

Connections



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Wang Gungwu

Renowned historian to deliver Briggs Lecture

Professor Wang Gungwu will deliver the *Asa Briggs Lecture* at the *Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning* in Brunei in March. His address will be entitled, “*Education and bridging cultures.*”

Currently Director of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore and Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, Professor Wang is best known as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong from 1986 to 1995. Previously, he was a history professor at The University of Malaya (in both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur) and at the Australian National University’s Research School of Pacific Studies.

“Professor Wang brings the best traditions of Eastern and Western scholarship to any discussion relating to education, society and history, which is his special field of expertise,” said COL President, Dato’ Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan. “His research on and academic contribution to the history of the Chinese Diaspora are seminal works in the field; and as an academic leader and university administrator he has won acclaim from peers, colleagues and governments throughout both the Asia-Pacific region and the Commonwealth. We are fortunate to have him present the *Asa Briggs Lecture* at the Pan-Commonwealth Forum.”

The *Asa Briggs Lecture* honours COL’s founding Chairman, the Rt. Hon. Lord Briggs of Lewes, also a world-renowned historian.

PAN Commonwealth

1–5 March 1999

FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING Bandar Seri Begawan

Empowerment through Knowledge and Technology

A Celebration of Ten Years of the Commonwealth of Learning

Papers to provide wide insights

Programme development is continuing at a fast pace for the *Pan-Commonwealth Forum*. Programme Manager, Professor Colin Latchem, reports that well over 100 delegates will present their work and ideas through case study presentations, workshops and posters. While not all of the papers are in at the time of writing, they promise to provide wide and fascinating insights into open learning across the full spectrum of education and training in the developed and developing countries of the Commonwealth.

Case studies will range from open schooling through adult and non-formal community education to higher education, covering staff development, research and evaluation, quality assurance, course development and delivery, media and technology, library and information services, student support and organisation and management. Papers received to date come from Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Britain, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Canada, Guyana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Malawi, Malaysia, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

With the Forum designed to facilitate the sharing of experiences, knowledge and ideas, these case studies will be grouped by topic and the parallel sessions will follow a format that allows presenters to put forward key points and then discuss and compare these with the other delegates’ experiences, concerns and suggestions.

Workshops, which will build upon the presenters’ experiences in their own institutions, focus on such issues as the Internet and World Wide Web, librarianship and accessing global information, professional development, introducing open and flexible learning, empowering adult learners and dealing with intellectual property and copyright issues.

Posters will be featured in common areas in the magnificent Brunei Darussalam International Convention Centre. The exhibition will also include print, audio-visual, computer-based and online courseware developed by delegates and their colleagues, along with information booths set up by commercial providers of hardware, software and services.

Round Tables on the first day of the Forum will receive reports from open educators from around the Commonwealth. They will be facilitated and chaired by Dr. Abdul Khan, Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University and Dr. Ros Morpeth, Director of the UK National Extension College.

The Forum also features keynote and plenary presentations by distinguished speakers from many fields, and a range of social events and educational visits.

The *Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning* will celebrate the tenth anniversary of The Commonwealth of Learning. The event will be co-hosted by COL, the Brunei Darussalam Ministry of Education and Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and is being organised in collaboration with the Commonwealth’s open and distance learning professional associations. It will be held in Bandar Seri Begawan from 1–5 March 1999.

Virtual conferences

Two of the four online “virtual conferences” leading up to the Pan-Commonwealth Forum have now concluded. *Distance Education and Challenged Communities* was moderated by COL’s President, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan in October and *Library/Information Systems and Student Support* was led by Ms. Elizabeth Watson, of the University of the West Indies, and Dr. Neela Jagannathan, of the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Both were well subscribed and discussion was lively. The summaries will be a meaningful contribution to the Forum proceedings.

The first virtual conference was featured on the World Bank’s redesigned web site (www.worldbank.org) that was launched during the same time period. As a Global Knowledge partner, the COL conference was one of the first to be included in the “Development Forum” section of the new site.

The COL virtual conferences continue with *Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Credit Banking* taking place from 11–29 January (moderated by Dr. David Woodhouse, New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit) and *Staff Development* going online from 1–20 February (moderated by Ms. Bernadette Robinson, an international training consultant). The conferences are e-mail based, with archives of postings available on the web for subscribers.

Further information on the Pan-Commonwealth Forum and the virtual conferences, summaries of previous discussions and instructions on how to join are all available on the Forum web site (www.col.org/forum) or by contacting the Forum secretariat at COL's Vancouver headquarters (forum@col.org).

Funding update

The Commonwealth of Learning gratefully acknowledges contributions to its core funding, received to date during current year (from 1 July 1998), from Australia, Barbados, the Province of British Columbia (Canada), Canada, Cyprus, Guyana, Maldives, Malta, Namibia, New Zealand, Samoa, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Swaziland, Tonga and the United Kingdom.

At their meeting in November, Commonwealth Senior Officials commended COL for the valuable work it is doing to promote distance education and open learning, and they urged member governments to help place COL on a sounder financial footing.

Canada, New Zealand and UK support Forum

The Honourable Diane Marleau, Canada's Minister for International Cooperation (responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency), has announced a new CDN\$110,000 contribution to COL to support the travel costs of selected delegates from developing Commonwealth countries to enable them to present papers or act as resource persons at the Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Brunei. Industry Canada has also contributed some funds for the same purpose and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has agreed to sponsor the travel costs of keynote speaker, the Honourable Maurice Strong, Chairman of the Earth Council.

In addition, New Zealand's Official Development Assistance (NZODA) will assist with travel costs for Pacific Islanders and the British Council will provide transportation for two plenary presenters, Dr. Ros Morpeth, Director of the National Extension College, and Sir John Daniel, Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University.

Database of online courses

COL joins others in supporting Canadian initiative

COL is supporting TeleEducation NB (Province of New Brunswick, Canada) in the further development of the TeleCampus Online Course Database, an initiative to index online courses from around the world into a single Web-based source.

The Online Course Database currently lists over 8,100 courses from 530 institutions in 12 countries. It contains the most comprehensive listing of online courses and programmes available world-wide. These are courses that can be accessed by students from anywhere if they have a computer and an Internet connection—although many require the payment of fees.

All educational sectors are represented, from pre-schoolers to retirees, and courses vary from graduate level engineering (e.g., *Introduction to Orbital Mechanics*) to simple "How to" instructions (e.g., *How to Open a Coconut*).

The Online Course Database is sponsored by the World Bank Group, The Commonwealth of Learning, the Office of Learning Technologies (Industry Canada, Government of Canada), the Government of New Brunswick, L'Agence de la Francophonie, Le Consortium international francophone de formation à distance (CIIFFAD) and Le Centre international pour le développement de l'information en français (CIDIF).

Those interested in learning more about TeleCampus can visit the web site (telecampus.edu). To search the database, click on "Courses."

COL in Action

First legislative drafting students complete course

Four Malaysians and two Singaporeans were recognised by the Commonwealth Distance Training Programme in Legislative Drafting in a ceremony held on 4 December in the Attorney General's Chambers in Kuala Lumpur. They are among the first to fulfil the requirements of the new international programme.

The course, print materials, audio tapes and assignments were designed specifically for independent study of the principles and practices of legislative drafting and the processes of preparing government legislation. While a course co-ordinator in England guided student progress, experienced professionals within local drafting workplaces also provided support.

The course was developed jointly by The Commonwealth of Learning and the Commonwealth Secretariat to meet the needs of member jurisdictions by providing workplace training rather than having to send trainees overseas for an extended period.

Certificates were presented to Ms. Chan Bee Keng, Ms. Rozita binti Ramli, Ms. Mazni binti Nawi of Malaysia and to Mr. Lee Chuan Hwei and Mr. David Lim (in absentia) of Singapore. The Programme also issued completion certificates to legislative drafters in Cyprus, Falkland Islands and India.



Presenting legislative drafting certificates in Kuala Lumpur. From left to right: Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, The Honourable Dato' Ahmad Zaki bin Haji Husin (Deputy Parliamentary Draftsman, Malaysia, officiating), Mrs. Rozita binti Ramli (receiving her certificate) and Ms. Haslina binti Mansor (assisting with the ceremony)

Caribbean teacher education inventory

COL regularly facilitates meetings of Chief Education Officers from throughout the Commonwealth Caribbean, including UK associated states, so that they can help in programme evaluation and development of new activities. The meetings also give the CEOs an opportunity to share experiences and reduce duplication of efforts throughout the region.

When they met again in Barbados in October, they received an *Inventory and report on teacher education materials and programmes in the Commonwealth Caribbean*, which was prepared by Ms. Christine Marrett, of the University of the West Indies Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC), and Dr. Claudia Harvey, UNESCO Sub-regional Education Adviser for the Caribbean. The research was organised and supported by COL, UWIDEC and UNESCO. The executive summary is available on COL's web site at: www.col.org/consultancies/98CaribInventory.htm or linked from the COL home page through "Consultancies".

Appreciation for COL's continuing work in the region was also expressed by ministers responsible for human resource development and education who were attending the second annual meeting of the CARICOM Council on Human and Social Development in Georgetown, Guyana, in November 1998.

TVET Net

To encourage and facilitate discussion among vocational educators throughout the Commonwealth and beyond, COL has created an electronic forum, specifically for discussions relating to technical/vocational education and training (TVET).

You are invited to join: send an e-mail message to majordomo@hwb.col.org, with "subscribe tvet <your e-mail address>" in the body of the message (without the punctuation).

The Majordomo software provides a simple, automated vehicle for reaching people quickly and at no cost. All you require is an e-mail address. Access to the World Wide Web is not necessary (unless that's how you access your e-mail).

The TVET forum will also provide information on the online resources of other organisations and systems that advertise employment opportunities, facilitate research and provide news.

Global Distance Education Net

Joining the launch of the World Bank's redesigned web site was the unveiling of the Global Distance Education Network (DistEdNet), a web-accessible collection of documents about distance education and development.

DistEdNet is a knowledge guide to distance education designed to help clients of the World Bank and policy makers and practitioners, particularly in developing countries, with quick and straightforward access to critical information and documents on using distance education for human development. The Network consists of a core site located at the World Bank and regional sites in all parts of the world. The principal source of documents on distance education is the International Centre for Distance Learning (ICDL), headquartered at the UK Open University. COL is a "partner institution", specialising in small states. Other partner institutions are providing current materials from Latin America, Asia, Australia, Africa, Canada and Europe.

For more information visit www.worldbank.org and click on "Development topics" then "Education & training" and then on "Global Distance Education Network."

Community radio

COL has installed portable "briefcase" community broadcasting stations in several locations, most recently in Southern Africa.

In October 1998, the low-cost,

Canadian-built radio station was set up in the main community centre of the Makuleke people who are located in the Northern Province of South Africa. The station is configured to transmit over a 30 to 40 kilometre area. Training covered both technical matters and the aspects of organising community productions and broadcasts.

Over 30,000 local residents can now listen to the educational broadcasts on their FM radios. Initial programming includes community discussions regarding health care and education.

A second COL installation is now transmitting in Lusaka, Zambia, operated by the country's Technical Education and Vocational Entrepreneurship Training Authority.

Eastern Africa

With encouragement and support from COL, three new distance and open learning professional associations have been established in Eastern Africa. National associations were formed in both Kenya and Uganda in October and November, preceded by the inaugural meeting of the Open Learning and Distance Education Association of Eastern Africa (OLDEA-EA) in Dar Es Salaam in September.

Dr. Emino M. Chale, Registrar of The Open University of Tanzania, was elected OLDEA-EA's first Chairperson. Earlier in the year, he was also re-elected Chairman of the Distance Education Association of Tanzania.

South Asia

In October 1998, The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) launched a new certificate programme for laboratory technicians in Sri Lanka's university system. It is the first programme offering based on learning materials, encouragement and regional adaptation workshops provided and sponsored by COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Says OUSL Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ranjith Arthenayake, "OUSL took this to the logical conclusion by offering the opportunity, in the first instance, to about 70 University Technical Officers nominated by science-based faculties of several Sri Lankan universities to follow the inaugural programme. A long-standing need and lacuna

in the tertiary education system in Sri Lanka has thus been met as a result of the welcome facilitating role of COL to enable the sharing of study material."

The inauguration of the revamped Commonwealth Certificate in Youth in Development Work was held at The Open University of Sri Lanka in September 1998. Forty-eight students, all sponsored by the Ministry of Samurdhi, Youth Affairs and Sports, were enrolled at the ceremony. The certificate programme is an initiative of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (Commonwealth Secretariat) and is now available in a distance education format that was designed in co-operation with COL. It is being implemented throughout South and Southeast Asia.

At the end of January 1999, the Government of Sri Lanka will be hosting the inaugural meeting of the Forum of Vice Chancellors of Open Universities of member countries in the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). SAARC Heads of State and Government established the Forum at their summit, held in July 1998 in Colombo, to share resources, develop joint programmes, and explore the possibilities of sharing information technology within the region in open and distance education.

People



Dennis Irvine

Dr. Dennis Irvine, COL's Regional Adviser to the President for the Caribbean, has been named the *Outstanding Educator in Jamaica for 1997/98* by the country's Joint Committee on Tertiary Education. A former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana, Dr. Irvine served as COL's Director of both Caribbean programmes and materials acquisition and development from 1989-1994. He is known for his energy, creativity and as a source of sound advice.

The new Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education in Tanzania has joined the growing list of world leaders who have had first-hand experience with distance education systems. **The Honourable Dr. Pius Y. Ng'wandu** is currently a fourth year student with the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) reading law. Dr. Ng'wandu has held ministerial portfolios before and was most recently Tanzania's Ambassador to Japan. Also at OUT, a prison inmate has been admitted to the LL.B. programme for the first time in Tanzania.

COL has appointed two new Regional Advisers to the President. **Professor N. Ranjith Arthenayake**, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University of Sri Lanka, will assist COL in South Asia and **Mr. Esekia Solofa**, Vice-Chancellor, University of the



Radio Makuleke hits the air

South Pacific, will provide support within the Pacific.

Ms. Subramanian Rama joined the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in November 1998 as Programme Officer, Multimedia. She brings with her ten years of experience in designing electronic and multimedia learning systems for a variety of clients.

Two Chief Programme Officers from the Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Department left London in October to head up regional programmes. **Mr. Jeff Bost** has taken on the regional directorship of the Commonwealth Youth Programme's South Pacific Centre in Honiara, Solomon Islands. **Dr. Lucy Steward** has been appointed Registrar of the Caribbean Examinations Council in St. Michael, Barbados. COL is grateful for their assistance in the past but is pleased to know that there will be continuing liaison and collaboration in their new roles.

Terms extended for COL Chairman and President



Ian Macdonald



Gajaraj Dhanarajan

At its meeting held in September in Vancouver, COL's Board of Governors acclaimed **Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, O.C.** as Chairman for a special third term, running from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2002, and unanimously approved a further extension of the term of office for its President and Chief Executive Officer, **Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan.**

Dr. Macdonald has had a distinguished career in academia and government. He served the Canadian Province of Ontario as Deputy Minister of Treasury, Economics, and Intergovernmental Affairs and, later, as President of York University, a position he held for more than ten years. He was then Director of York International for another ten years. He is now President Emeritus and Professor of Economics and Public Policy at York University and Director of the Master of Public Administration Program. He has chaired the COL Board of Governors since January 1994.

Professor Dhanarajan has an international reputation as an expert on and advocate for open and distance learning and the application of appropriate educational technologies. Early in his career, he helped to develop distance education programmes at the University of Science in Malaysia and other South Asian institutions. In 1989, he joined the newly established Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (now the Open University of Hong Kong) as Associate Director (Academic), and served as Director from 1991 to 1995. He became President of COL in September 1995.

Events

Open schooling in India

With funding support from UNESCO, and in conjunction with India's National Open School (NOS), a national conference on networking and collaboration in open schooling was convened in Goa in November. The symposium was attended by secretaries of state education from throughout India as well as by directors of state open schools.

The purpose and result of the meeting was to encourage the establishment of state open schools throughout India, in order to increase access to educational opportunities at the basic schooling level, and to explore the roles that NOS can play, such as in the provision of learning materials, staff training and administrative support.

Southern Africa collaboration

Two meetings were held in September to further the collaboration among eight Southern African countries toward COL-facilitated programmes:

"Strategic contact persons" met in Harare and developed a plan of action for the implementation of a project to increase access to secondary school level education through the production of quality learning materials.

A regional training workshop for curriculum team leaders in the development of distance education training programmes for teachers of lower/junior secondary science, technology and mathematics subjects ("STAMP 2000+") was held in Pretoria (with funding assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat).

STAMP 2000+ writers workshops were held in November in Gaborone, Botswana, and in December in Kariba, Zimbabwe—and the COL Programme Advisory Committee for Southern Africa also met in Gaborone in November.

Barriers to technology for women

In collaboration with the British Council in New Delhi, COL convened an international meeting to develop strategies to overcome identified obstacles encountered by women in accessing communications and information technologies in open and distance learning. A number of recommendations and three draft project proposals were also produced.

Experts from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the meeting. Funding support from local British Council offices in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka enabled participation from those countries.

AAOU '98

The 12th annual conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) was hosted by The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) in November 1998. COL co-sponsored a pre-conference workshop on distance librarianship and COL's President delivered a plenary address. Professor Tam Sheung-wai, Vice-Chancellor of OUHK, was elected AAOU President for 1998/99.

T&T launches national distance learning system

The formal launch of Trinidad & Tobago's nationally co-ordinated Distance Learning System took place in Port of Spain in December 1998. COL was represented at the launch by its Regional Adviser, Dr. Dennis Irvine, who delivered a presentation at the opening ceremony on the potential that distance education holds for the Caribbean. COL was also among the institutions that were invited to showcase their work in an exhibition.

A highlight of the occasion was the awarding of certificates to the successful local participants in COL's Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme. Post-graduate diplomas were presented to seven students, with four also receiving their Master's of Arts in Distance Education degrees, both conferred by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (India).



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EdTech News



A supplement to *Connections* • January 1999

This edition of *EdTech News* will look in part at the “year-2000” (“Y2K”) issue and also consider a cost-effective alternative to the high-priced operating system software that is produced by the commercial software industry.

Y2K—are you ready?

A 105-year-old retired Swiss teacher in Echallens, Switzerland, was ordered to attend elementary school, thanks to a computer that cut a century off his age. The mix-up happened because a list of local residents recorded only the last two digits of the birth dates. So the man, along with 65 five-year-olds in the town, received a letter ordering him to start school. Thus, the town government was alerted to the need to update its computer system.

The year-2000 issue has become a matter of urgency for both private and public sectors globally. It arises because many computerised systems use two digits rather than four to identify a year. Date-sensitive systems may recognise the year-2000 as 1900 or some other date, resulting in errors when information using the year-2000 is processed. Problems may also arise earlier than in the year-2000 when some systems refer to a date in the future or use certain dates in 1999 to represent something other than a date. Millions of computers around the world must be reprogrammed to recognise the year-2000.

As the year-2000 rapidly approaches, educators should be looking closely at the problems that could arise from the use of older computing systems and software. In some circles it is thought that the issue only affects large, specialised “mainframe” computing systems and that it will not affect school and home computers. The reality is that many computers, both mainframe and personal, manufactured before 1996 are indeed affected. The good news, however, is that fixes are available.

The Y2K problem, or “millennium bug”, could show up on a personal computer in three places—from the internal real-time clock, in the operating system and/or due to applications software and utilities.

An electronic clock forms part of the computer’s Basic Input/Output System (BIOS), which provides the critical information a computer needs in order to start up (or “boot”). An operating system, such as Windows 3.1, Windows 95, 98 or NT, is the computer’s internal software required for proper functioning.

A non-compliant BIOS can create a snowball effect. It receives date and time information from the real-time clock, then

passes it to the operating system, which passes it to any software applications (word processing, spreadsheet, etc.) that need it. Because the BIOS receives time and date information in a two-digit format, it adds the century indicators. A non-compliant BIOS, however, will add a “19” instead of a “20”.

IBM and compatible computers, (including Compaq, Dell, Digital, Gateway and Hewlett-Packard) built before 1996 with Pentium or older chips could face millennium bug issues, depending on which version of the BIOS chip the computer has. As far as operating systems, Windows 98 appears to be problem free, while Windows 3.1 and older versions of Windows 95 and NT will need software patches to achieve full compliance.

One of the central sources of information on whether your computer may be compliant is the NSTL, Inc. web site. NSTL was established in 1983 as the world’s first independent organisation dedicated exclusively to testing the functionality, usability, and performance of hardware and software. The web site provides a small test programme that analyses a computer’s BIOS to establish whether an upgrade is needed (www.nstl.com). Also, most major computer manufacturers have included downloadable BIOS upgrades in their web sites.

Most applications software manufacturers, such as Microsoft Corporation (www.microsoft.com) have prepared web sites that provide information on whether their software or hardware complies with Y2K, and many have included downloadable software upgrades.

Apple Computer, Inc. asserts that all Macintosh computers and operating systems should be compliant until the year 29940, provided all other products (e.g., other software, firmware and hardware) used with it properly exchange date data with the Apple product (www.apple.com)!

Any other system with embedded computer technology could also be at risk. Examples include telephones, fax machines, alarms, generators and local and wide-area networks. In preparing for the year-2000, a review of all systems should begin immediately if it has not already been done.

To assist in further exploring the year-2000 issue and how it might affect educational systems, COL is planning to host a “round table” discussion to be held in early 1999.

Desktop video/audio production

COL continues to explore and pilot projects that provide low-cost technological advancements. Projects have focussed on health education, teacher training, learner support and technical/vocational education and training.

Recently, COL has installed portable “briefcase” community broadcasting stations in several locations (see accompanying *Connections* article) and desktop video/audio production suites.

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Left to right: Mr. Samuel Thompson, Technician, and Antonio Katakwe, Producer/Director, and COL’s desktop video/audio production system in Zambia

In November 1998, COL installed a production suite at the Technical Education and Vocational Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA), formerly the Department of Technical and Vocational Education (DTVET), in Zambia. The project was formulated to enhance TEVETA's capacity to produce quality audio and video educational content for use both by the national broadcaster and by students using the 26 regional TEVETA training centres. Along with the equipment, COL provided training in the use of the video and audio edit software, desktop publishing, graphics, web publishing, and Internet connectivity. The system is entirely desktop computer-based with the addition of a portable tape and video deck/camera for field operation.

Linux, a lower-cost operating system

There are many factors that make it difficult for educators to implement computers in schools, including the costs and availability of electricity, phone lines, hardware and software.

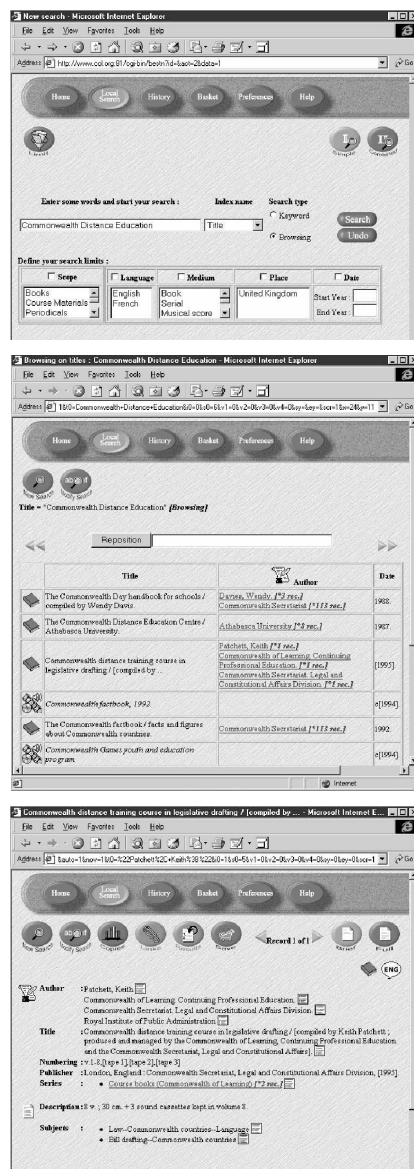
In the software area, educational institutions are looking at alternatives to the high cost and restrictions of licensing software from companies such as Microsoft Corporation. As an alternative to Microsoft's Windows operating system, Linux software has become a serious contender.

Linux is classified as "open-source" software as it is developed and improved collaboratively by thousands of volunteer programmers around the world. Unlike proprietary operating systems such as Windows, Linux developers and users have access to the system's underlying software code and can modify that code under certain conditions. This, however, can be a drawback in that there is a limited (although increasing) supply of applications software that can be run on Linux workstations—and this does restrict its popularity.

The Mexican government plans to install the free Linux operating system in 140,000 elementary—and middle-school computer labs around the country. Over the next five years, the government's Scholar Net programme will furnish Mexican students with access to the World Wide Web and e-mail, as well as word processing and spreadsheet applications.

The Linux in Schools Project, in Oregon, USA, also operates an extensive web site as a service to schools that have adopted Linux as a network operating system. The site provides advice on implementation and ongoing support.

The main progress that Linux is currently making is at the server level; not as much headway has yet been made in the desktop/workstation area. With Linux also being adapted for use in some educational institutions in countries where English is not a first language, and with the open-source code, it is being suggested that students in the schools might become the frontline of programmers in developing Linux software applications.



Screen shots from an online search of COL's Information Resource Centre

Linux software is available as a free download (through the World Wide Web) or from distributors such as Red Hat Software that distribute Linux at a cost of US\$50 for a pair of installation CDs and a manual. Red Hat's version of Linux can be copied from system to system as many times as necessary at no extra charge.

Linux is a Unix-like programme that is said to be more reliable, adaptable and efficient than commercial operating system software. These qualities also make Linux a good choice for use on older, less expensive computer equipment (after checking Y2K compliance!).

Using Linux software, COL has been able to host its Pan-Commonwealth Forum virtual conferences and other e-mail forums on an old 486/66 server.

Linux Online: www.linux.com
 Red Hat Software, Inc.: www.redhat.com
 Scholar Net programme in Mexico: www.nuclecu.unam.mx/~arturo/scholar
 Linux in Schools Project: www.riverdale.k12.or.us/linux/k12linux

Online library catalogues

COL recently converted its Information Resource Centre (IRC) cataloguing system to run on new web-based software, which allows it to be available for searching by anyone, at any time through the World Wide Web.

This was completed after an evaluation of a number of library software packages. The software selected, called WebSuite, includes a cataloguing module, an online public access catalogue (OPAC), database configuration and conversion tools and a serials control module. It is produced by a Canadian company, Best-Seller Inc., which is a leading North American supplier of year-2000 compliant library software and services. WebSuite is aimed primarily at small libraries although the company produces software for large libraries operating on UNIX or NT platforms.

As an introduction and/or for libraries wishing to create an entry-level, web-based OPAC from their catalogue, Best-Seller offers its WebSuite Start programme as a free-of-charge download. The software includes a configuration tool to convert an existing catalogue (MARC, dbase format, ASCII label, or ODBC) to a web-ready OPAC; a keyword search engine with boolean operators ("and", "or", "begins with"); Bibcat, a cataloguing tool for bibliographic records; Sitecat, a cataloguing tool for Web sites; and WebSuite Start Server, a standard http server that can run on all windows platforms.

COL's OPAC can be accessed through: www.col.org/irc

Best-Seller, Inc.: www.bestseller.com
 e-mail: info@bestseller.com
 (English or French)

EdTech News

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