Revive and revitalise education for the COVID-19 generation

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the greatest disruptions in modern history, affecting the lives of students, teachers and entire communities.

According to new data from UNESCO, one year into the crisis, more than half the world’s students still face significant disruptions to their education. Digital infrastructure challenges continue to exacerbate existing inequalities, and teachers need ongoing support to effectively harness technology to meet their students’ needs.

Over the past year, COL has been instrumental in helping Member States revive and revitalise education and lifelong learning. COL supported Nigerian universities to go dual-mode and provided assistance to integrate distance and technology-enabled learning in institutions in Antigua and Barbuda, Kenya and Malaysia.

COL also helped to integrate employability into the curriculum in Zambia and to develop online safety and privacy policies at the University of Rwanda. A video-on-demand service aligned to the curriculum needs of the Pacific Island States was launched to improve STEM outcomes for students in the region.

COL has provided resources, tools and expertise towards skills development for sustainable recovery across the Commonwealth. Capacity-building efforts have included training in the areas of cybersecurity, virtual labs for science teachers, inclusive-education MOOCs, and technology solutions for farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

In the last 12 months, it has become increasingly clear that education and lifelong learning will be at the centre of the post-pandemic “reset” — keys to creating inclusive, safe and sustainable societies that will be resilient in the face of future crises. COL will continue to support Member States to gear their education systems towards this goal.

“In the last 12 months, it has become increasingly clear that education and lifelong learning will be at the centre of the post-pandemic ‘reset.’”
COL President at the Nobel Week Dialogue

Professor Asha Kanwar was invited to participate in the Nobel Week Dialogue, which is organised annually as part of the official Nobel Week programme. The event brought together eight Nobel Laureates and leading experts in a variety of disciplines from across the world for insightful discussions about the role of learning and education in building inclusive and resilient societies. Speaking about the benefits of open and distance learning (ODL), Professor Kanwar noted that it can increase access to education, reduce costs and improve quality — all with a lower carbon footprint. She spoke about the importance of ODL in bridging divides and contributing to equitable outcomes.

You can watch the Dialogue recording here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwK10jkI2K0

New Zealand-COL partnership for the Pacific

With funding from New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, COL launched the Pacific Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning. The five-year project aims to enhance the capacity and efficiency of the Pacific education sector through greater use of innovative delivery mechanisms and technology. This new initiative will support young people, women and persons with disabilities to build skills in ways that allow them to be engaged and productive workers and citizens. It is implemented in partnership with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development, hosted by the University of the South Pacific.

Presenting the new initiative to local audiences, the Honourable Rosy Akbar encouraged teachers across the country to take advantage of materials available via the new platform and integrate them into their daily classroom practices. She expressed hope that this will improve STEM outcomes for Fiji students.
Building resilience in The Bahamas

In an online ceremony, Professor Asha Kanwar ‘handed’ over 30 Aptus devices and 300 tablets to the Honourable Jeffrey Lloyd, Minister of Education, The Bahamas to help build education resilience in his country. These tools were recently delivered to the education ministry for use by local schools that are still grappling with the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian. COL’s contribution will be directed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students, who have limited access to devices and the Internet or are in environments that are not conducive to academic engagement.

Virtual labs for Maldives educators

In collaboration with the National Institute of Education, Maldives, CEMCA organised an online capacity-building training on virtual labs for teachers and teacher educators. The event brought together 194 educators in the areas of physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. Participants were welcomed by the Honourable Fathimath Naseer, Minister of State for Education, Maldives, who emphasised the usefulness of virtual labs for reaching teachers and students across diverse geographies in the country.

COL presents COVID-19 response at EMAG

At the sixth meeting of the Commonwealth Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG), Professor Asha Kanwar presented key features of COL’s comprehensive response to the education challenges caused by COVID-19. The online meeting deliberated on priorities for strengthening the capacity of education systems in the Commonwealth in light of the pandemic.

COL BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr Arif Lalani
COL welcomes Mr Arif Lalani, Director General, International Organizations, Global Affairs Canada, who succeeds Mr Gort as the country’s representative to the Board of Governors.

Professor Dan Kgwadi
Professor Dan Kgwadi, Vice Chancellor and Principal of North-West University, has been appointed as the representative for South Africa to COL’s Board of Governors. He succeeds Professor Baijnath, who is now the Board Chair.

Senator Kay S. McConney
Senator Kay S. McConney, Minister of Innovation, Science and Smart Technology, Barbados, has been appointed as the Caribbean representative to the Board of Governors.

Mr Michael Gort
COL is grateful to outgoing board member Mr Michael Gort for his valuable contributions to COL. Mr Gort served on the board from 2018 to 2020.

Mr Hubert Charles
COL appreciates outgoing board member Mr Hubert Charles for his close engagement with and strong support of COL’s work. Mr Charles served on the board from 2015 to 2020.
Online co-design workshop

An online co-design workshop for decision makers, classroom practitioners and teacher trainers from Jamaica, Kenya and Uganda marked the launch of a project aimed to build capacity in inclusive education. Organised in partnership with The Open University, UK, it initiated the development of two massive open online courses on inclusive education: *Inclusive Teaching and Learning* and *Creating an Inclusive School*. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to design material that is contextually relevant and meets the professional development needs of practitioners in inclusive education.

Inclusive teaching and learning

Although policies on inclusive teaching have been enacted in many countries, teachers still need support, resources and training in order to practise true inclusion that transcends all learner needs in the classroom. This was the key focus of the MOOC offered by COL and the team from The Open University’s TESSA programme, which brought together 328 participants from across the Commonwealth. This course was the first of a pair that draws on the UNICEF Wave Model for inclusive education.

**Coming up:**

The second course in the inclusive education series starts 12 April. It supports professionals in working together to create an inclusive ethos and culture and to collaborate with stakeholders for the benefit of all learners, but particularly those with a special educational need.

To register, please visit: https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=455

**Indian bank officials embrace L3F**

COL has partnered with the Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Bank, India to train its staff in aspects of the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) model. During a two-day orientation programme, the bank’s senior and mid-level officials were introduced to the processes and analytics of learning using mobile devices. This partnership adds a new dimension to L3F by bringing in the co-operative sector as a stakeholder in informal learning, thereby raising awareness about the importance of building cognitive social capital as the basis for improved credit management.

**Scaling TVET in Zambia**

COL is assisting Zambia to upskill tradespersons to improve their own lives and help grow the country’s economy. In the framework of its Skills in Demand model for scaling TVET using a blend of workplace plus online learning, COL facilitated training for master craftspersons from the Nakadoli Furniture Makers Cooperative (NFMC). Having developed pedagogical skills and health and safety awareness, NFMC master craftspersons will now apply this knowledge in the workplace as they train their apprentices towards formal qualifications.

**Secretary-General speaks on women’s leadership**

Professor Asha Kanwar moderated a webinar with the participation of the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Right Honourable Patricia Scotland QC. Organised as part of the CommonwealthWiseWomen online series, it focused on the ways to develop women’s leadership skills. The Right Honourable Patricia Scotland provided examples of women’s leadership from the Commonwealth and beyond and stressed the importance of inclusivity as a driver of change.

You can watch the webinar recording here: https://www.commonwealthwisewomen.org/mentoring-women-for-leadership/
Empowering women for COVID-19 challenges

COL has been working with Youth Aid Education and Possible Changes Organization (YAPO) in Tanzania to build the capacity of local women and girls to respond to the challenges arising from COVID-19. A total of 1,000 learners will benefit from vocational and life-skills courses using technology-enabled learning.

One of the beneficiaries is 18-year-old Amina Abrahamu (below), whose dreams of becoming a décor designer had been shattered by the pandemic. Having heard about COL’s project over the radio, Amina decided to register in YAPO courses on liquid soap making, fashion design, décor and ICT. She has acquired the skills and knowledge needed for the labour market and is now working to strengthen her start-up business.

In Mozambique, COL has been helping ADPP (a Mozambican non-governmental association) train 1,000 women and girls in business management and entrepreneurship. The goal is to help trainees strengthen their existing business or start new income-generating activities, thereby increasing the resilience of local communities to COVID-19.

Génia Artur Devo, who is 22 years old, runs a small business selling second-hand clothes. She attended the ADPP record-keeping and financial-management module as well as courses in marketing. Génia has learnt how to manage finances and market products using various channels, including social-media advertising. She is already reporting an increase in income.

Video-based learning for Kenya

COL has been working with Elimu TV (Kenya) to ensure learning continuity in the face of COVID-19 by using video-based educational content. This collaboration has resulted in more than 20,000 independent views of relevant content in just eight weeks, in addition to an estimated 150,000 views for each live broadcast. Accessible in multiple ways, including via mobile devices, each resource typically focuses on one curriculum topic at a time and combines digital text, graphics, audio and video. COL plans to use feedback from learners and teachers to improve the content already shared, identify and address curriculum gaps, and augment the resources for topics that learners find particularly difficult.

You can watch the videos here:

https://www.youtube.com/user/elimudigitalmedia/videos

Competencies in promoting gender equality

COL launched a capacity-building programme for its partners to advance gender equality in their workplaces and in the communities that they serve. The programme spans four Commonwealth regions — Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific — and involves 11 organisations. A series of online workshops focuses on developing competencies in promoting gender-equal roles and relations for women/girls and men/boys, countering negative gender stereotypes and integrating a gender perspective into development programming. COL’s programme can also serve other development organisations in their efforts to build capacity in gender equality and women’s empowerment.

JL4D seeks contributions

Contributions are invited for the Journal of Learning for Development, which focuses on innovations in learning — in particular, but not exclusively, open and distance learning and its role in development. Contributions can take the form of research articles, case studies, commentaries and reports from the field. Please visit the journal’s website for more details and to submit work:

www.jl4d.org
In their own words

Since the launch of the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative in May 2020, over 150,000 Commonwealth citizens have gained access to free online courses taught by highly reputed professors and mentors from top universities and companies around the world. With a selection of 5,000 courses in 400 specialisations, attuned to employability, learners were able to gain new skills in the face of job market disruptions caused by COVID-19. For many, this was a transformative experience.

‘Ilaisaane Lololhea Manu (Tonga) appreciated an opportunity to learn new ideas, skills and techniques and meet new friends. She managed to complete 18 courses, which she called an investment in personal and professional development. She is now determined to bring innovative methods and solutions to the work that she does, for the wider benefit of Tonga.

Johnstone Muruka (Kenya) is an environmentalist and an entrepreneur who has taken 18 online courses after joining the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative. The skills and knowledge he gained helped him develop his own environmental business to make cleaner living spaces by converting everyday waste into sustainable fuel, as recommended in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Johnstone was nominated for an award for youth-led business initiatives that mitigate the consequences of COVID-19.

Runi Chakma (Bangladesh) is a first-generation learner from an indigenous community. She understands full well the importance of developing skills for her future professional life. Obtaining completion certificates from universities around the world boosted her self-confidence. Runi identified “writing professional emails in English” and “communicating in the workplace” as some of the newly developed competencies that increased her chances of getting a job.

Ronelle Biscombe (Saint Lucia) is a teacher by training. She enjoyed the variety of offerings, exploring courses ranging from Chinese for Beginners to those focusing on business. Ronelle has also improved her skills in teaching English to non-native speakers and is currently completing studies in teaching French as a second language. The programme inspired her to think innovatively, and she now sees opening her own business as a new possibility for her future.

Digital content development in Trinidad and Tobago

In partnership with the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, COL is scaling up the Open and Innovative Schooling model in the country, with a focus on training teachers to be digital content developers and online facilitators. During the virtual launch of this new partnership phase, the Honourable Minister of Education, Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, noted that the move to digital resources and online teaching had been a way both to address the challenges of the pandemic and to update pedagogy. Over the coming months, COL will support the ministry to develop an open schooling policy and model and will facilitate additional training in pedagogy as well as monitoring and evaluation for local educators.

New videos on online learning from Tony Bates

In collaboration with COL, Dr Tony Bates has produced a new video series on the key issues in online and digital learning. Taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the videos focus on such areas as developing quality blended learning courses, digital learning and the new economy, new learning technologies and their potential/limitations for teaching and learning, as well as online learning in the K-12 school system.

The videos are available on COL’s YouTube channel at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1iAFP53Zbc

Dr Tony Bates 5-PART SERIES
Self-directed learning offers flexible ways to access education and can help learners cope with COVID-19 disruptions. It calls for the development of skills such as the following:

1. **Creating a self-management plan:** Creating a self-management plan with clear goals and timelines will provide direction and structure for meaningful engagement.

2. **Managing time:** Effective time management helps learners plan when they will engage with their studies. For younger learners, this might be during normal school hours while at home. For others, effective study time could include overnight and/or during weekends.

3. **Managing resources:** Knowing where to find useful open content, being able to adapt it for particular learning purposes, and being clear about how to share what has been taken from online sources and adapted for sharing require the development of some new open resource management skills.

4. **Managing processes:** In addition to learning about curriculum subject content, learners also need to become familiar with the tools that will be used to manage teaching, learning and assessment processes.

5. **Managing the environment:** A lot of self-directed learning takes place in the context of the home, where many distractions are possible. So there is a need to manage the new learning environment at home, with parents and other caregivers playing a key role.


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**Podcasting for innovative classrooms**

To promote the co-creation of audio-based resources for learning in low-resource settings, COL has launched “Educational Podcasting for Innovative Classrooms” (EPIC). It includes online podcast streaming as well as collaboration spaces for in-country teacher communities of practice. There is also a podcast portal for teacher-generated content, a teacher professional development and community area, as well as links to other resources for teacher professional development. Currently, EPIC has country groups for Kiribati, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

For more information on how to become a member, please visit: [https://epic.colvee.org/](https://epic.colvee.org/) or email teachered@colfinder.org

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**Coming up:**

- **29 March to 30 April 2021**
  *The Blue Economy: Blue Space*
  To register, please visit: [https://www.mooc4dev.org/BlueEconomy4](https://www.mooc4dev.org/BlueEconomy4)

- **12 April to 7 May 2021**
  *Planning a Family and Intergenerational Literacy and Learning (FILL) Programme*
  This is an invitation-only course. For more information, please e-mail: teachered@colfinder.org
Building skills for business success

Celestine Omondi (Kenya) credits COL with equipping her with the skills and knowledge to improve her own life and create livelihood opportunities for others. Widowed with four children in her care, Celestine was looking for ways to support her family and started working at a local school before opening her own early childhood education centre. With enrollments growing, she sought new resources to expand the premises.

A life-changing break came when Celestine enrolled in a programme supported by COL, gaining knowledge about table banking and developing farming skills. With a farm input loan from the Siaya Sustainable Economic Enterprise Development Saving and Credit Cooperative Society, she started working the land and eventually purchased a half-acre plot.

Celestine was able to open the Furaha (meaning ‘happy’) Academy. Having started with 20 children and one teacher, the facility has grown to 307 pupils and 14 educators and now offers care services spanning from early years to primary school. She continues to combine her management role with farming activities and frequently uses COL’s mobile learning platform to improve her skills.

Driving change in Tuvalu’s skills sector

When Katalina Taloka was tasked with developing training materials for the newly-founded Tuvalu Atoll Science and Technology Training Institute (TASTTI) in 2018, she immediately knew where to turn for assistance.

“As a small country, Tuvalu can benefit a lot from COL’s resources and pool of experts. Knowing that there is someone out there who can help gave me motivation and confidence to take risks and try out new things,” she says.

Katalina has been involved in training learners for TASTTI qualifications using COL’s open educational resources for basic trades. An experienced educationalist, she assisted with identifying courses and modules to be taught at the institute. COL has helped her adapt available resources to the local context.

Katalina has also co-ordinated a project focusing on training workers in Tuvalu’s Public Works Department (PWD) for formal qualifications using a blend of workplace and online learning. With COL’s support, about half of the PWD workers responsible for maintaining the country’s public infrastructure will gain formal qualifications.
Assisting learners with disabilities in Mauritius

Primary teacher Emily Favory works in what she calls a “mainstream” school in Mauritius, and it was a desire to help her differently-abled student that prompted her to enrol in a course developed by COL. Five-year-old Tessa had been facing speech difficulties and was often barely able to speak in the classroom.

The 12-week course on Disability Needs Assessment and Assistive Technologies taught Emily how to conduct meaningful needs assessments and introduced her to free and accessible assistive technologies.

Following the course, Emily was able to assess Tessa’s needs and identify an approach that works best. She is now combining a text-to-speech application and group work to enable Tessa to communicate and interact with her peers.

As a result of her teacher’s efforts, Tessa has become more confident and independent in the classroom. She is now able to scan words or phrases from a book and have the app “read” them back to her, a process designed to increase the young girl’s recognition and comprehension.

Emily shared her experience with other teachers during a pedagogical meeting and plans to become more familiar with other assistive tools.

Minimising cyber risks for teachers and learners

A chemistry teacher in South Trinidad, Patricia Maharaj recently completed Cybersecurity Training for Teachers (CTT), a free online course developed and offered by COL. She has found the skills and knowledge gained during the course to be very helpful in making her online teaching better.

Since her students were preparing for exams when schools closed due to COVID-19, Patricia realised that she needed a platform to continue working with them. This led her to discover a host of tools that made her lessons interactive and kept the students engaged. She is using the knowledge gained from the CTT course to keep herself and her learners safe.

Having taken this course, Patricia feels that it is relevant not only to online learning but also to the daily activities that she and her colleagues conduct online, considering that most organisations have moved their services online.

“After completing this training, I definitely feel more confident, and I will incorporate the knowledge gained to assist my co-workers to feel safer while teaching and learning online,” she says.

Empowered woman becomes community role model

Until Rumeisha (to the left) became involved with COL, she would rarely leave the house. This young woman from a village in Sri Lanka was raised in a traditional culture and would manage her day-to-day life with a minimal income brought in by her husband and occasional sewing orders.

A life-changing break came after she met with a representative from the Women’s Development Centre, COL’s partner in Sri Lanka. Rumeisha was invited to participate in a training programme aimed at developing women’s livelihood and business skills. She was able to build self-confidence and obtain skills that allowed her to become a sewing instructor for the Industrial Development Board in her village.

Rumeisha is proud that she was able to “find herself” with support from COL. Despite pandemic-induced disruptions and being pregnant with her second child, she is determined to succeed. In 2020, she started a sewing class for women from her community. A total of 25 of Rumeisha’s students have already graduated and are selling good-quality garments locally.

Empowering Learning
The Open University of Cyprus (OUC) was established in 2002 as a public university and is the country’s only university dedicated exclusively to distance education. Open and distance education, lifelong learning for all, unrestricted access to education, flexible learning paths, appropriate use of emerging educational technologies, strategic focus on research, progressive thinking, constant improvement, and attention to quality and excellence are in our DNA. OUC’s objectives are to grow as a student-centred, digital and inclusive open university, and to give unrestricted access to quality higher education to people from around the world, anytime, from anywhere, regardless of their age, status, time availability, residence or life circumstances.

At the Open University of Cyprus, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to higher education. OUC’s flexible distance learning methodology supports people’s need for continuous enhancement of their qualifications apropos of personal development and career advancement, allowing students to customise their own educational path. With an enrolment of approximately 3,700 students in the 2020/21 academic year, and an alumni community reaching nearly 7,000 graduates, OUC offers accredited bachelor, master and PhD programmes in both “classical” and “cutting-edge” scientific areas across three faculties — Humanities & Social Sciences, Pure & Applied Sciences and Economic Sciences & Management. In promoting lifelong learning, OUC provides opportunities for the continual development of new skills and competencies through stand-alone Thematic Units (short courses) and vocational programmes, so that people can respond and adapt to new challenges in the labour market and changes in society.

OUC leverages the powers of digital technologies in education and offers its students a continuously evolving online environment in a state-of-the-art eLearning platform called eClass, which supports virtual classes. OUC’s aspiration to constantly improve students’ learning experience has led over the years to the introduction of virtual labs, the smart use of existing technologies, and the development of new eLearning simulation applications using gamification and Internet of Things elements in distance learning, allowing students to test their knowledge in real-world conditions and engage more actively in learning processes. For these innovative applications, OUC received Gold Awards in 2019 and 2020 for “Best Learning Experience” at the Cyprus Education Leaders Awards.

OUC’s aspiration is to make a positive national and international impact through the work conducted by its faculties, programmes and personnel. Thus, in addition to delivering quality and inclusive education and making lifelong learning for all a reality, OUC places significant emphasis on research. In the context of its internationalisation strategy, OUC develops mutually beneficial partnerships to offer joint degrees; engage in multilateral research and educational projects; provide mobility opportunities for its students and staff; participate in or co-host workshops, conferences and other scientific and cultural events; and reap benefits from its involvement in international university networks and associations. Since the Open University of Cyprus admitted its first students in 2006, a lot has changed: labour market demands and conditions, the world’s economies, societies, human interactions and communication. But OUC remains committed to grasping new opportunities, tackling the challenges of online education, leveraging the powers of digital technologies and engaging in ambitious partnerships to: a) deliver quality and inclusive education, b) foster opportunities for lifelong learning and continual professional development, c) promote rigorous research that addresses national and global challenges and drives intellectual advances, and d) impact society in a transformative way.

At the Open University of Cyprus, we are looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead, and we are committed to resilient partnerships to contribute to a more robust, vibrant and transformative future for global higher education.
Teaching maths with technology

COL’s innovative course aiming to skill maths teachers to offer engaging online learning has brought together over 1,350 educators from 54 countries. *Teaching Mathematics with Technology* was developed to help teachers improve their skills in creating digital resources promoting student-centred pedagogy and in offering engaging learning experiences. Due to the central role of mathematics in the school curricula of most countries, the use of technology in teaching this subject has taken on a new urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The course has demonstrated the need for teachers to be aware of subject-related OER as well as the tools to create teaching resources to improve classroom practice, irrespective of the delivery mode.

Workshops on digital assessment

Drawing from current research and practice, COL Chairs Professor Mpine Makoe of the University of South Africa and Professor George Veletsianos of Royal Roads University, Canada led a workshop as part of COL’s online series on digital assessment. It brought together 228 participants and focused on learner-centred design as the key driver for digital assessment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an accelerated uptake of digital learning solutions to develop “21st-century” knowledge, skills and competencies. Learner-centred design, the panelists argued, should drive assessment as well as the design of content and instruction. The workshop recording is available on COL’s YouTube channel at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grUTM7oSI9w&feature=youtu.be

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MOOC on sustainable development in business

In partnership with the Open University of Mauritius, COL is launching the fourth offering of this popular MOOC, with a focus on resilience and recovery. The module will be linking the SDG concepts to the pandemic. It will analyse post-COVID-19 issues and introduce strategies aimed to build a robust, resilient and more sustainable world.

To register, visit: https://www.mooc4dev.org/sdev4

COL’s course wins international award

COL’s online course *Understanding Open Educational Resources* won a prestigious Brandon Hall Group Silver Award for excellence in the Learning Management Measurement/Business Impact Tools category. The course caters to the need of teachers and policy makers to quickly learn about the merits of openly licensed educational resources and has been used by over 13,000 people worldwide since 2018.

The course can be accessed at https://learnoer.col.org/

Employment pathways for young Nigerians

With support from COL, the Yaba College of Technology (Yabatech) has been managing a programme contributing to the development of skills that Nigeria needs to boost its economy and benefit millions of its citizens. Tapping into informal apprenticeships, it creates new employment pathways for young Nigerians. The focus is on upskilling technicians for computer and mobile phone repair and maintenance, with a view to boosting their knowledge and helping them get formal recognition for their skills. The programme contributes to building learners’ hard and soft skills to make them more relevant to local labour markets.

COL has helped Yabatech to develop open educational resources for a blended workplace-online learning programme to be delivered in 2021. A recent workshop brought together Yabatech academics and craftspersons from Nigeria’s largest computer village. The college is also building staff capacity to mentor other TVET institutes in blended learning. Informal industry associations from other industries have already reached out to Yabatech, wanting to upskill their apprentices.
Training in blended course design

COL has been assisting higher education institutions across the Commonwealth to develop capacity in technology-enabled learning.

In Antigua and Barbuda, an online workshop on Blended Course Design Using Moodle brought together 40 participants from Antigua State College (ASC) to build the capacity of teachers to use the Moodle learning management system to create blended and online courses. As a result, 13 blended courses have been developed on ASC’s Moodle platform.

In Kenya, 23 staff members of Kibabii University (KIBU) participated in Blended Course Design Using Moodle. At the end of the training, 16 blended courses were initiated for further development on KIBU’s Moodle platform.

Regional Centres offer online capacity building

Prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, COL’s Regional Centres have pivoted toward an online model for their capacity-building efforts. In the West Africa sub-region, COL and RETRIDOL co-ordinated a six-part online series with the participation of higher education institutions from Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone. In the Southern African Development Community, COL and SADC-CDE co-ordinated a similar event, bringing together institutions engaged in open schooling from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Tanzania. The focus in each engagement was on capacity building for technology-enabled learning, with the aim of developing and delivering online courses. The Regional Centres and COL are now working with these institutions to implement action plans developed during these activities.

Training of trainers in Belize

With COL’s support, the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, Belize organised a three-week online training of trainers to develop the local capacity of digital education leaders. As part of the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme, it brought together teachers from 44 schools in Belize. Currently, C-DELTA in Belize focuses on providing orientation for teachers and students wishing to use open educational resources to develop relevant knowledge and skills.

ODL accreditation standards for Lesotho

A blended policy development workshop at the Council of Higher Education, Lesotho aimed at developing the National Programme Accreditation Standards for ODL. The workshop was facilitated with COL’s support and brought together 55 participants. As a result, draft accreditation standards have been finalised.

To learn more, visit: https://www.col.org/working-with-us

APPLY FOR YOUTH INTERNSHIPS

COL offers internships of up to 12 months to young citizens of Commonwealth countries, in support of learning for sustainable development. Internships are available remotely, at COL headquarters in Metro Vancouver, Canada, at the office of CEMCA in New Delhi, India, or in a combined remote and on-site way. This is a non-compensated, full-time engagement. Interns will be expected to work on various activities within the framework of COL’s Strategic Plan. The deadline for applications is 30 June 2021.
**Employability strategy for Moi University, Kenya**

COL has supported Moi University (MU) to develop an institutional employability strategy and training on competency-based curriculum development. A SWOT analysis has been completed, leading to the development of an employability strategy. As well, COL has assisted with drafting the competency-based curriculum mapping for MU’s School of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management and the School of Business.

**Quality assurance for University of Buea, Cameroon**

COL is actively working with African universities to implement quality assurance processes, most recently at the University of Buea (UB) in Cameroon. A five-day workshop at the university’s Distance Education Unit aimed to develop quality guidelines for distance education provision, as well as an implementation plan for the quality assurance policy that had been developed at UB with COL’s support. Participants welcomed an opportunity to grow their expertise in the area of quality assurance and expressed interest in additional training in this area.

**COL facilitates collaboration between Zambia and Namibia**

A blended learning workshop on digital assessment at Copperbelt University (CBU) in Zambia was led by the University of Namibia’s ODeL Director. Participants included 30 CBU staff as well as personnel from the Zambia Qualifications Authority, the Higher Education Authority, the Examination Council of Zambia, Muzuka University and Zambia ICT College. As a result, ten online/distance learning assessments are being developed at CBU with COL support.

**TEL Benchmarking at UMS, Malaysia**

The Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is the first institution to use COL’s Technology-Enabled Learning Benchmarking Toolkit to assess its TEL implementation across ten domains. COL has been providing ongoing support to UMS to build its capacity to integrate blended learning in the courses offered at the university. A three-month benchmarking activity involved over 50 teachers and resulted in an “action plan” highlighting goals and areas to further mainstream TEL at UMS.

**Micro-courses on youth development**

With COL’s support, the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development has developed a series of micro-courses on youth development. The course on Engaging Pacific Youths in Their Communities brought together over 300 learners, and the training on Youth and the Climate Crisis garnered the interest of nearly 600 learners. Other courses in the series will be rolled out in succession through June 2021. Learners who complete five of the six micro-courses will earn a micro-credential to demonstrate their professional development.

**Discussion series on open schooling**

COL launched an online discussion series with insights into the need for, nature of and possible ways to effectively implement open schooling. Based on COL’s new publication Open Schooling: Addressing the Learning Needs of Out-of-School Children and Youths through the Expansion of Open Schooling, the series will be of interest to education system planners and teachers grappling with the challenges of remote teaching in the face of COVID-19 and beyond. The online series is available at:


**Coming up:**

- 12 April: Health and Well-being: Issues for Youth
- 17 May: Youth Entrepreneurship
- 21 June: Good Governance in Youth Organisations

https://learn.uspglobal.usp.ac.fj/courses?topic=youth-work or email info@col.org
Raising our kids by “educating” them worked really well in the 20th century. So well, in fact, that most people today want to continue it into the 21st century (with, of course, some incremental reforms). But that would be a mistake, because for the 21st century — and 21st-century kids — 20th-century education, even reformed, can no longer do the job we need. It has “gone lame” in the sense of a horse who has been injured and is unable to walk or run. Twentieth-century education is inadequate to prepare our young people for the current century and beyond.

LAME is an apt acronym for what the world’s education system has become: Learning Applied to Mastering an old curriculum for Existing employment. The world’s 20th-century education is a “LAME” system for raising 21st-century kids. It may still work for a few, perhaps — but certainly not all. Most kids we have to force through it.

Empowerment vs. education
The problem with 20th-century education lies not in its details, but in its essence. The approach is built around the concept of making people better via learning in advance. That was a decent strategy when the world changed slowly and real-world accomplishment by kids was far off into their future. But young people’s capabilities have changed dramatically, and our kids are now far more powerful, far earlier.

The new alternative — 21st-century “empowerment” — is built around making young people better via real-world accomplishments with immediate impact. Learning still occurs, but empowerment views learning as a means, not an end. Its philosophy is that we learn in order to accomplish useful things (at least, most of us do). Those who don’t — and who view learning also as an end in itself — we call “academics.” Somehow, over time, the academics managed to hijack the entire 20th-century world into thinking that “learning for its own sake” is what all kids need, and that this is enough to prepare them for their futures.

It is not. While there is no need to stop offering “academic education” for those who thrive on it, the new 21st-century need, across the entire world, is for our empowered kids to become useful in the real, non-school world, starting when they are very young. I am not talking here about “vocational ed” or “exploitation” — rather, I am talking about kids’ new ability to get things done with their newly acquired powers. I am arguing that although many adults may consider academics to be better or higher, other new, and far more empowering, alternatives are emerging.

The world now needs an empowering upbringing that is different from what was called “getting an education” in the 20th century, very different from academics. In this century, the new empowerment option — where kids practise getting things done in whatever area(s) interest them, suit them and make them happy, from toddlerhood to post-adolescence — should be the preferred route for our kids. I predict it will become so, as new, empowering alternatives arise and develop. The academic route will remain for the few it suits. We will still need it — just not for most.

FAR better
In the 21st century, empowerment is an alternative now emerging. It is based on kids continually:

Finding their new empowering beliefs, unique value, new connections and new 21st-century powers,

Applying these to make a positive impact while still young, and doing meaningful work that creates and adds value for humanity all their life,

and thereby

Realising their positive dreams for themselves, their families and their world.

That is why it is “FAR” better than the “LAME” 20th-century alternative. It is time for the world to go there.

We need to create “Empowerment Hubs”
We need to look at creating a new side-by-side alternative to the schools we now have. One good name for these is “Empowerment Hubs.” Such hubs are now forming — and being defined as an alternative for parents and kids — on every continent. Each will be different and distinct, but they will all differentiate themselves from education and schools by focusing on the FAR better goals of achieving self-knowledge, accomplishing with impact, and realising kids’ dreams — not ours.
NEW RESOURCES

Sustainable Development and Education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)
This publication aims to sensitisre readers to ideas, approaches and challenges for integrating 4IR technologies into learning modalities. It offers recommendations for countries at all stages of development, with some focus on the role of 4IR in education for sustainable development.
http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3698

Creating New Opportunities for Women and Girls: Enhancing Women’s and Girls’ Success in Technical and Vocational Education
This policy brief makes recommendations for increasing women’s and girls’ participation in employment-related skills training and identifies gender-responsive approaches to improve their retention and success in TVET.
http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3732

A Guide for Implementing a Quality Assurance Institutional Review Tool for Blended Learning
The purpose of the Review Tool is to help institutions enhance their capacity to develop and deliver quality blended learning courses for students. It also serves to support an individual institution’s progress towards building a sustainable culture to embrace blended learning.
http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3734

Addressing Gendered Consequences of COVID-19 in Education and Training
This policy brief provides insights into the effects of COVID-19 on girls and women. The authors call on policy makers to design equitable interventions for pandemic response and recovery that are gender transformative and protect human rights.
http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3725
#TECH TRENDS

Towards accessible augmented reality technologies for TVET

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions in all fields of human endeavour, and education has been the hardest hit, at all levels. Many face-to-face institutions have pivoted to some form of technology-mediated delivery, with online education coming to the forefront. However, technical and vocational training institutions have faced an insurmountable barrier, since most of their offerings seek to develop practical skills that require some element of hands-on training. Theoretical components of such training can conceivably be imparted through online means, but the equipment and materials required to address the hands-on component necessitate the provision of a physical environment.

While video content has been widely used as a learning support, especially to demonstrate practical techniques, it has not proven to be a substitute for practical training. One interesting alternative to hands-on instruction could be the introduction of augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) techniques into technical and vocational training.

AR allows the student to interactively experience a real-world environment where actual objects are enhanced with computer-generated information that can take on or more of many forms, such as visible, audible, etc. For example, a student using AR glasses while working on an automobile engine would be able to see instructions showing how much and in which order the bolts should be tightened, without the student having to refer to a paper manual.

Virtual reality, on the other hand, has the capability of bringing the laboratory to the student. Thus, students could experience a full 360-degree view of the same engine and manipulate its various components from their classroom (or even their home) without being anywhere near an actual engine! VR also has the capability of allowing students to “virtually” walk through hazardous environments that would otherwise be impossible to experience. Combining this with haptic feedback can make the training extremely realistic. Good examples of such environments are the simulators used for training airline pilots.

Another huge advantage of these technologies is the possibility for the student to repeat a practical experience as many times as needed to master a particular skill, without any additional inconvenience or expense. However, these environments do come with a price tag. Typical AR/VR systems utilise very large amounts of bandwidth and computing power. These would have to become more affordable by several orders of magnitude for these technologies to become mainstream, especially in TVET systems, which are typically financially constrained.

The second major barrier to widespread acceptance is the absence of agreed standards for rich content. Without standards, every purveyor of AR/VR content develops materials for its own needs and requirements, giving no thought to the reuse or repurposing of such content. With standards firmly established, however, one could easily envisage a brand new ecosystem of AR/VR open educational resources.

The world now realises that technology-enabled learning has become an integral part of the teaching/learning landscape, and blended approaches — online and in person — will be the new norm. However, this does raise the possibility of widening the gap between technologically advanced countries and the rest. Add the above AR/VR technologies and the gap could easily become a gaping chasm, uncrossable except by a few. A revolutionary reduction in bandwidth and computation costs will be required to ensure an equitable distribution of skills and knowledge across the globe.

“With standards firmly established, one could easily envisage a brand new ecosystem of AR/VR open educational resources.”

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