugbear of new educational technologies – is that people focus on technological details rather than educational goals. Right now the rather sterile debate over how open an open educational resource needs be to qualify as a genuine OER risks bringing the whole project into disrepute. Furthermore, much of the debate is wasted breath until jurisprudence in different parts of the world has established precisely what is meant by the Non-Commercial restriction in Creative Commons licences. I am delighted that Creative Commons has created a special division for education and is giving attention to this problem.

This is a live issue for organisations like my own Commonwealth of Learning that live in the real world, spend their time in developing countries, and must constantly ensure that the best is not the enemy of the good.

The UK's former Prime Minister, John Major, choosing his words rather carelessly, once remarked that when you've got your back to the wall you must turn round and fight. It would be an exaggeration to say that bitter arguments about the theology of openness have put our backs to the wall, but we do have to fight for the principle that in education what counts is what works. And I mean what works for students.

I am reminded of the politician who, after making a speech, was complimented by a woman who told him that he would get the vote of every thinking person present. "That's not enough", replied the politician, "we need a majority!"

Similarly, open educational resources need a majority that reaches out beyond the Stalinists of the freedom culture into the real world that is thirsty for real education. In the same way those in the Wiki community engaged in the debate between inclusionists and deletionists should remember that to most outsiders Wikis resemble gated communities more than the global commons that they purport to create.

But having spent nearly forty years working to advance open education I am confident that we can get there. The recent Cape Town Open Education Declaration, which the Commonwealth of Learning has signed, is an encouraging sign of compromise and consensus. I rather regret that it appropriates the term "open education" to mean only OERs because, as I have argued, open education is much broader than that. But that is a minor quibble.

Finally, I am pleased that the debates about all this are being conducted with particular acrimony and vigour here in the United States for, as Winston Churchill, remarked, the US will always do the right thing – after having exhausted all other possibilities.

> *The main danger that I see – and this has always been the bugbear of new educational technologies – is that people focus on technological details rather than educational goals.*

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth: What is your vision for the future?

Regional Meeting of the Focal Points of the Caribbean
Jamaica, 10-11 March 2008

Sir John Daniel

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth
PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

I am delighted to have the opportunity to give an update on the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth to this meeting of COL's focal points for the Caribbean. The Caribbean is a major concentration of small states. Some of your countries have been very active in the work of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, the VUSSC, and I would like to see that activity become more intense and more widespread in future.

For me the VUSSC is very much front of mind right now. Two weeks ago I attended the VUSSC meeting in Singapore on the Transnational Qualification Framework. This was the largest VUSSC event to date, attended by 37 senior officials from 27 countries, including most of yours. Then last week I went to Seychelles for the fifth of our course development workshops that we sometimes call "boot camps". The subject was Fisheries and by day two of the workshop the participants, from 12 countries, were aleady busily producing learning materials. It is good to observe that with each boot camp we become better at doing this.

> *Each of the five course development workshops has tackled one of the topics that were identified as priority subjects by your Ministers when I wrote to them three years ago.*

It was good to have a VUSSC event in Seychelles because when ministers of education conceived this initiative back in the year 2000 the then Minister of Education of Seychelles, Danny Faure, was a leading protagonist of the concept. Later, when a draft proposal had been developed, he hosted a meeting of a small group of ministers there in March 2003. They finalised the proposal and sent it to the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, which endorsed it later that year. That was exactly five years ago.

I also note that both these meetings reflected the developing collaboration between COL and UNESCO in assisting the small states with the development of higher education. There were UNESCO representatives at both events

Today I want to give you a brief update on what you have done through the VUSSC to date. Then I shall challenge you and your governments to renew your vision of what you want the VUSSC to become so that it can become a major thrust in COL's Three-Year Plan for 2009-12 in the Caribbean region.

So first, some background on the accelerating development of the VUSSC. These remarks are based on a paper that Paul West, COL's lead staff member for the VUSSC, and I developed recently. It is on the COL website.

So far we have held three planning meetings, two in Singapore and one in Jamaica, and five of what we used to call "boot camps" because one of their functions is to provide basic training in IT skills for online collaboration. Last week, as I noted earlier, there was a very productive meeting in Singapore that laid the groudwork for a Transnational Qualifications Framework. This TQF will facilitate the offering of all VUSSC courses around the Commonwealth.

Each of the five course development workshops has tackled one of the topics that were identified as priority subjects by your Ministers when I wrote to them three years ago. The first, for developing materials in Tourism, Hospitality and Entrepreneurship was held in Mauritius in 2006. Last year we held three more: in Singapore for Professional Development of Educators; in Trinidad & Tobago for Life Skills; and in Samoa for Disaster Management. The fifth workshop, on Fisheries, is taking place in Seychelles as I speak and another workshop on Construction will be held in the Bahamas later this year.

The VUSSC: preliminary activities and outputs

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is gathering momentum. eLearning materials are coming on stream in these priority areas and you are getting better and better at doing it.

Each successive course development workshop has made greater progress than its predecessor in producing learning materials in electronic formats. We thought that the event on Disaster Management held in Samoa late last year was a model of how to operate such a workshop, thanks to the tremendous expertise and dedication of the team leaders in particular and the participants in general. From what I saw of the workshop on Fisheries in Seychelles they hit the ground running even faster.

The Transnational Qualifications Framework will help build credibility for small states that offer programmes internationally. Your colleagues from the

qualifications agencies agreed in Singapore that programmes listed on the VUSSC website will carry national and where applicable, regional accreditation. Learners who are looking for online programmes will be able to clearly see the legitimacy of the VUSSC programmes and the associated accreditation.

But as you know, there have been some important spin-offs from the workshops apart from the learning materials. One is that significant numbers of educators from your countries have acquired good skills in the most modern forms of collaborative online working through ICTs. COL urges all workshop participants to share this training when they get home and many have done so. Belize's country report to this meeting notes how this has happened at the University of Belize. Nearly a hundred people will have attended the five workshops and we estimate that they have trained another 400 people when they got home. This has thrown a well-placed bridge across of the digital divide – one of the aims of Ministers when they conceived the VUSSC.

Another spin-off is the cross-cultural friendships and understandings that have been generated. Educators from small states do not often get opportunities to visit small states on the other side of the world. They seem to find it immensely enriching to meet people from a range of cultures and backgrounds who all have in common with you the experience of living in a small state.

So the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is beginning to have some real impacts and is generating a sense of cohesion amongst the participating states.
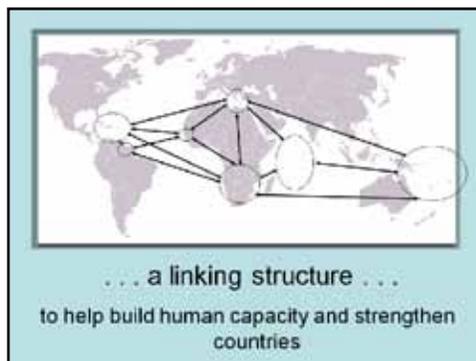
So it is timely to ask you and your governments what you want the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth to become. I say what do you want it to become, because the VUSSC is an expression of the will of the small states to take their development in hand. What is your vision for how it should do this?

The overriding objective for the VUSSC that emerges from the original proposal endorsed by ministers is that it should help institutions in the small states to serve learners better. So how are we doing?

How has the VUSSC worked?

In fact the VUSSC has developed rather differently from what was envisaged in the original proposal, which called for the expenditure of $20 million over the first five years. In the event funds on this scale were simply not forthcoming.

Total expenditure to date has been closer to $2 million, for which we are all most grateful to the Hewlett Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, the Government of Singapore and your own governments who have paid the salaries of colleagues taking part in VUSSC

. . . a linking structure . . .
to help build human capacity and strengthen countries

The proof of that mastery is not only the ability to put electronic learning materials in a repository, but more importantly the know-how to get them out again and into the hands and minds of students, whether studying in classrooms or learning at a distance.

events. You could call the VUSSC a shoestring operation, because there hasn't been much money. You could also call it a bootstrap operation because we've built it from the bottom up.

We have followed two guiding principles. First, in order to remain close to the thinking of ministers of education we created the function of "interlocutors", usually ministry officials who can speak for their countries in planning meetings. Some of you are VUSSC interlocutors.

Second, since the overall aim of the VUSSC is the development of learning materials that can be studied by real students in real institutions leading to real qualifications; we identified the role of "implementer". These are people, usually in tertiary institutions, who are involved in the teaching/learning process.

The identification of implementers has been very pragmatic. Ministers identified a number of subject areas in which they wanted the VUSCC to develop materials. When we hold a workshop to develop content in one of those areas, such as Fisheries in Seychelles at the moment, we ask all small states whether they are interested in taking part.

Countries that decide to participate identify a specialist in the subject from their most appropriate institution. We have been extremely impressed by the expertise and quality of many of the people who have come.

In order to get materials created we have focused on subjects and individuals rather than institutions. This approach has helped us get traction and secure involvement in the initiative. It is interesting to look back over the VUSSC meetings held so far to see who has attended from which countries and institutions.

This table gives the overall picture. The three planning meetings and the TQF meeting involved 132 people, nearly 60% of them from government ministries or agencies. 87 people have attended the course development workshops over 70% of them are from institutions.

This balance, with more ministry officials and interlocutors at the planning meetings and more institutional implementers at the course development workshops is what we would have expected. We are surprised that the proportion of people from institutions at the course workshops is not even higher, but we realise that in small states some people wear two hats and can represent the ministry of education and an institution at the same time. If we put all the events together we have 48% of participation from institutions, 46% from government and 6% from other bodies.

Once educators have the necessary skills to work online they can learn how to offer online learning as well.

Which countries have shown most interest in the VUSSC? This table lists the countries with the highest level of total participation in terms of person-meetings. For example, across all the events the VUSSC has held, 21 places were taken by Trinidad & Tobago, though of course in some cases the same person attended more than one meeting. This table shows a nice spread around the Commonwealth regions and is good to see our smallest state, Tuvalu, right in there.

But we suggest that it is now time for the VUSSC to go beyond being an informal network of ministries of education and become a forum for real collaboration between institutions.

Who attended these events? This table ranks countries by the number of person-events involving ministry of education officials. There are similarities and differences with the previous table. For example, Namibia was number three in overall participation but since nearly all its participants were from institutions it doesn't figure in this table.

There are more Caribbean states on this list than the last one, indicating that you have a propensity to send Ministry officials to VUSSC events. You might want to ask yourselves whether this is a good thing if the overall aim is to develop institutional capacity?

Next, which countries sent most people from institutions? This table ranks the top countries by their institutional attendance. Again there is a nice spread. A total of 46 institutions from the small states have been represented at one or other of the VUSSC events. Mauritius spread the experience most widely with five institutions involved, followed by Lesotho with four. Going back to my last comment about Caribbean participation I find it worrying that only St. Vincent & the Grenadines makes it onto this list.

Our final table looks at individual institutions. Which are the institutions that have attended VUSSC events most assiduously? Again there is a nice spread with the University of Swaziland at the top but also key institutions in smaller countries like St. Vincent & the Grenadines and St. Kitts & Nevis also taking advantage of these opportunities.

However, on reading the country presentations that were submitted in advance of this focal points meeting I am quite encouraged. I mentioned that University of Belize participants have shared the training they got at VUSSC events with colleagues. Belize is also linking this to training received through CKLN. Grenada has used the VUSSC training to expand distance education at the T. A. Marryshow Community College and is also making links with CKLN. The VUSSC experience seems to have given impetus to the development of distance learning at the Further Education College in St. Kitts & Nevis. Trinidad & Tobago, which has participated in all the VUSSC boot camps, has plans to have the materials developed at those workshops adopted by local institutions.

The surprise, if you compare this ranking with the original proposal for the VUSSC, is to find that the two regional universities have not participated much in the VUSSC. The University of the West Indies was only involved in three events and the University of the South Pacific has not taken part at all. Does this mean that the VUSSC has most to offer to the smaller small states that do not have a well-developed tertiary sector?

So what do we conclude from all this?

When the Ministers conceived the VUSSC they wanted to launch their countries into the e-world and to have them acquire the skills necessary to look larger countries in the eye as equals in their mastery of eLearning and online education. The proof of that mastery is not only the ability to put electronic learning materials in a repository, but more importantly the know-how to get them out again and into the hands and minds of students, whether studying in classrooms or learning at a distance.

For that to happen it is not enough for the eLearning materials to be attractive and well-designed. They must fit seamlessly into the curricula and programmes that your tertiary institutions are offering so that students can receive credit and awards in the normal way.

Hence our decision to begin work on a Transnational Qualifications Framework that we hoped would facilitate the adoption and use of VUSSC programmes of study in all countries, thus supporting institutions in their wish to offer online qualifications internally. This should contribute usefully to the general development of education in the small states.

The VUSSC: Next Steps

To conclude these remarks I return to our theme: what is your vision for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth to become? What does that vision imply for the next steps to take?

STATUS AND STRUCTURE

Let's start with what the VUSSC is not and will not become. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is the title chosen by ministers in 2000. However, it is not a university in any normally accepted sense of the term. It is not a body that teaches programmes to students and awards degrees.

Nor will the VUSSC become a university in that sense. One reason is that the authority to grant degree-awarding powers rests with national governments, not with intergovernmental bodies like COL or UNESCO. A second is that ministers have made it clear that they want the VUSSC to reinforce the impact of your existing tertiary institutions, not to compete with them.

If that is what the VUSSC is not, what is it now? It is essentially an informal network of ministries of education supported by the part-time efforts of a number of people at the Commonwealth of Learning. We believe that approach has served us rather well to date and has produced very creditable outputs given the very small investment of money.

But we suggest that it is now time for the VUSSC to go beyond being an informal network of ministries of education and become a forum for real collaboration between institutions. We need to strengthen the involvement in VUSSC of the institutions that are actually developing and using the VUSSC eLearning materials. An important task for you for the coming years

is to nurture the participation of your institutions and encourage them to join VUSSC subject networks.

Later this year a web portal will be created for VUSSC that will provide access to online programmes offered by accredited institutions in VUSSC countries. Thanks to the good work in Singapore two weeks ago students will be able to register for these programmes with the knowledge that programmes offered through the portal will carry the national accreditation of the country in which the providing institution is based.

In addition to this, they will be able to see from the Transnational Qualification Framework how the qualification fits into their own country's framework.

CURRICULUM EXPANSION

During the first phase of the VUSSC we have given strong support to those people who needed more ICT skills in education. Once educators have the necessary skills to work online they can learn how to offer online learning as well. Several hundred educators have already improved their ICT skills through the VUSSC. We are now at a point where we should increase skills in eLearning – for both the creation of online courses and the tutoring of online learners.

Another concern is how we expand and diversify the eLearning materials that the VUSSC can make available to countries and institutions. The model that we have used to date, that of the three-week face-to-face course development workshop, has served us well and has begun to narrow the digital divide between participating countries. People have acquired the ICT skills required for work in the virtual world; learning materials have been produced in the process; and an inspiring sense of community has developed amongst educators from small states.

The three-week workshop model is fine but it is too expensive to be sustainable in the longer term. However, there is beginning to be a large enough cadre of skilled educators in the small states who can work confidently in the online world.

In the Caribbean you have a special opportunity to bring together the various projects that are aimed at making eLearning more widely available. COL was recently asked to evaluate the CUPIDE project and the assessment shows that it has resulted in the training of many people and the development of a number of courses. After some hiccups the CKLN project is also contributing to this movement. It is up to you to put all this together and we seek your ideas on how the VUSSC best fits into all this.

The key point is that the offering of online programmes in new subject areas does not mean developing all the material from scratch, Ministers were clear when they launched the VUSSC that, although they wanted to create an indigenous capacity to navigate in the e-world, their goal was not e-isolationism! Once people can operate confidently in the e-world they can draw on eLearning material from elsewhere, not only CUPIDE and CKLN, but the expanding corpus of open educational resources worldwide.

As time goes on we shall see the VUSSC website include courses that originated in the boot camps; courses developed collaboratively online by institutions working together; courses developing under the aegis of CUPIDE and CKLN and courses derived from the growing body of freely available

We believe that following an informal bottom-up approach in building the VUSSC has yielded excellent value for the small investment that has been made in it since 2003.

content. Posting programmes on the VUSSC website will signify that the programmes are credible: that is to say they have been vetted by national and regional structures and that they relate to the TQF processes that began to be created last month.

Accredited institutions in participating countries that already have online courses that are ready for international offering can put these on the VUSSC website as it develops later this year.

I emphasise this point because I am impressed from your reports to this meeting by the number of online courses being developed alongside the VUSSC activity. Barbados notes online courses being developed at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic and the Cave Hill Campus of UWI. The University of Belize is already offering an online course, Introduction to Computer Studies, in three other Caribbean countries. St. Kitts & Nevis is preparing to teach Spanish online. Finally, of course, despite the disappointing participation of UWI in VUSSC activities so far, putting all UWI's online courses on this portal would be a natural move.

COURSE DELIVERY

Finally, we hope that your institutions will pool experience of the delivery of VUSSC course materials and other online courses. So far we are in the early stages of using these materials but clearly they will be used in very diverse ways. Sometimes they will enrich conventional on-campus instruction; sometimes they will be used for distance learning. Moreover variations in connectivity between and within states mean that distance learning itself will occur in a variety of ways. Pooling experience of what works and what doesn't will be most valuable.

Conclusion

Let me sum up. We believe that following an informal bottom-up approach in building the VUSSC has yielded excellent value for the small investment that has been made in it since 2003. But the time has now come to formalise arrangements somewhat more, especially the groupings of institutions offering similar programmes.

Please bear that in mind as you report back to your ministers. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is their project and they should determine what it becomes and how it can expand and improve learning in your countries.

Each country must now ask itself again what goals it intends to achieve through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and how can it put in place the local institutional arrangements necessary to see that it reaches them. Please carry that message back. It is a privilege for COL to coordinate this initiative but the ownership belongs to you. Please see that it becomes what you want it to become.

Each country must now ask itself again what goals it intends to achieve through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and how can it put in place the local institutional arrangements necessary to see that it reaches them.

Education for Sustainable Development: Reaching the Masses

Fourth International Conference on Environmental Education
Ahmedabad, India, 26 November 2007

Sir John Daniel, Dr. Krishna Alluri and Professor Mohan Menon

Abstract

In order to succeed, education for sustainable development must reach the masses. This means three things. First, we must focus on those who can multiply the message, especially teachers, working not just in the classroom but through open schooling systems. Second, we must cultivate lifelong environmental learning, including that related to climate change and water resources management. Third, it follows from these two imperatives that we must use learning technologies and teaching media at scale. We describe the work of the Commonwealth of Learning in these three areas. Technology-mediated open and distance education makes it possible for the Centre for Environmental Education to teach its Green Teacher Diploma to thousands of teachers. Information technology kiosks in villages allow farmers to become lifelong learners, increasing their prosperity and lessening their environmental impact.

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen it is special pleasure to speak to you for four reasons.

First, this session has become a nice metaphor for competition for resources due to overpopulation - competition for time, working microphones and the right computer as more and more speakers have been added to the list.

Second, and more seriously, the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development was launched when I was Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO and it is wonderful to see the progress being made.

Third, the Commonwealth of Learning has been a partner of our great host institution, the Centre for Environmental Education, for a number of years and it is a privilege to present some to the work we have done together.

Finally, the previous session, and particularly the speech by Shri R.P. Agrawal, has set the stage perfectly for what I have to say.

It is a pleasure to join with my COL colleagues, Professor Mohan Menon and Dr Krishna Alluri, in addressing this important conference. Our title is Education for Sustainable Development: Reaching the Masses. We start with an obvious statement. If education for sustainable development is to succeed it must reach the masses. That means two things.

First, we must either take the message to the masses directly or work with those who can multiply the message, particularly teachers. Second, to reach the masses we need to use the mass media and other technologies, because face-to-face communication cannot be scaled up to meet the challenge. Indeed, the same principle applies to teachers. There are millions of them and the conventional methods used for their professional development can't cope with the numbers wanting it.

TO REACH THE MASSES...

1. Take the message to the masses or to multipliers (e.g. teachers)
2. Use mass media and communication technology
3. An ongoing process

We add a third condition. Education for sustainable development is not a one-shot event. It is an ongoing process; not a vaccination that lasts for life. This adds even greater numbers to the challenge of educating at scale.

We shall describe two initiatives of the Commonwealth of Learning that address these requirements squarely. First I shall talk about the Green Teacher Diploma which the Centre for Environmental Education, which will teach to thousands of teachers using technology-mediated open and distance learning. Second, we shall describe how we are using technology to enable farmers to become lifelong learners in their villages with the aim of improving their livelihoods and lessening the environmental impact of their agricultural methods. I start with Green Teacher.

The Green Teacher Diploma

BACKGROUND

Green Teacher is a one-year Diploma in Environmental Education for teachers and educators. India's Centre for Environmental Education designed and developed it in partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning and it is the first programme of its kind in the Commonwealth. It was offered initially as a distance education programme with four modules

in print form supported by field assignments and contact classes.

Now the programme is going digital with an instructional design that allows both online and blended learning. The aim of the course is to enable teachers to engage with environmental concerns and issues in the classroom, and involve their students in practical, action-oriented Environmental Education (EE) projects.

So Green Teacher gives practicing teachers the opportunity become environmental educators who can influence the school curriculum and the way that it is taught. Teachers are multipliers of impact, so the long-term aim is to change how their fellow teachers, their pupils and the wider community think about the environment and sustainable development.

The development of the Green Teacher programme matched the expectations of India's National Policy of Education (1986) and its launch coincided nicely with the ruling of Supreme Court of India that environment should be a compulsory subject at all levels of education starting in 2004-2005.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The curriculum of the Green Teacher programme empowers practicing teachers with the knowledge, ideas and skills that can help them green their teaching. Its novel feature is that it has been designed to match the realities of education systems in developing countries and in full appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of teachers in those systems and the dilemmas they face - one of which is little time for professional development. It recognises the diversity of contexts in which teaching takes place, the heterogeneity of the pupils and the limited resources available.

It also tries to convey the all-embracing, multidisciplinary and dynamic nature of environmental issues by being geared towards understanding and solving real-world problems. A teacher already trained in teaching Arts and Science subjects is given the extra set of skills required for imparting environmental education.

This is done through four course modules:

The first deepens their understanding of Ecology and gives them ideas for communicating ecological concepts in an interactive manner.

The second helps them appreciate the complexities of environmental issues in development by showing them how to view a problem from various perspectives and to select a plausible solution for a particular context.

In the third module they practice communicating material so as to enrich and enhance the tried and tested textbook, chalk and talk methods in a variety of ways.

The fourth module examines the range of resources that can contribute to environmental education in schools so that teachers can appreciate and use the opportunities that are available within the school system: text books, local visits, nature camps, media resources, and so on.

> **GREEN TEACHER**
>
> ...gives practicing teachers the opportunity become environmental educators who can influence the school curriculum and the way that it is taught.

COURSE IMPLEMENTATION

The English medium Green Teacher programme in print based was launched in 2005. 40 of the 53 students enrolled in the first batch graduated, including 31 women, and over 100 students are enrolled in the second batch. The Centre for Environmental Education plans to enroll up to 200 students in the English medium course annually.

The course is being translated into three Indian languages through partnership with Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, the Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited, the Yashwantrao Chavan Open University and the GEER Foundation. It hopes to offer the course in other countries in South Asia through a link with UNESCO and the course is also is being adapted for offering in Nigeria through the National Teachers' Institute.

GT-ONLINE

Finally, COL and the CEE are now digitizing the Green Teacher curriculum with a novel learning design so that with a suitable Learning Management System it can be offered both and off-line.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers

We turn now to our work with farmers in the developing world and the Commonwealth of Learning's programme Lifelong Learning for Farmers.

Two major factors affecting food security in developing countries are globalisation and declining agricultural productivity. Globalisation and the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have transformed markets for agricultural produce without farmers in developing countries being aware of the changes. To help them adapt to the challenges, the role of agricultural extension needs to be completely revamped.

USING THE ICT-BASED KNOWLEDGE REVOLUTION

For some years the Government of India (GOI) through the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has been promoting the idea of strengthening the agricultural sector by taking advantage of the ICT-based knowledge revolution. Government programmes such as the Department of Information Technology's Mission 2007- Every Village a Knowledge Centre and Community Service Centre, as well as private and NGO initiatives are increasingly bringing ICT to the doorstep of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, fisher folk and forest-based communities to connect them to the knowledge revolution and strengthen the extension system.

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS (L3 FARMERS)

The Commonwealth of Learning conceived the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) project as a way of creating a paradigm shift in the concept and practice of extension. L3 for farmers, where "farmers" include agricultural labourers and communities involved in various aspects of the primary sector) is based on the following premises:

First, facilitating self-directed personal strategic learning can enhance the quality of extension and create a demand-based development process;

Second, Technology-Mediated Open and Distance Education and Learning, which our Indian colleagues abbreviate as "Tech MODE" can play a major role in self-directed learning;

Third, L3 Farmers assumes that mobilising the farmers and building cognitive social capital are essential preconditions for promoting self-directed learning;

Fourth, combining modern ICT and local mobilisation can integrate the vertical and horizontal transfers of knowledge;

Fifth, this new approach to extension must be placed firmly in the context of the entire social and economic value chain. The various stakeholders in that value chain such as financial institutions, marketing agencies, industries and research institutions need to come together to create a win-win-win framework. This helps communities to move away from perpetual dependence on donor-supported programmes and to adopt instead a self-sustainable, self-replicating, and self-generative extension process;

Sixth and finally, the demand from rural communities for an integrated package of information to facilitate local knowledge management requires the knowledge creating institutions to work as a consortium to provide holistic locale-specific information.

As a key example of stakeholder engagement, the banking sector is responding positively to the L3 Farmers concept. The participating banks see L3 Farmers as a business strategy for themselves and a development strategy for the rural communities. COL has been launching pilot projects of the model in India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Kenya, Jamaica and Papua New Guinea.

REAL EXAMPLES

As a human example, Ms. S. Vallikannu, an illiterate 60-year old landless woman is involved in the L3 for Farmers Project in Uppukottai village, in the Theni District of Tamil Nadu, India. She has been able to access bank loans at an interest rate of 9% for setting up backyard dairy. In the past her family borrowed loans from money lenders at an exorbitant interest rate of 60%. She is the first person in her family ever to own a cow.

Finding that L3 Farmers is stimulating prompt repayment of their loans from the poor communities, the banking sector is realising that investing in capacity building with the help of ICT and mobilization can create new banking business.

Mr Kulaindaiswamy, a farmer in Kannivadi in the nearby district, learned through ICT- based learning materials about the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), a low-input, high-volume method of paddy cultivation. The average yield of paddy in this region is less than 5 tonnes per hectare. Mr. Kulaindaiswamy has harvested 8.5 tonnes of rice per hectare at lower cost and with less water. The farmers attribute this jump in efficiency and productivity to the learning and networking environment created by COL's L3 Farmers project with the help of NGOs such as the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation.

The L3 Farmers project uses ICT to encourage dialogue and discourse among the participating rural communities. This is a complete change from the style of the conventional extension system, which sees the farmers as vessels to be filled with the extension agents' knowledge. Having all stakeholders participate in a win-win-win framework has the potential to create a self-sustaining development process.

Conclusion

These two examples are just two ways in which we can use media and ICTs to expand lifelong learning about sustainable development and stimulate positive and self-sustaining action at the grassroots. My COL colleagues Mohan Menon and Krishna Alluri will be pleased to tell you more.

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS

6 PRINCIPLES:

1. Facilitating self-directed personal strategic learning can enhance the quality of extension and create a demand-based development process;

2. Technology-Mediated Open and Distance Education and Learning, (Tech-MODE) can play a major role in self-directed learning;

3. L3 Farmers assumes that mobilising the farmers and building cognitive social capital are essential preconditions for promoting self-directed learning;

4. Combining modern ICT and local mobilisation can integrate the vertical and horizontal transfers of knowledge;

5. This new approach to extension, must be placed firmly in the context of the entire social and economic value chain;

6. The knowledge creating institutions to work as a consortium to provide holistic locale-specific information.

Open Educational Resources: Help or Hindrance to Open Learning?

Opening Address at the International Conference on Open and Online Learning
Penang, Malaysia, 12 June 2007

Sir John Daniel, Professor Asha Kanwar and Paul West

Abstract

Thanks to significant external support, notably from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, institutions around the world are creating open educational resources (OERs) in the expectation that they will increase access to quality education. Is this hope justified? How often do OERs travel the last mile to the individual learner in the form of award-bearing courses? How open are open educational resources? Is the dogma of the "freedom culture" obstructing the sensible sharing of learning materials? Has the medium become the message? These questions are examined with particular reference to the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

Introduction

Thank you for asking me to give the opening keynote at this International Conference on Open and Online Learning, which I have prepared with my Commonwealth of Learning colleagues Asha Kanwar, our Vice-President, and Paul West, our Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology. It is a pleasure for me to be in Penang again. I first came here twenty years ago, as a new university president, to a meeting of the Executive Heads of Commonwealth Universities. Asha Kanwar and I were here quite recently for a meeting of the institutions from five Asian countries that offer the Commonwealth Executive MBA and Master of Public Administration programmes.

That meeting was hosted by Wawasan Open University, a private open university headed by Tan Sri Dato' Professor Raj Dhanarajan, my predecessor as president of the Commonwealth of Learning, a most distinguished Malaysian who once directed the distance education programme of our hosts, the Universiti Sains Malaysia. We wish him every success with this exciting new venture which is significant in world terms.

It is an important pioneering venture because the only way most countries will be able to raise their participation rates in higher education to the levels of 35% or more now found in developed countries is by relying much more on private universities and much more on distance education. The Wawasan Open University College combines both.

Malaysia has already shown the world the way to a new model in creating the Open University of Malaysia as a private institution with the participation of public universities as shareholders. This tremendously dynamic institution is a world pacesetter in the application of technology to distance learning.

May we also pay tribute to Professor Alain Senteni, one of the organisers of this conference and head of the Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies (VCILT) at the University of Mauritius? The VCILT is doing great work. When you visit it you feel that "buzz" that innovation generates. The Commonwealth of Learning was privileged to use the facilities of the VCILT last year for the first 3-week course development "boot camp" of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth that was organised by Paul West.

People from 12 countries came there for a world first, the international collaborative development of open educational resources on a Wiki. We shall talk more about the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth in a moment, but first let us give you an advance organiser of what we are going to talk about.

A keynote address should place things in context. We shall begin by reflecting on the title of the conference and the juxtaposition of the words open and online. We shall then give you a brief history of open and distance learning, noting how it has been influenced by new approaches and new technologies.

If you detect a note of scepticism in our account you will be right. The best thing that we can do for our students, as a major legacy of learning with us, is to inculcate in them a spirit of systematic scepticism. We cannot do that if we ourselves are credulous in the face of the latest innovations.
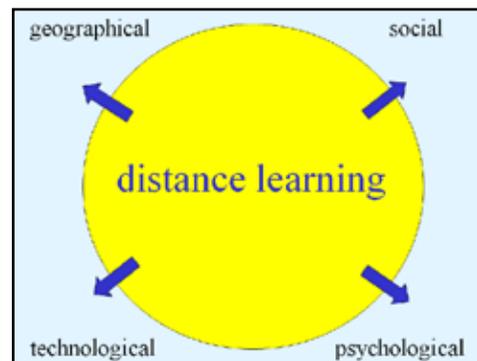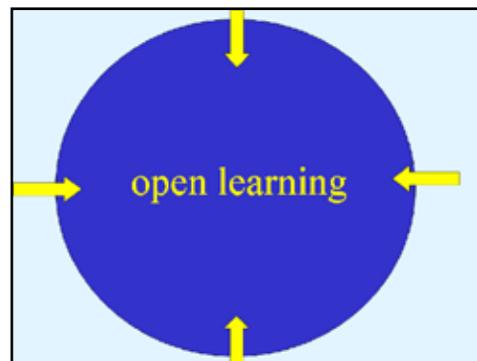
We shall bring this scepticism to an examination of a currently fashionable innovation – the subject of many papers at this conference – Open Educational Resources.

Our title is Open Educational Resources: Help or Hindrance to Open Learning?

Open and Online Learning; Distance and eLearning

That's the outline, now for the substance. We note first that the title of your conference "open and online learning" is an oxymoron. Most of the world's people are not online, even here in Penang, so online learning is not open to them.

The term "open and distance learning" has attracted tens of thousands of words of commentary and we shall not add to them here. That term is not an oxymoron because distance learning can be open learning and vice versa. However, you can also have distance learning that is not open and open learning that is not done at a distance.

Our first point, therefore, is that open learning is a precious term that we must not debase. It means access to learning without barriers, access that is not closed. Open learning is an ideal, because there will always be some barriers to learning, but let us accept that the requirement to be online is incompatible with the notion of open learning for most of our fellow human beings.

Distance learning is another useful general term with a simple meaning: learning that bridges distance. The distance can be physical, social, psychological or technological and can separate the learner from other learners, from teachers, from an institution, or from learning resources. Distance learning is a liberating phenomenon with a long history, let us not debase that term either – as we do when we substitute the term eLearning for it.

eLearning is a wonderful development and a great addition to the increasingly rich toolkit of distance learning. However, if we pretend that all distance learning has to be eLearning we are once again cutting off most of our fellow citizens from the remarkable source of empowerment that goes with a broad interpretation of distance learning.

Some History

The history of open and distance learning makes this apparent. We start that history with St. Paul for two reasons. First, by taking the Christian gospel to the world his was one of the most successful educational campaigns in the history. Second, the four key elements of Paul's distance

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learning system still provide the underpinning for most of what you will be talking about at this conference.

The first element is learning materials, in this case the letters that Paul wrote to the young churches around the Mediterranean, painstakingly copied by hand. Second, there had to be a means of distributing these materials – in the first century they were carried by messengers. Third, there were teachers, called priests and deacons, who read and interpreted the learning materials to groups of people. Fourth, people learned through this process and applied what they had learned.

All subsequent developments in open and distance learning have attempted to improve on one or more of these four components of Paul's system. First was the printing press, which eliminated the need for the fastidious hand copying of manuscripts. The availability of printed materials made surprisingly little different to conventional face-to-face teaching, where lecturers continued to lecture, but it allowed distance learning to take full advance of the next technological breakthrough.

That was the development of postal services. Educators don't always apply new technologies quickly but when Britain introduced the Penny Post in the mid 19th century, Isaac Pitman immediately started offering a correspondence course in Shorthand. A large industry grew up over the subsequent century in countries with postal services. Much of this industry was in the private sector and operated for profit.

The next milestone was the creation of the UK Open University in 1969. This brought three important innovations. First, it made distance learning at scale an objective of public policy, with public funds to match. This enabled the Open University, among other things, to invest in a strong, pervasive and effective student support system and to have access to public broadcasting channels.

Second – and the founding Vice-Chancellor, Walter Perry, thought this the most important innovation – it introduced the notion of the course team. Instead of being prepared by individuals, courses were prepared by multi-disciplinary teams with rigorous quality assurance mechanisms. The quality of Open University learning materials – on all media – was hailed with respect and amazement by academics around the world both for their intellectual muscle and their pedagogical effectiveness.

Third, the Open University committed itself to deploying the full range of communications media available then and in the future. Making one of the most important statements in the history of open and distance learning, the University's first Chancellor, Geoffrey Crowther, had this to say at the inaugural ceremony in 1969:

The world is caught in a communications revolution, the effects of which will go beyond those of the industrial revolution of two centuries ago. Then the great advance was the invention of machines to multiply the potency of

The Iron Triangle

men's muscles. Now the great new advance is the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men's minds. As the steam engine was to the first revolution, so the computer is to the second. It has been said that the addiction of the traditional university to the lecture room is a sign of its inability to adjust to the development of the printing press. That, of course, is unjust. But at least no such reproach will be levelled at the Open University in the communications revolution. Every new form of human communication will be examined to see how it can be used to raise and broaden the level of human understanding. There is no restriction on techniques.

The UKOU has remained faithful to this commitment. We are amused when people who dabble in eLearning on a small scale compare their own efforts in a condescending manner to the "correspondence courses" offered by the Open University. In reality the UKOU has always adopted new media as soon as they were accessible to enough students to be called open learning. It was already using computer-supported collaborative learning back in the 1980s. By the late 1990s it had 150,000 students working with it online from home. It is an institution that has remained at the leading edge and we shall talk later about its hottest current innovation, OpenLearn.
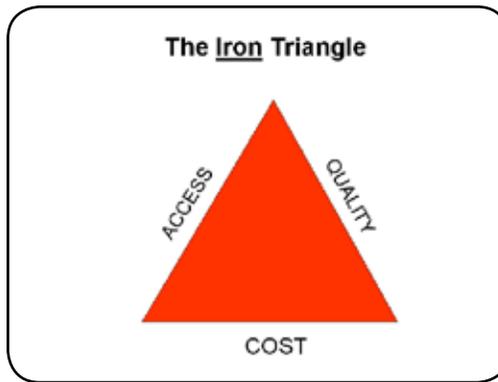
The Iron Triangle

The Open University was a milestone – we would say a revolution – because it broke open the iron triangle that has constrained education throughout history. Those responsible for providing education, particularly governments, usually have three aims. They want wide access to quality education at low cost. The snag is that when you express these three vectors, access, quality and cost, as a triangle it is an iron triangle.

We call it an iron triangle because when you try to alter one side of the triangle using conventional teaching methods you are constrained by the other two sides. Try to increase access by putting more students in the classroom and people will accuse you of sacrificing quality. Try to improve quality by providing more learning materials and you will increase cost. You get the picture.

The Open University was revolutionary because it increased access whilst at the same time increasing quality and reducing costs. It did this by taking advantage of technology. Technology is the application of scientific and other organised knowledge to practical tasks by organisations consisting of people and machines. Distance learning uses it in a number of ways to break out of the iron triangle.

First, it takes advantage of economies of scale in reproducing learning

TO BREAK OUT OF THE IRON TRIANGLE

- Economies of scale in production
- Economies of scale in distribution
- Qualities of scale in student services distribution
- Specialisation and Division of Labour
  from the cottage industry to the 21st century

from the cottage industry, where one artisan does everything, to a technological approach where teams work together to bring a range of skills to bear on the task.

Putting it another way, the secret of quality distance education is to take the teaching and learning process apart into its component elements (including the administrative and social elements), focus on doing each one as professionally as possible, and then put the process back together. This is the answer to those who claim that this or that learning outcome cannot be achieved by distance learning. When you take the process apart you will almost always find that parts of it can be done at a distance and parts cannot.

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Therefore you put together a blended system, which usually has two advantages. First, you gain in efficiency on the parts you do by distance learning. Second, the parts that require contact will probably be done better as a result of the analysis you have conducted.

For example, when the Open University came to design practical work for its science and engineering students it thought deeply about how to use their time efficiently with experiments that would enable them both to learn the necessary practical skills and to gain deeper understanding of physical and technological phenomena. The result was a series of experiments that were later adopted by conventional universities because they were so powerful.

materials. The unit costs of printing decrease with the numbers you print, and that is even truer of later media such as DVDs. Economies of scale get better and better with each generation of technology.

Second, it takes advantage of economies of scale in distributing materials. Postage is less costly than St. Paul's messengers and electronic distribution is almost cost free.

Third, it takes advantage of what you could call qualities of scale. You can make big investments in quality services to students, using everything from face-to-face tutorial sessions to sophisticated web-based services.

Fourth, distance learning uses what are still the most basic characteristics of technology, namely division of labour and specialisation. Open and distance learning allows educational practice to make the transition

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Access: The Next Frontier

Technology has helped to create an educational revolution through distance learning and millions of people have benefited by gaining access to higher learning that would previously have been impossible. The enrolments in the world's 40 or so open universities, many of them here in Asia, number in the millions.

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But there is still a huge task ahead. In developed countries 40% or more of the age cohort undertake higher education. Our host country, Malaysia, is heading determinedly towards this figure, helped by a policy that looks with favour on both distance learning and private colleges and universities. However, in much of south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa participation rates languish below 10%. How are these countries to catch up? The numbers are huge.

If we were to achieve a 35% participation rate in higher education among the 4 billion people at the bottom of the world economic pyramid it would generate 150 million students, which is far more than the world total today.

How can we serve such numbers? There is no single solution. In a paper with our UNESCO colleague Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Asha Kanwar and I have argued that alongside the multiplication of conventional bricks-and-mortar institutions the answer lies in a big expansion of private, for-profit providers; in much more use of distance learning and, as a corollary to both, more cross-border provision.

The potential of open educational resources, or OERs, to make quality learning material available at low cost has attracted the support of donors that wish to increase access to education worldwide.

Distance learning has already made a tremendous contribution to increasing access: cutting costs and raising quality. But to conquer the challenge of access at the bottom of the pyramid it must cut costs further whilst maintaining quality. How can this be done?

The three essential components of distance learning are course development, student support and logistics, including administration. Can technology help us to cut costs in each category?

The most helpful underlying technological development is the steady extension of connectivity, in which we include mobile telephony. We can now foresee a day when most people will be connected, at least through a tele-centre or ICT kiosk in their community. How does connectivity help us make distance learning more cost-effective?

Let's take the components of distance learning in reverse order. First, connectivity can reduce the costs of administration and logistics. It is already doing so. Experience in Africa has shown that mass mailings of text messages to mobile phones have a measurable effect in motivating students to complete and submit their assignments. Web-based systems allow students to do much of their own administration, which both motivates them and cuts costs.

The second component, a quality student support system, is something we can never take for granted. However, both public and for-profit systems now have widespread experience with the effective management of large student support systems using part-time tutors. These systems benefit from increasing connectivity by allowing quicker feedback on student assignments and easier tutor-student and student-student communications.

The third component is course development. Developing good distance learning courses is expensive because it requires intellectual effort by skilled people, preferably working as a team. The secret of cutting costs is not to skimp on the intellectual and pedagogical input to courses but to achieve economies of scale by having each course – or a version of it – reach many students. For this reason the notion of sharing and adapting courses between institutions has been on the distance learning agenda for many years, but with disappointing results in terms of courses actually shared.

There are two reasons for the disappointment. First, even distance learning institutions suffer from the "not-invented-here syndrome" that makes them reluctant to use material from elsewhere. Second, the adaptation of courses that are not in electronic formats is cumbersome and expensive.

Recent developments have altered this picture dramatically. We all now use search engines to locate material on the Web, which makes us less prone to the "not-invented-here syndrome". Second, the availability of materials in electronic formats has made sharing and adaptation easy.

The result is the growing worldwide movement to create open educational resources.

Open Educational Resources

The potential of open educational resources, or OERs, to make quality learning material available at low cost has attracted the support of donors that wish to increase access to education worldwide. We pay a special tribute to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation that has made particularly large and intelligent investments in the creation of OERs. Our remarks as we assess the state of play in OERs are intended in a constructive spirit. Without Hewlett's commitment there would be much less to assess. We mention three of Hewlett's projects in particular because they highlight the evolution of OERs in relation to access.

In 2001 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) caused a stir by making the course notes of its faculty available on the web for all to see. This launched the OER movement with all the prestige of MIT. The material on display is information on course curricula rather than self-learning materials but it is widely consulted as a benchmark by faculty and students around the world.

Last October the UK Open University took this one stage further with its OpenLearn initiative. This makes self-learning materials, student support and

collaboration tools available on the web. OpenLearn receives 20,000 visits a week and is intended to be of more direct value to students than the MIT material. The site also has a LabSpace where people can mix, match and adapt the materials.

If MIT's OpenCourseware shares information and the UKOU's OpenLearn shares learning, the next step is to share teaching – or course development. This is what COL and 28 country partners are now doing through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, which COL is coordinating through Paul West.

People from many developing small states are already working collaboratively to prepare learning materials on Tourism and Entrepreneurship, Teacher Education and Life Skills. These international course teams are developing OERs on a Wiki called WikiEducator that COL created last year. The OERS they produce will be adapted appropriately as courses for each country.

So far, so good! In a few years we have progressed from sharing lecture notes to sharing learning materials to sharing course development. Why then, do we ask whether open educational resources are a help or a hindrance to open learning? We have a number of related worries.

For starters there is the classic development challenge of the last mile. Fancy fibre telecom systems often don't cover the last mile to the individual user. The results of agricultural research frequently don't reach the poor farmer in the African village. Simple disease-avoidance information doesn't make it to illiterate mothers who could use it to keep their children healthy.

So the big question is, will all these nice OERs make it out of their electronic repositories and take the form of real courses that can be studied for credit by real people, even if they don't have access to technology? That is the key question for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. We hope that by the end of this year we shall be able to answer it positively. What are the challenges?

The first is simply getting the OERs produced. Collaborating online from more than 20 small countries is not straightforward, especially as the course developers have other duties besides contributing to OERs. A second challenge is for each country to convert the OER into a course that is appropriate for its needs and its qualification framework. To address this problem we are working with the South African Qualifications Authority to come up with a common framework that blends what the small states already have. We are urging the participating states to start early in fitting the courses derived from OERs into their institutional curricula. A third challenge is to create delivery and student support systems appropriate for each of 28 small countries.

Our purpose today is to urge all of you who want the OER movement to achieve its potential for expanding access to education to work on the last-mile problem. This means avoiding two common pitfalls.

The first is our tendency to get preoccupied with the medium rather than the message. We get so carried away by perfecting the medium that we forget the message it is meant to carry. We are all for research, but the history of educational technology shows that people often get so carried

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away by refining and perfecting their tools that they lose sight of the ultimate purpose, which is to expand access to learning for real people. Rather than waiting for the perfect all-singing, all-dancing OER in the perfect learning object repository we need OERs that are good enough for onward adaptation and readily accessible.

A second and related pitfall is obsession with the meaning of "open" in open educational resources. From what we have already said you will know that we believe in openness. To go on our WikiEducator, OERs must be fully open in the sense of a CC-BY-SA license. Anyone can use and adapt the material provided they acknowledge the source and put their new adaptation back into the system. But WikiEducator cannot be the only game in town. There will often be a trade-off between openness and quality.

For example the excellent UKOU materials on OpenLearn can be widely used and adapted, but they do carry a Non-Commercial use restriction. Such a restriction was a necessary condition for getting the UKOU to open up its materials in the first place and is perfectly reasonable pending much more experience of the real use and adaptation of OERs by institutions and individuals.

In fact, the Non-Commercial restriction places no restriction on the using institution's ability to charge for all costs, be they registration fees and printing costs, and overheads and salaries. The restriction simply means that the material should not be used for generating bottom-line profits without first contacting the owners of the intellectual property and securing permission.

Some course developers may want to introduce third-party copyrighted material into their distance learning materials. This is a perfectly rational calculation if the material is of classic importance or if the cost of copyright clearance for using it is less than recreating something similar.

We believe in simplicity but we live in a complex world that cannot always be simplified as far as we might like. WikiEducator is really another oxymoron – a repository restricted to totally free materials. We also need repositories that can contain material that can be used with different levels of freedom, the challenge being to tag each one in such a way that users know what they are getting.

Focus on the benefits to learners, individually and collectively, and you will indeed live to see the day when open and online learning is no longer an oxymoron.

The Commonwealth of Learning has invested considerable effort in helping countries understand the world of copyright, copyright exemptions and Creative Commons licenses in order to help them extend access to learning at the lowest possible cost. This advice is summarised in the Copyright Guideline available on our website.

Conclusion

It is time to conclude. Are open educational resources a help or a hindrance to open learning? We believe that they can be a terrific asset but that is still an act of faith. Before we can say with certainty that OERs are part of the answer to the access problem we need to see large numbers of them cover the last mile to disadvantaged learners and give them useful qualifications or skills.

Do not let your fascination with perfecting OERs or computer-supported collaborative learning or pedagogical scripting – or whatever excites you – distract you from the goal of improved access to learning. Do not make your commitment to the freedom culture a straitjacket that prevents you from helping learners in sensible ways. Focus on the benefits to learners, individually and collectively, and you will indeed live to see the day when open and online learning is no longer an oxymoron.

Before we can say with certainty that OERs are part of the answer to the access problem we need to see large numbers of them cover the last mile to disadvantaged learners and give them useful qualifications or skills.

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