

# Summary: Children and Young People

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*by Frances Ferreira and Helena Fehr  
Commonwealth of Learning*

*Delivered by Frances Ferreira*

From one session at PCF1 in Brunei Darrusalem to a fully fledged Theme at PCF5 in London, that is indeed progress for Children and youth! May I, on behalf of my colleague and fellow theme leader, Helena Fehr and myself, congratulate the PCF5 Executive for their wisdom in making this decision and also for having asked us to chair this very stimulating theme?

Carol Bellamy in her keynote framing the discussions around children and young people, when referring to the 12 year old Oscar said:

at stake is the collective human potential and **hope** of Oscar and millions of other children like him who have so much to contribute to their communities and their nations, and while countries around the world have committed themselves, through the MDGs and Dakar Declaration, to the international goals of universal primary education by 2015, **quality** education remains a distant dream for far too many children across the globe.

And she posed a question:

What will it take to close this inexcusable gap?

Ladies and gentleman, in trying to answer this question and many others, we organized the CYP theme was under 6 thematic sessions, namely

1. Open Schools: Assessing the impact in reaching the marginalized communities, and also
2. Expanding access to pretertiary and vocational education and training
3. Innovation in curriculum and assessment: rethinking Higher education
4. And using technologies to improve teaching and learning

5. Appropriate technologies, integrating multimedia packages
6. Networks and resources for learners in difficult circumstances and rural areas
7. Organizational development: Innovative approaches to strengthen teachers

Of course we could not find answers to all our questions, but the keynote speaker on Monday was also kind enough to offer one such a solution when she said

"The key to Education for All lies in the **tapestry of new and innovative partnerships**.

I am pleased to report that one of the strands which emerged from discussions under this theme was **collaboration**. One way for collaboration is the effective deployment and use of technology in programmes that focus on children and young people. However, we were advised that if we want to use technology for collaboration in developing programmes for children and youth, it should be appropriate and culturally relevant. One participant put it so aptly when he said, **we should live in the world our students do!** WE must use the tools they identify with, and special reference was made to mobile technology at various stages, and Community radio to reach child workers and other vulnerable groups, while North South Collaboration with the BBC and the rest of the commonwealth came out specifically.

Mr. Chairman, while Sir John Daniel was quoted as saying we should turn the digital divide into the digital dividend, we were again challenged by Carol Belamy when she said that Open and distance learning is **more than closing the digital divide**, as real as it is. **It's a critical part of closing the human rights divide** between those who will grow up literate - with skills, possibilities, and hope - and those who will not.

This morning Professor Pityana referred to instances where qualifications are not relevant to development needs. Interestingly, in his response to the Asa Briggs Lecture, Lord Asa Briggs made a comparison between his degree in accounting and that of professor Brenda Gourly's, significant about his statement is, that if our curriculum is not tailored to the learning needs of learners, the learned will find them selves in a world that no longer exists. In this context The CYP participants agreed that we should focus on the development of a **community** of practice in teacher education, while focusing on **curriculums** which will provide youths with employable skills, while alleviating poverty.

Open schools offer the opportunity to develop a diverse **curriculum** tailored to the individuals learning need, while also addressing development need of the country. In this regard it was suggested that we exploit appropriate technologies such as community radio/internet and print, mobile technology to develop **OERs** which could not only improve access and enhance quality, but which could also be used to reach vulnerable groups.

The participants acknowledged the fact that there is substantial expertise in open schooling in the south which could with the help of the COL facilitate South-North transfer.

Another trend which emerged this morning in Professor Sanjaya Mishra's talk in the session Organizational development :Innovative approaches to strengthen teachers and ODL practitioners is **sustainability**, for us to ensure sustainable ODL institutions which will respond to the needs of

children and young people we should ensure that we have a **competent trained cadre of staff**. He stated that while the debate on distance education as a discipline is a matter of the past (where he quotes Sparks/Rumble/Holmberg and others) the issue still threatens the sustainable development and progress of distance education as a mode applied in all domains of knowledge and learning. He said that without serious considerations for the **human resources** requirements vis-a-vis the spread of ODL, the **quality** is being compromised.

Where do we go from here??? There are some questions left unanswered and we hope 2010 India we will be able to answer whether:

1. ODL through the use of non traditional technologies and approaches, can be transformational in relation to established culture norms, eg, gender roles?
2. How do we involve the youth to inform us of their needs and preference which can enhance the learning process?
3. How do we as a Commonwealth community take care of the multilingual environment?  
Especially when talking about collaboration?

Finally, it is our hope that at that time we will not only talk about the possibilities of OERs to increase access and improve quality, but that we will be able to make available OERs for Secondary education in all Commonwealth countries.

I thank you.