COL CARIBBEAN FOCAL POINTS MEET

COL Focal Points from all 13 Caribbean Commonwealth countries took part in a two-day consultative meeting in Jamaica in March 2008. The meeting provided an opportunity for COL staff and its key contacts in Caribbean countries to review the progress on Country Action Plans, to obtain input for COL’s upcoming three-year plan for 2009-12 and to provide an opportunity for networking and future collaboration. After a presentation of COL’s objectives and the strategic planning process, Focal Points presented reports that highlighted the achievements and relevant needs of each country. COL Education Specialists reviewed programme work with special focus on the Caribbean.

COL introduced the system of Focal Points in 2006 by asking Ministers of Education in Commonwealth countries to nominate someone to act as COL’s primary contact in their country. This first Focal Points’ meeting provided evidence that COL’s move to establish and develop this system was a successful strategy. The role of Focal Points is to act as COL’s main contact in a country by:

- co-ordinating with the Ministry of Education, other government ministries and other stakeholders,
- disseminating COL-related information,
- meeting with visiting COL staff and arranging appointments for them as required,
- following up on the timely release of contributions to COL,
- acting as an advocate for open and distance learning (ODL) and COL in their countries, and
- providing advice and guidance to COL.

www.col.org/FocalPoints

RECORD ATTENDANCE EXPECTED FOR PCF5

More than 600 people representing educational institutions, governments and development agencies will attend the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) from 13-17 July in London. The Forum has grown to become one of the world’s leading conferences on learning and global development.

The PCF5 programme will feature workshops, discussions and presentations that address each of the Forum’s main themes:

- Governance, Conflict and Social Justice,
- Health,
- Livelihoods, and
- Children and Young People.

Keynote speakers include the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Kamalesh Sharma; Mr. Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO; Professor Brenda Gourley, Vice-Chancellor, U.K. Open University and Chair of the Association of Commonwealth Universities; and Reverend Professor Barney Pityana, Vice-Chancellor, UNISA.
The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) continues to move forward with another training and programme development workshop. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is making excellent progress, but to take advantage of the expansion of tertiary provision that it offers, the small states must not shy away with degree mills. One purpose of the Transnational Qualifications Framework that is being prepared for VUSSC is to help establish the credibility as well as the transferability of programmes developed through this collaborative network.

Degree mills also pose a threat to personal and national security. People with phoney medical degrees cause serious harm by acting as doctors. Terrorists and criminals try to gain illegal entry to countries by using fake degrees to obtain skilled-worker visas. Governments, institutions and employers must work together to curb degree mills and protect the credibility of legitimate educational institutions. COL is working with other bodies, including UNESCO and the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), to promote the following actions:

- Work with the small states of the Commonwealth in drafting legislation and putting in place accreditation procedures so that degree mills can be readily identified.
- Put the issue of degree mills on the agendas of international meetings of education ministers.
- Encourage international agencies to toughen their procedures for protecting misuse of their name (bogus operations often claim a spurious accreditation relationship with groups such as COL, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization).
- Create a “whitelist” of accredited institutions (UNESCO is working on a web portal for this purpose).
- Strengthen the COL information system.
- Encourage employers, academic admissions officers and immigration authorities to check the authenticity of all credentials presented to them.
COL-PROTEIN SEeks PROPOSALS

COL has announced a call for proposals for its Poverty Reduction Outcomes Through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme. COL-PROTEIN supports innovative uses of open and distance learning (ODL) to alleviate poverty in rural areas.

Four proposals from developing Commonwealth countries will be funded in 2008-2009. Successful applicants will receive expert assistance in the area of ODL, at a cost and financial help of up to $CDN 18,000.

The deadline for applications is 15 August 2008. For more information about eligibility, the application process and proposal evaluation criteria, go to www.col.org/protein.

PACIFIC TAKES THE LEAD IN LEARNING4CONTENT

COL’s new Learning4Content initiative is rapidly building capacity in wiki skills for content editing through a number of online and face-to-face workshops. It’s estimated that more than 500 people have participated in workshops in the first half of 2008. In return, participants are asked to contribute one learning resource to help build COL’s library of free learning materials.

The Pacific is leading the way for Learning4Content, with the first workshop taking place in the Solomon Islands in February 2008. The country’s Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development provided valuable support, funding travel costs for the 17 participants and supplying a computer lab for the workshop. The three-day workshop was also attended by the Chief Education Officer, Mr. Bernard Rapasia, who is COL’s Focal Point for the Solomon Islands.

“Technology provides a revolutionary means to connect and empower education professionals in the Pacific, not only between head offices in the main towns, but right down to the level of teachers and educators working in community schools and distance learning centres in remote and rural areas, thanks to the slow but steady improvement in connectivity,” said Mr. David Leeming, a consultant who facilitated the workshop in Honaria, Solomon Islands. “This workshop will have a huge impact, as historically it has been very difficult and expensive to pool resources and collaborate in the Pacific, owing to the small scales, scattered populations and high travel costs. Curriculum managers have been quick to realise the potential for developing and converting curriculum materials into formats for electronic delivery and localising resources from other regions.”

COL INTROduces NEW eLEARNING PROGRAMMES

COL has added two new courses to its suite of Writing Effectively programmes. The courses have been developed for the UNESCO India country office and the UN’s Office of Internal Oversight Services.

COL’s eLearning for International Organisations team tailored the core Writing Effectively course to meet the specific needs of the UNESCO India country office.

The course is online on UNESCO India’s Intranet, supplemented by CD-ROMs. Approximately 100 staff members will begin the course in July 2008.

The Auditing division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) required a highly specialised writing programme to help auditors master the process of planning, writing and revising an audit report that effectively communicates research and audit findings to targeted readers. COL has developed a print-based Writing Audit Reports course that is being rolled out to about 120 OIOS auditors. To build incentive for staff to complete the course, it qualifies for continuing professional development credit from the Institute of Internal Auditors.

Since the first Writing Effectively Programme was introduced to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2000, COL has developed and delivered eight versions of the course for international organisations. COL helps these organisations solve training challenges by employing the power of customised eLearning courses.

“We’re seeing a growing recognition of the value of eLearning in the workplace because of the flexibility, accessibility and cost-effectiveness,” explained Ms. Angela Kwan, COL’s Learning Manager, International Organisations. “As we expand our partnerships with international organisations, we are providing quality professional development in developing countries around the world.”

COL’S Effective Writing programme follows best practices in open and distance learning (ODL), especially in terms of learner support. Learners who take part in the Effective Writing courses receive personalised coaching from an online tutor, which is particularly important to overcome the isolation that can be felt by ODL learners.

www.col.org/COLeIO

COL’S WikiEducator is the first test site for an open source collaborative video editing environment. The project is a collaboration of the Wikimedia Foundation and Kaltura, Inc. Visitors to WikiEducator.org can collaboratively create video by uploading, editing and re-mixing videos.

“I am proud that WikiEducator can support the testing of this cutting-edge innovation for education in collaboration with the free knowledge community,” said Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, COL Education Specialist, eLearning and ICT Policy, and founder of the WikiEducator project. “Social networking and collaborative editing of rich media will unleash untapped potential for learning across our planet.”

www.WikiEducator.org/Help:Collaborative_video

COL Hosts Pakistan Study Tour

In May 2008, COL organised a study tour for 13 vice-chancellors and registrars of Pakistan universities. The tour began in Vancouver with one week of presentations by Canadian education experts. The topics covered included university governance and management; academic innovation; information and communication technology policy; and application and research. The second week was spent visiting five Canadian universities.

This international tour is one of several funded by Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission so their educators and administrators can gain improved knowledge about best practices.
COLLaGE SHARES APPROACHES TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

COL has created COL Leadership and Governance Empowerment (COLLaGE), an online community for sharing insights, ideas, resources and approaches related to governance. The objective is to connect the many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), learning institutions and ministries engaged in good governance initiatives with a global community of peers. COLLaGE was officially launched with an inaugural presentation by COL’s President Sir John Daniel in May 2008.

“Good governance is an essential foundation for developing organisational capacity and accountability,” Sir John said. “COLLaGE will enable organisations to share their experiences and case studies of good practice related to governance, while also facilitating the collaborative design and development of quality ODL materials and tools.”

COLLaGE uses a facilitated presentation format. Sir John was the first presenter, and discussed the importance of good governance and the potential of ODL for building individual and organisational capacity. Future presenters will address particular challenges pertaining to good governance, giving regional examples and showcasing successful practices in terms of materials, approaches, systems and sustainable models.

An important goal for COLLaGE is empowering women and engaging semi-literate and illiterate people (who comprise the largest proportion of the population in many of COL’s partner countries). It will also be useful to identify opportunities for collaborative work in materials development through open educational resources on WikiEducator’s WikiGoverance area. To join COLLaGE, register at: http://groups.google.com/group/collage-community.

L3 FARMERS IN SRI LANKA

Dr. Krishnna Alluri, COL Education Specialist, Food Security and Environment

Professor Uma Coorayarathna, COL Consultant, L3 Farmer Project, Sri Lanka

Professor Kshanaa Hiriubangara, University of Colombo

COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme strengthens the competency of farming communities to identify and make select changes for improving their livelihoods that are financially viable, economically feasible and socially acceptable. The experience of L3 Farmers in Tamil Nadu, India highlighted two critical success factors. One is the importance of developing partnerships among farming communities and members of the agricultural commodity chain including educational institutions, information and communication technology centres, community-based organisations and financial institutions. The second success factor is encouraging and enabling farming communities to analyse their own situations and take steps to work together with all the partners to gain access to self-directed learning, skills and loans.

Initiated in partnership with the Open University of Sri Lanka, L3 Farmers is a receivng support at several levels including:
• the national level (the Presidential Secretariat, ministries, government departments, University Grants Commission, Council for Agriculture and Research Policy and provincial ministries/departments),
• the institutional level (conventional universities, agricultural research and development institutes, and science and technology institutions),
• non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and
• banks.

The thrust in Sri Lanka is to gain strong government support for national universities to implement the initiatives in the villages of their choice, making this L3 Farmer model uniquely institution-based.

The livelihood sources in Sri Lanka include cattle rearing, tissue culture banana cultivation, chili cultivation and mushroom farming. The information sought by the farmers is developed in collaboration with the consortium members and input from the farming communities. Content is developed in a self-learning format and delivered in forms that are appropriate to the communities and circumstances. The learning materials are also posted on the WikiEducator website.

Introduced in 2007, the Weligatta pilot project in Sri Lanka has already demonstrated many positive outcomes:
• Knowledge is driving a better socio-economic in the farming community:
• Income generated by farmers has increased substantially, which has had a direct impact on their livelihoods.
• The culture is increasingly self-reliant.
• Employment opportunities for rural youth in the laboratory and in the field have increased.
• There is a marked increase in demand for tissue cultured banana plants across the country.
• The Government of Sri Lanka is recognising L3 Farmers as a viable project that could complement the President’s “Gama Neguma” (village development) programme.

“This is a unique project demonstrating how academic, government, international and non-state organisations can work together to help farmers enhance their productivity,” said Professor Gamini Samarawickrema, Chairman of Sri Lanka’s University Grants Commission.

“I believe this particular L3 Farmers project will be an ideal example of how entrepreneurial culture could be fostered amongst our academics. I hope it will motivate other academic institutions to initiate development-oriented projects that address problems related to regional development. This kind of culture should be sufficiently incorporated in the undergraduate curricula that young graduates could be encouraged to take up national responsibilities through such innovative approaches.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GENDER

COL has adopted gender mainstreaming as an organisational strategy to ensure that gender equality is considered an integral part of all its policies and programmes. It is more than adding a “women’s component” or even a “gender equality component” into an existing initiative, activity or organisational process. Mainstreaming goes beyond increasing girls/women’s participation; it means that the experience, knowledge and interests of girls/ women and boysmen are central to COL’s Learning for Development agenda.

WHAT IS MEANT BY “GENDER”?

Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities which determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman/man and girl/boy. Gender roles are learned through socialisation processes; they are not fixed but are changeable. Perspectives and practices relating to gender are reinforced in society through:
• educational, political and economic systems
• legislation,
• culture, religion and traditions.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDER, GENDER BALANCE, GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER EQUITY? AND WHY IS GENDER EQUALITY IMPORTANT?

Gender balance is primarily a matter of balancing numbers. It is about the equal participation of women and men in any activity. Gender equality relates to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same; rather it is about equal opportunities and rights for all and not treating everyone as though they have identical interests and needs.

Gender equity goes one step further. It refers to structural power relations including control over resources in society and may include taking positive or affirmative action to ensure that policies and programmes benefit women/ girls and men/boys equally.

Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

WHAT DOES GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT ENCOMPASS?

Gender and development focuses on the social, economic, political and cultural forces that determine how women and men participate in, benefit from, and control differently. This approach shifts the focus from women as a group to the socially determined relations between men and women.

WHAT IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING?

Gender mainstreaming is the process of addressing the implications for women and men of any planned action. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.

HOW DOES COL ADDRESS GENDER?

For COL, gender equality is a cross-cutting corporate goal which requires that both women’s and men’s views, interests and needs shape its programmes, organisational policies and processes. COL appreciates that there is a diversity of regional and national experience with respect to achieving gender equality across the Commonwealth. www.col.org/gender

INDIA’S HC VISITS COL

HIS EXCELLENCY R. L. NARAYAN, INDIA’S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO CANADA, (MIDDLE) VISITED COL WITH VISITING COL PRESIDENT PROFESSOR ASHA KANWAR AT COL’S VANCOUVER OFFICE EARLIER THIS YEAR

CURBING THE GROWTH OF DEGREE MILLS

COL President Sir John Daniel was invited to join a steering committee organised by the U.S. Council for Higher Education Accreditation and UNESCO to explore how to impede the growth of “degree mills” -disreputable distance education institutions that sell bogus degrees. The meeting in March 2008 was also attended by educators from around the world who share a concern about the threat of these degree mills to the credibility of open and distance learning. The presentations focused on the dangers of these institutions, approaches to curb them and the need for governments to act immediately. The group plans to issue an action statement after a follow-up meeting in Paris in November.

For more about degree mills, see the Editorial on page 3.
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF OPEN SCHOOLING

AS ENROLMENT IN PRIMARY EDUCATION HAS INCREASED, THIS HAS CREATED A CORRESPONDING RISE IN DEMAND FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLING – SCHOOLING THAT, IN MANY AREAS OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD, DOESN’T EXIST.

COL has recently stepped up its efforts to facilitate the growth of open schooling in developing countries. While open schooling is accepted as an important part of the solution to the increasing need for education beyond the primary level, it is still a rather new area. There is much to be done in terms of building capacity for managers to run effective open schools, helping policy makers understand how they can support sustainable open schools and helping communities understand how they can tap the potential of open schools to achieve development goals.

Youth mothers can learn at home and the use of unconventional teaching features such as the fame Australian School of the Air. Open schools today take many forms such as the famed Australian School of the Air. Open schooling has the potential to meet the rapidly increasing demand for secondary education because it can be conducted at scale and cost-effectively. The flexibility of open schooling makes it suitable for learners who cannot or will not attend a conventional classroom. And open schooling can use new information and communication technology (ICT) as it becomes locally available.

WHAT IS OPEN SCHOOLING?

Open schooling is characterised by several features including:
- an open, flexible approach,
- the physical separation of learner from teacher, and
- the use of unconventional teaching methodologies and ICT.

It is called open schooling rather than open and distance schooling, because openness and flexibility are more important features than physical separation. Usually there are no rules dictating student ages, prerequisites, content of courses or number of courses in which learners must enroll. As a result, open schooling meets the needs of a broad range of learners:
- Young people who missed out on schooling in their childhood can pursue a secondary education without having to attend classes with much younger children.
- Young mothers can learn at home and attend materials when necessary.
- Working adults can study while continuing to earn a living.
- People of all ages can acquire new skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods.

Open schooling uses self-instructional materials – materials that can also be used in the conventional school system. Local Study Centres often provide personal support and facilities for sitting examinations.

Open schooling dates back to the early 20th century in the industrialised world. The origins of open schools today were in the original correspondence schools and school radio such as the famed Australian School of the Air. Open schools today take many forms – some are complements to the conventional education system, while others are alternatives. Some are independent; others are branches of open universities, branches of ministries of education or run by school boards. The common elements are openness and flexibility.

COL’S WORK IN OPEN SCHOOLING

The promotion and support of open schooling are key planks of COL’s work. In 1994, COL produced one of the first known publications on open schooling, and it has supported the establishment of open schools throughout the developing world. COL also helped to establish a Consortium of Open Schools in Southern Africa, sponsored training workshops related to open schooling and conducted a needs assessment and draft action plan for the establishment of an open school in Nigeria.

COL is currently working to support the growth of open schooling through several initiatives:
- Conducting and publishing a research report that examined the costs and effectiveness of open schools, focusing on India and Namibia,
- Developing a handbook for managers of open schools, and
- Publishing a new book in our “Perspectives on Distance Education” series that focuses on open schooling issues for policy makers.

RESEARCHING OPEN SCHOOLING

“Open schooling is an area crying out for more research,” said COL President Sir John Daniel in a recent presentation to the World Bank. While there is growing recognition that open schooling has the potential to address the challenge of increasing access to secondary education now that Universal Primary Education is on the way to being achieved, there is little research data about its effectiveness and efficiency.

COL has made a start on the research agenda by commissioning a study of the costs and effectiveness of two open schools in...
THE GROWTH OF OPEN SCHOOLING CONTINUED... 

GOVERNMENTS MUST COMMIT ADEQUATE HUMAN, FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES FOR OPEN SCHOOLS TO SUCCEED.

JUNE 2008

IN FOCUS

NIOS offers an alternative to conventional secondary education for 300,000 students, while NAMCOL, a distance education college within the Ministry of Education, provides education to almost half of secondary school learners between the ages of 15 and 25.

Role: While NAMCOL supplements the formal education system, NIOS serves as an alternative. The study confirms that open schools can be either a complementary or alternative system to the conventional school system.

Pass rates: NAMCOL students generally do not perform as well as students in the full-time system. While NIOS students perform well in comparison with the students taking other Boards' secondary education examinations, they do not perform as well at the higher secondary level.

Curriculum: NIOS offers vocational educational opportunities alongside more academic school subjects. NAMCOL's main focus is the academic stream, but plans are underway to broaden access to vocational courses.

Quality assurance: The quality of NAMCOL's course materials is not in doubt and logistically the College performs well, but the student support system could be improved further to ensure that a higher proportion of students achieve their aim of getting an A to C grade in the national examination. NIOS has well-defined processes for curriculum development. Administrative and academic support is provided to the learners through the Accredited Institutes, which are selected against strict criteria.

Academic facilitators monitor activities at these Institutes, including teaching and assignment marking. However, there is some doubt as to whether these monitoring processes are adequate, and there is no current means of planning and reviewing a system-wide process of evaluation and quality assurance.

Open schooling is significantly more cost-efficient than formal education and has retention rates approaching 90 percent, the study finds. It is a powerful way of addressing issues of equity and social justice since it can bring the formerly excluded into the school system. And it can ramp up technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in the school system.

The principal area needing attention is learner support. This is an imperative that open schooling shares with open and distance learning at all levels.

Policy makers must approve the economic model, which sees a higher maintenance cost that pays off in lowering operating costs once the system is running.

To help policy makers fully understand what open schooling requires, COL is publishing a new title in its "Perspectives on Distance Education" series. This book will help both governments that are planning new open schools and those that are overseeing the operation of existing open schools. Through case studies and recommendations, this book will help policy makers establish sustainable and successful open schools.

Above all, we hope this book will help policy makers understand the need to balance access and quality in open schools," said Mrs. Frances Ferreira, COL Education Specialist, Basic Education and Open Schooling. "Open schools are an important way of increasing access, but it's important not to sacrifice quality. There's little advantage to educating masses of people if it doesn't help them improve their livelihoods."

COL's next area of focus is the development of open educational resources for open schools, while also encouraging further research. As more learning materials are developed and freely shared, as the capacity of open school managers increases and as governments develop policy that support sustainable open schools, the potential of open schooling will begin to be realised. Indeed, we will see dramatic advances in learning for development.


www.COL.org/consultancies www.WikiEducator.org/Open_Schools

Handbook for Open School Management

While policy makers and ministries of education are beginning to understand the potential for open schooling to meet the demand for education beyond the primary level, they often don't fully appreciate what is required to make open schools effective.

To help build capacity among managers of open schools, COL is developing a comprehensive handbook that outlines best practices in areas ranging from staffing and corporate governance, to marketing and financing. COL convened a meeting of experts in open schooling from Australia, Botswana, Canada, India, Namibia, New Zealand and the U.K. in February 2008 for a weeklong workshop focused on developing this handbook. It is expected to be released later this year and will be posted on WikiEducator for comment.

Directions for Policy Makers

One of the findings of the open schooling study commissioned by COL is that political will is necessary to make open schooling an integral part of a national education system. This political will needs to be expressed in the form of enabling policy. Governments must commit adequate human, financial and technical resources for open schools to succeed.

Educators are periodically afflicted with a psychological condition called “Cute Kitten Syndrome”. This syndrome manifests itself as an evolving perceived universal favor for an idea or concept and with those opposing cast as lacking some key element that comprises humanity. I mean, really, who doesn’t love cute furry kittens? If a person is to speak against open educational resources (OERs), they are essentially revealing their callous nature. But, I must say a few critical things.

First, I’m in favor of OERs as a concept. In fact, in 2008, a group of us started a community on open educational resources based on a few articles I had posted online and Stephen Downes’ concept of Distributed Learning Object Repository Network. We set up a few discussions and workshops for a while, tried to organize sub-committees, but things never really moved forward as Stephen and I had hoped. The group slowly breathed its last and the domain name went to the land of unfilled dreams.

Where are we now with OERs? The term is used very broadly and the landscape is shifting constantly. MITx OpenCourseWare initiative is often cited as the starting point of OERs, but David Wiley and others were already dealing with the notion of openness from a licensing perspective in the late 90s. Some view OERs as simply making resources freely available. Some - such as OCWconsortium have a required minimum commitment from contributors and it appears that OERs are the new hype feature of educational conferences...almost getting to the learning object and repository level of late 90s/early 00s. We’re in that same happy state of chaos where we find ourselves in so many areas of emerging technologies - moving too fast with too many voices to give this thing a concise name.

While I have huge appreciation for OERs and hold out for the prospect that OERs will truly make a difference to people who most need them, I still have a few critical views.

1) Why OERs? What are we trying to achieve? Marketing our institution?

Educators are periodically afflicted with a psychological condition called “Cute Kitten Syndrome”. This syndrome manifests itself as an evolving perceived universal favor for an idea or concept and with those opposing cast as lacking some key element that comprises humanity. I mean, really, who doesn’t love cute furry kittens? If a person is to speak against open educational resources (OERs), they are essentially revealing their callous nature. But, I must say a few critical things.

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1) Why OERs? What are we trying to achieve? Marketing our institution?

Reducing costs for learners? Better quality learning materials? Making the world a better place? Help people in developing countries? What’s your motivation or the motivation of your institution in pursuance of OERs? I fear too many educators are talking about it because others are. Look deep within your soul. Why are you interested in OERs? What can we do with them that we cannot do under our current system?

2) OERs are window dressing if systems and structures of education do not change. It has been stated, “OERs can change education”. No, they can’t. OERs, like blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other ideas and tools are dailies in the long-term trend of how we are interacting differently with information and with each other. OERs have not yet achieved divine status. I don’t think they will. They are an important reflection of the larger trend wave, but they are not driving the larger trend.

3) OERs exhibit (are embodied with) certain ideals/views/pedagogies, etc. For a student in the Middle East to use MIT’s resources requires they use the English language...or Aboriginal learners lose Indigenous knowledge when encountering resources created with a different worldview. Better yet, how do we encourage people in developing countries to create their own OERs and export them to our countries? Some believe that other cultures appropriate OERs, they would naturally reject their identity and their culture. I’m not sure.

But in fairness, there are many things we are not sure about with regard to OERs. Who is using these resources? How are they being used? I’ve heard of Chinese students translating entire MIT courses into Chinese. How common is this? What is the impact of these courses? Why are students taking them? For personal interest or part of an academic program? And how will we sustain these initiatives? We need more research on the actual impact.

BTW, I do like cute kittens.

Cute Kitten Syndrome: OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

By George Siemens

Fair Comment

Reprinted with permission from Connectivismo blog, www.connectivismo.ca/blog.
Agricultural specialists and government representatives from across the Caribbean at the COL sponsored meeting in Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

ASIA: CREATING GENDER-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

Gender-sensitivity in schools was the focus of a Round Table on Gender Friendly Schools hosted by COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat and India’s Institute for Social and Economic Change. The three-day meeting in Bangalore, India in February 2008 included educators, development agencies and researchers from South Asia and the Caribbean.

Many stakeholder groups have the ability to influence the quality of schools in relation to gender, including teachers, policy makers, school management committees and parents. The purpose of the Round Table was to identify factors influencing gender-friendly schools and to develop draft indicators for these stakeholder groups so they can help create enabling environments in schools for both boys and girls.

These indicators are being further refined with community input in South Asia and the Caribbean. The next step is for university partners to get feedback on these draft learning materials from farmers and revise the materials based on this input.

ASIA: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT FOR L3 FARMERS

In association with Sri Lanka Association of Distance Educators (SLADE), COL organised a content development workshop on open agricultural education resources in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 31 March to 3 April 2008. The aim of the workshop was to build capacity among university partners in the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme in Sri Lanka. Under the guidance of COL Education Specialist, Dr. Krishna Alhali and Professor Uma Coomaraswamy, COL consultant for L3 Farmers Sri Lanka, the workshop was facilitated by Mr. N.R. Raji and Mr. P. Anil Prasad from India.

Each of the university teams at the Colombo workshop prepared an interactive lesson on WikiEducator. The subjects included Housing and Feeding Poultry, Banana Cultivation and Chili Diseases. The next step is for university partners to get feedback on these draft learning materials from farmers and revise the materials based on this input.

COL expanded the L3 Farmers programme to Sri Lanka last year. The pilot phase in four villages is helping people improve their livelihoods by bringing together four partners:

- farmers,
- learning institutions that serve as an information resource for farmers,
- information and communication kiosks that link farmers to the learning institutions, and
- banks that provide loans to farmers.

ASIA: QA FOR PRIVATE ODL

The emergence of many cross-border partnerships will improve the quality, lower the cost and enrich the curricula of higher education. Symbiosis, the organisation that hosted the meeting, is an example of excellence in private provision. A not-for-profit institution, Symbiosis includes a network of 35 face-to-face teaching institutions spanning a range of disciplines. In Law School and Management Institute are rated among the top five in India. The Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning has grown to 160,000 students in just over 10 years under the leadership of the Director, Ms. Swati Mukundar. Today it is an impressive institution that features state-of-the-art information technology, high quality learning materials and strong management.

Participants at the meeting in Pune agreed to form a consortium of non-governmental ODL tertiary providers to further their interests with governments and to work together on professional and institutional development.

PACIFIC: ODL GROWS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Papua New Guinea Association for Distance Education (PNGADE) highlighted the growth of open and distance learning (ODL) in the country at its second conference in Port Moresby. The conference was carried live nationwide on radio.

The University of Papua New Guinea now has 10,000 students in its Open College compared to 4,000 students on campus. The Open College’s learning centres will be significantly enhanced when broadband connections are introduced in 2009.

Sir John Daniel spoke about COL’s work in support of ODL for development in Papua New Guinea, including the participation of several educators from Papua New Guinea in Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth training workshops, the addition of COL’s executive masters degree programmes at the University of Papua New Guinea and media empowerment initiatives aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS.

www.col.org/pacnews

AFRICA: EXPANDING ODL IN NIGERIA

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) opened a new study centre at Akure, Ondo State in March 2008. Located a five-hour drive from Lagos, the study centre is equipped with 25 computers with Internet connectivity as well as video-conferencing facilities for local students. NOUN has now established similar study centres to support open and distance learning in more than 60 percent of the Nigerian states.

www.ocol.org

CARIBBEAN: USING MEDIA TO SUPPORT FARMERS’ LIVELIHOODS

Developing new strategies to use media to support agricultural extension was the focus of a meeting sponsored by COL in Ocho Rios, Jamaica in March 2008. The Consultative Meeting on Using Media for Education for Livelihoods brought together agricultural researchers and extension specialists with partners from ministries of agriculture and education where COL has helped to establish media units to disseminate information about agriculture.

Africa: ODL in Nigeria

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The private sector will have a much larger role.

Programmes will relate more closely to livelihoods.

A far greater proportion of higher education will take place by distance learning.

- The emergence of many cross-border partnerships will improve the quality, lower the cost and enrich the curricula of higher education.

- Symbiosis, the organisation that hosted the meeting, is an example of excellence in private provision. A not-for-profit institution, Symbiosis includes a network of 35 face-to-face teaching institutions spanning a range of disciplines. In Law School and Management Institute are rated among the top five in India. The Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning has grown to 160,000 students in just over 10 years under the leadership of the Director, Ms. Swati Mukundar. Today it is an impressive institution that features state-of-the-art information technology, high quality learning materials and strong management.

- Participants at the meeting in Pune agreed to form a consortium of non-governmental ODL tertiary providers to further their interests with governments and to work together on professional and institutional development.

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- www.col.org/pacnews

- www.ocol.org
**ASIA: LEARNING FOR COMMUNITY CARE**

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), COL’s regional office, has introduced a multimedia resource kit for children with special learning needs. Developed in consultation with organisations that work with children with disabilities, the resource kit will serve as a learning resource for families, teachers, counsellors and community care professionals. It examines issues concerning disability in early childhood years and explores ways of improving early interventions in the community.

[www.cemca.org](http://www.cemca.org)

**AFRICA: QA FOR TEACHER EDUCATION**

COL is working with UNESCO’s Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) in the area of quality assurance for teacher education. A Joint Forum on Quality Assurance in Teacher Education in West Africa in February 2008 was organised by COL, UNESCO’s Field Office in Abuja and Nigeria’s Universal Basic Education Commission. The three-day workshop drew 28 teacher education policy makers and senior administrators from The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and focused on COL’s Quality Assurance Toolkit.

**CARIBBEAN: DEVELOPING NATIONAL POLICY**

COL facilitated a workshop in Trinidad & Tobago to develop a national policy on open and distance learning (ODL). Attending the three-day session in February 2008 were Mr. Peter O’Neil, Chief Education Officer with the Ministry of Education, along with more than 30 people from government ministries and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions. The national ODL policy framework deals with open schooling, TVET and higher education.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CONFERENCE OF THE AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION (ACDE)**

8 - 11 July 2008, Lagos, Nigeria

*Hosted by ACEDE and National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)*


**THE FIFTH PANN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING**

13-17 July 2008, University of London, UK

Organised by COL and the University of London Theme: Access to Learning for Development

[www.col.org/p5](http://www.col.org/p5)

**17TH CONFERENCE OF COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION MINISTERS (17CCeM)**

15 - 19 June 2009, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Hosted by the Government of Malaysia

**OER AFRICA LAUNCHED**

A team led by the Center for Open and Sustainable Learning at Utah State University is creating a handbook to help people learn how to create open education resources (OERs). The project is supported by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with content development hosted by COL’s WikiEducator. The handbook will be a practical how-to guide to getting started in the creation of OERs. It will cater to various audiences, including educators, institutions and policy makers.


**SOUTH AFRICA RECOGNISES FORMER SG ANYAOKU**

Chief Emeka Anyaoku, former Commonwealth Secretary-General (1990-2000), was conferred with South Africa's highest national honour for non-South Africans, the Order of Supreme Companions of O.R. Tambo: Gold. The award recognises Chief Anyaoku’s contribution to the ending of apartheid and establishment of democracy in South Africa. The honour was conferred on Chief Anyaoku by South African President Thabo Mbeki in a special ceremony in Pretoria, South Africa, on 22 April 2008. Sir Shridath Ramphal, Commonwealth Secretary-General from 1975-1990, was presented with the same award last year.

**STAFF NEWS**

Professor Mohan Menon has left COL after seven years as Education Specialist, School Development and Team Leader, Education Sector. During his tenure with COL, Professor Menon made several contributions towards teacher education and open and distance learning (ODL) in developing Commonwealth countries. His notable contributions were in collaboration with the Centre for Environment Education, India, which led to the ODL-based “Green Teacher” programme; helping to strengthen the National Teachers’ Institute in Nigeria; assisting in the development of the Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education Institutions and in facilitating the establishment of the Indian Consortium for Educational Transformation (I-CONSENT). A respected expert in the area of ODL, Professor Menon is thanked for his leadership, his ability to form effective partnerships and his tenacity in pursuing initiatives to improve the availability and quality of teacher education.

For information about current employment opportunities with COL, go to [www.col.org/opportunities](http://www.col.org/opportunities).

**RECOGNISED FOR INNOVATION**

The Society of Satellite Professionals International recently named Mindset Network as one of two 2008 Industry Innovators for System Development & Application in the for-profit sector. The award was presented in February 2008 in Washington, DC. A partner in several COL projects, Mindset Network is a non-profit, South African organisation that creates quality educational resources for primary and secondary schools, healthcare, technical/vocational education and under-resourced communities.

[www.mindset.co.za](http://www.mindset.co.za)

**MINSET**
Two rapidly emerging technologies are increasing access to the Internet via mobile phones worldwide. Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) is currently the most popular standard for mobile phones in the world. More than 80 per cent of the global mobile market (close to three billion people), use the standard, according to the GSM Association. The widespread prevalence of GSM makes international roaming between mobile phone operators very common, enabling subscribers to use their mobile phones in many parts of the world.

Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access (WiMAX) provides wireless data over long distances; it is an alternative to cable and DSL. WiMAX is gaining a strong foothold in developing countries, providing low-cost, high speed Internet connectivity for handheld devices. It is touted as being effective in providing “nomadic connectivity”, with the expectation that it will provide broadband access to places where it has been economically unviable. As a result, the future of the Internet is widely predicted to be dominated by handheld devices as opposed to traditional computers. This provides unprecedented opportunities for open and distance learning, as more people in remote locations gain access to online libraries, online communities and online learning.

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/GSM
www.wikipedia.org/wiki/WiMAX

The mobile phone has become a lot “smarter” in recent years. There is a growing range of “smart phones” on the market, including the Apple iPhone, the BlackBerry and the Motorola Q. Most smart phones offer full email capability with the functionality of a personal organiser. Some also feature:

- a QWERTY keyboard,
- a touchscreen,
- built-in camera,
- global positioning satellite (GPS),
- media software for playing music, browsing photos and viewing video clips, and
- Internet browsers.

Introduced in June 2007, the Apple iPhone was named Time magazine’s Invention of the Year in 2007. The average Apple iPhone user is an avid email reader (not writer) under age 30, browses the Web heavily and may carry a second phone, according to a report by research firm Rubicon. The survey of iPhone users also found that the smart phone is displacing the notebook computer – more than a quarter of iPhone users say they often carry their smart phone instead of a notebook PC. But the iPhone may not be smart enough: almost half (43 percent) of users strongly supported making changes to the iPhone.

The growing use of smart phones is changing how we live and work. Some organisations have been prompted to create smart phone etiquette rules, admonishing users not to check for messages or make phone calls at funerals, during movies or on dates, and warning them not to type while they drive. Apparently these devices can’t always make their users smart.

www.corporateicon.com/morearticlesbycorpicon.html
www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smartphones

If you have a low-quality video from a cell phone, digital camera or webcam, a free web application can clean it up for online posting. FixMyMovie enhances videos to up to four times their resolution, fixes poor lighting exposure, and stabilises and smooths low frame-rate videos. Named one of PC World Magazine’s “101 Fantastic Freebies” of 2008, FixMyMovie also provides one-step sharing of videos from mobile phones.

www.FixMyMovie.com

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smartphones