JAMAICA CONFERENCE INSPIRES, EDUCATES

COL’S FOURTH PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

More than 500 people from 64 countries and various international organisations gathered in beautiful Ocho Rios, Jamaica for COL’s Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF4) from 30 October to 3 November 2006.

Although many delegates arrived to a heavy rainstorm on the first day of the forum, the Jamaican sun shone every day after that. The Opening Ceremony featured a welcoming address by Conference Co-Chair, COL’s President Sir John Daniel. Delegates were also treated to a warm Jamaican welcome from the St. John’s Prep Dance Troupe who performed their award-winning dance, “Ketch A Fire”.

Entertaining, educational keynotes

PCF4’s three keynote speakers, from three continents, provided diverse commentaries on the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in learning, gender and education, and the use of technology for development.

Mr. Winston Cox, Alternate Executive Director, Inter-American Development Bank, and former Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, delivered COL’s Asa Briggs Lecture. He talked about how ICTs to increase participation and strengthen democracy must begin from strongly held values, such as the Commonwealth values of peace, equality, democracy and good governance. Mr. Cox discussed how the new media such as blogs can increase the transparency that makes for a better world and how other online technologies can make the processes of democracy more accessible.

Professor Penina Mlama, Executive Director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and member of COL’s Board of Governors, spoke about the challenges of improving educational access and opportunities for girls in Africa. Declaring that education is a human right, Professor Mlama noted that the world seems at a loss to reduce the huge number of illiterate adults. Since open and distance learning (ODL) programmes cannot claim any level of gender equality to date, ODL must move beyond itself and develop formulae for addressing gender inequalities in education. For the sake of our development and our dignity, she said, we must transform the deeply entrenched gender construction.

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COL’S THREE-YEAR PLAN ENDORSED BY EDUCATION MINISTERS

At their 16th triennial conference, Commonwealth Ministers of Education endorsed COL’s next Three-year Plan for 2006-2009 and pledged funding for it.

The 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers took place in Cape Town, South Africa, in December. Some COL Board members and staff were present to represent COL and report at the various meetings. They played active roles in the Stakeholder and Youth Forums that were held in parallel to the ministerial meetings.

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Dr. Sugata Mitra, Professor of Educational Technology, School of Education, Communications and Language Sciences at University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and former Senior Vice President for Research and Development at NIIT Limited, India, spoke about his idea of “outdoortrination”. Dr. Mitra challenged delegates to use ICTs for development by focusing on the poorest and least accessible areas with the best technology. A little improvement at the bottom of the pyramid will do wonders for development, he said. Dr. Mitra’s work with his “hole-in-the-wall” project – placing a computer in a slum near his office in India and monitoring how it is used – has shown the power of non-invasive education.

**TVET in Jamaica**

On the final day of PCF4, the HEART Trust/National Training Agency Jamaica invited 50 delegates to visit their hospitality training hotel and academy at Runaway Bay. Delegates were welcomed by the Executive Director of HEART Robert Gregory and by Kevin Mullings, Senior Programme Director.

The Human Employment and Resource Training (HEART) Trust was established in 1982. HEART is financed through a compulsory 3% payroll deduction levied on qualified private sector firms, supplemented by assistance from international partners. The Trust finances, develops and monitors employment-training programmes, helps place graduates in jobs and promotes employment projects. It is therefore the main TVET provider in Jamaica. HEART has been the leading trainer and provider of human resources in the hospitality and tourism sector through on-the-job training at HEART academies (like Runaway Bay) and through vocational training centres and the special programmes they provide. Several trainees on placement from HEART assisted at PCF4.

HEART utilises many of the methodologies of ODL (e.g., learning materials) and is moving to develop on-line capability. Described as “the icing on the cake” by one of the delegates, this visit provided an ideal occasion for networking and learning what is being done in Jamaica.

**Making Progress**

In his closing remarks, Sir John pointed to five key areas of progress since PCF3 in Dunedin, New Zealand in 2004:

1) **Better research**
   Presentations at PCF4 contained deeper analysis, rather than simply describing a programme or initiative. Sir John emphasised the need for a continuing focus on research to support new educational approaches. Vital developments such as open schooling need more research on their cost-effectiveness and social/educational impacts to be taken seriously by governments and donors.

2) **A more professional approach**
   Terms such as “results-based management” and “logic models” are being used more commonly and reflect more professional programme management.

3) **More participation from developing countries**
   PCF4 included far more presentations from developing countries, evidence of flourishing south-south collaboration.

4) **Integration of technology**
   We have moved beyond the “wow” factor of technology. It is being treated less as a novelty that gives interesting possibilities for the delivery of ODL and more as an integral part of our work.

5) **New issues**
   Cross-border education and open educational resources (OERs), which were hardly mentioned at PCF3, are now at the centre of debates. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is becoming a reality.

Pointing to innovations such as OERs, Sir John spoke about the need to change educational paradigms at all levels so that OERs reach their potential in transforming the cost structures of ODL. He also pledged COL’s support in continuing to focus on copyright issues to cut the costs of education and remove barriers to learning, particularly in developing countries.

He also spoke of scaling up effective COL programmes such as Lifelong Learning for Farmers (Connections, June 2006, page 1), which is improving livelihoods through partnerships in India, and the COL Media Empowerment programme (Connections, June 2006, In Focus section), which is empowering people to develop their own messages to improve health and reduce disease. The challenge for COL is to ensure these programmes replicate themselves, spreading spontaneously from village to village, from nation to nation.

**Areas of Focus at PCF4**

Open Schooling was a very hot topic at PCF4. Alternative methods of schooling are essential to meet the growing demand created by the drive for Universal Primary Education and to meet the needs for marginalised groups such as nomads, street children and AIDS orphans. Significant progress is being made by institutions such as India’s National Institute for Open Schooling and in many developing countries.

Teacher education is a related and equally urgent issue that was explored in depth at PCF4. The challenges of expanding learning of good quality at low cost for both pre- and in-service teachers was discussed in several parallel sessions, with many innovative initiatives being shared.

The Forum also looked at emerging trends such as mLearning and how ODL institutions are discovering that communication by cell phones motivates students by making them feel included. Delegates examined both the successes and failures of eLearning. Sir John pointed out the importance of moving beyond the hype of eLearning to focus on learning rather than technology in developing programmes.

“Never have I attended a conference where the level of engagement was so high,” said Sir John. He concluded by congratulating delegates for taking full advantage of PCF4 “to develop and extend our community of practice so that, collectively, we make a great contribution to achieving the development goals.”
The fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5), to be held under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), will take place in London in 2008. The announcement was made by Sir John Daniel, COL’s President and Chief Executive Officer, and Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, during the fourth biennial PCF. Sir John and Sir Graeme will be Co-Chairs of PCF5.

Organised jointly by COL and the University of London, the Forum will take place at the University’s Bloomsbury campus in central London from 13-17 July 2008. It will form part of the University’s celebration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its External Degrees programme.

About 800 practitioners, researchers, planners and policy makers who work in the fields of open/distance learning and development are expected to attend PCF5.

With the theme, “Access to Learning for Development”, the forum will provide opportunities to share experience and expertise while contributing to future thinking about access to learning. Outcomes will be relevant across the world as a contribution towards the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, the goals of Education for All (Dakar) and the Commonwealth’s objectives of peace, democracy, equality and good governance.

The University of London began conference planning with an online forum in January 2007 that explored possible topics for the conference, event structure and related issues.

www.col.org/pcf5

Keynote presentations and the 236 presented papers are available online: www.col.org/speches and http://pcf4.dec.uwi.edu/papers.php (password protection has now been removed). A book bringing together the “best of PCF4” will be published in 2007.

www.col.org/pcf4
VUSSC DEVELOPS LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Organisers of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) have developed a detailed business plan that provides direction for the next six years. This plan is the result of a meeting of government interlocutors of VUSSC member countries following the fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning held in Jamaica in November 2006.

VUSSC member country interlocutors developed targets in areas such as policy, accreditation, quality assurance, technology and funding. These targets specifically address how member states, participating institutions and VUSSC will contribute to the development and sustainability of this initiative.

The meeting in Jamaica followed a successful collaborative materials development workshop in Mauritius in August 2006. The results of their work, which produced materials in the fields of Tourism and Hospitality and Entrepreneurship both during and since the workshop are available for review and additional contributions at www.WikiEduca-tor.org.

“We made excellent progress with VUSSC in 2006,” said Mr. Paul West, COL’s Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology. “Course development is well underway, we received important financial support from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Government of Singapore, and our long-term strategy has been defined.” Member countries have been contributing substantially through the provision of skilled staff.

The idea for VUSSC originated at the Commonwealth Ministers of Education Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in 2000. Ministers from small states shared their anxiety that their countries did not have the critical mass, either of expertise or of equipment, to engage with online learning in an autonomous fashion. The Ministers thought that by working together, they might be able to create capacity for eLearning that would enable them to harness these new developments for the benefit of their peoples. They asked COL to flesh out a formal proposal.

Twenty-six small states of the Commonwealth, located in Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and the Pacific, are participating in VUSSC.

Three more collaborative materials development workshops (or “boot camps”) will be held in 2007 in Singapore (March), in Trinidad & Tobago (June) and in Samoa (November). The goal is to have at least one person from each member state trained in online collaborative materials development by the end of the year and to have three more courses – in Professional Development for Educators, Life Skills and Disaster Management – under development.

COL continues to actively seek funds to support VUSSC content creation. Development agencies and others that are interested in pursuing this opportunity are encouraged to contact Mr. Paul West, COL’s Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology at pwest@col.org

www.col.org/vussc

EDUCATION GOOD PRACTICE AWARDS ANNOUNCED

Nine finalists from seven Commonwealth countries were recognised in the first Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards, announced at the 16th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Pretoria, South Africa in December 2006 (16CCEM). The awards honour programmes, projects, policy strategies or significant interventions which have made a positive difference to the status or condition of primary school children, their teachers or the education system of a country in respect of one or more of the six Action Areas that were identified at 15CCEM three years ago: relevance; measurable impact and effect; sustainability; efficiency and effectiveness; community participation and contribution; and replication.

The first place winner was Generation of Leaders Discovered (GoLD) Peer Education. This programme addresses the behaviours and beliefs that are at the root of the HIV/AIDS pandemic among young people, while also preparing for the leadership crisis that is being precipitated by the disease. GoLD Peer Education is being implemented with GoLD Technical support and training within 150 schools where over 7,500 young people are being developed as adolescent peer educators to positively influence their peers and communities.

www.thecommonwealth.org
Presentations delivered by COL’s President, Sir John Daniel – some co-authored with other COL staff – are available on COL’s website.

Through an excellent co-operative working relationship with the host organisation, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the conference schedule and logistics provided COL with good opportunities to present its past work and future plans. COL was well received by senior officials and Ministers. The 16CCEM Communiqué included the following paragraphs:

14. Ministers complimented the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on its work and achievements over the past three years, 2003-06. They endorsed the Plan, ‘Learning for Development, 2006-09’, and recognised the need to mobilise the proposed level of funding of C$12 million for the Plan period. Ministers noted with appreciation the United Kingdom’s offer to contribute 30% to the total funds provided by other Commonwealth countries for COL in the Plan period as an incentive for increased funding. They also noted the commitment of the Governments of Cyprus, India and New Zealand to increase funding to COL.

15. Ministers acknowledged that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has improved access, and enhanced quality of education and training in many parts of the developing Commonwealth. The implementation of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a step in the right direction as it seeks to bridge the digital divide and encourage collaboration.

COL is very appreciative of the financial support that it receives from Commonwealth member countries and is particularly grateful for the several new and increased contributions that it has received recently. The U.K.’s incentive offer continues from past arrangements, and commitments to increase funding from Cyprus and New Zealand had been communicated to COL earlier in the year. India announced at the Ministers’ meeting that it would raise its contribution to COL from Rs 24 million to Rs 40 million (about Cdn$1 million), a 66% increase.

www.col.org/speeches
www.thecommonwealth.org/document/ 157817/ cape_town_communique.htm
www.col.org/3yp0609
www.16ccem.com

GRAÇA MACHEL URGES GOVERNMENTS TO “TURN THE TIDE”

Former Mozambique Education Minister and children’s activist, Ms. Graça Machel touched the hearts of many with the personal story she told 16CCEM delegates in her opening keynote address. She was home in Mozambique for her mother’s funeral. While there she discovered that 70% of her childhood school mates were dead and those that she did meet looked much older than she did. The only difference between her and her school mates is the education that she was fortunate enough to have.

The importance of access to education for all cannot therefore be overemphasised, she pleaded passionately, urging educators, Ministers of Education and their Governments to focus follow-up to 16CCEM on definite strategies and implementation plans for eliminating the gaps in education provision and “turn the tide in global education.” Her story will stay with many for some time to come.

Ms. Machel also called on governments to place a higher priority on education: “If you compare the education and defence budgets of countries, the resources can be found if we reallocate priorities.”

“How can we in 10 years time afford to sit down again and conclude that we have been allowing the ranks of the millions of children to grow illiterate in a world like ours where our generation has accumulated a huge amount of scientific knowledge?” asked Ms. Machel.

In thanking Ms. Machel for her presentation, South African Education Minister, the Honourable Naledi Pandor, concurred that all members of the Commonwealth needed to work together to improve their education systems.

Ms. Machel was Mozambique’s Minister of Education and Culture from 1975 to 1989 and Chair of the Commonwealth Foundation from 2001 to 2004. She is the wife of former South African president Nelson Mandela and widow of the late Mozambique president Samora Machel. She currently serves as a Trustee of the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

Her speech was given to a joint Ministerial and Stakeholder session at the 16th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (16CCEM) held in December in Cape Town, South Africa.
In partnership with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) and Jamaican Micro Enterprise Financing Ltd. (MEFL), COL is introducing its Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme in Jamaica. Already successful and self-replicating in Tamil Nadu state in India, L3 Farmers facilitates partnerships among farmers, researchers, marketers and bankers. By improving access to information and financing for farmers, L3 Farmers aims to reduce poverty and promote development.

Pointing to a “deficiency in knowledge” in the area of small farm agriculture, Jamaica’s Agriculture and Lands Minister, the Hon. Mr. Roger Clarke, highlighted the need for such a programme in his country. Mr. Clark attended the initial L3 Farmers workshop in Jamaica, which explored how to adapt the programme for that region. The plan is to establish L3 Farmers first in Jamaica and then expand the programme to other Caribbean countries.

**L3 Farmers in Jamaica**

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**Building TVET Capacity**

Eight students from St Kitts and Nevis recently completed the Special Diploma in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme of the University of Technology (UTech), Jamaica. Designed jointly by COL and UTech for teachers in the Caribbean, this programme is building capacity in TVET through open and distance learning (ODL). The graduation ceremony was held in Kingston, Jamaica in November in the presence of the Governor-General of Jamaica, His Excellency, The Most Honourable Professor Kenneth O. Hall.

**Commonwealth Executive Degrees Programme Grows**

COL’s two executive degree programmes are expanding to more institutions, have growing enrolments and are undergoing major course revisions to meet learner needs.

The Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programmes are designed for senior and middle managers working in developing Commonwealth countries. Courses are delivered through open and distance learning (ODL). The programmes involve two years of full-time study.

The CEMBA/CEMPA degrees and diplomas are granted by one of the partner universities. This consortium, originally consisting of four open universities in South Asia, has expanded to include the National Open University of Nigeria and Wawasan Open University in Malaysia.

There have been more than 13,000 CEMBA/CEMPA course enrolments since the programmes started in 2002. Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan has experienced the highest increase, from 1,600 in 2003 to more than 4,000 in 2005.

“The Commonwealth executive degree programmes are helping developing nations meet the need for highly trained professionals who can contribute to economic growth and good governance,” said Dr. Willie Clarke-Okah, COL’s Education Specialist, Higher Education and Policy Development. “The programmes offer all the advantages of ODL – flexibility, affordability and accessibility.”

Major course revisions are currently underway to ensure the programmes offer relevant content, updated case studies and action learning opportunities. The CEMBA/CEMPA section of COL’s website is being expanded to include content and links from partner universities and a resources section for ODL, online and print learning materials. COL continues to explore programme expansion in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

www.col.org/cemba
LEARNING MATERIALS DONATED TO WIKI-EDUCATOR

WikiEducator has received a donation of 100 Math and English lessons from College of the Rockies in Cranbrook, BC, Canada. These learning materials will be freely available under a Creative Commons license. Launched by COL in 2006, WikiEducator is a website (www.WikiEducator.org) that provides free eLearning content for anyone to edit and use. WikiEducator is being used extensively to develop educational resources for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

The donation illustrates a growing trend towards sharing of learning materials in academia, according to Mr. Wayne Mackintosh, COL Education Specialist, eLearning and ICT Policy.

“The College of the Rockies is showing real leadership in making their materials freely available through WikiEducator,” said Mr. Mackintosh. “We hope that other institutions will recognise the enormous good that can be accomplished by offering free content to learners, particularly in developing countries.”

“College of the Rockies has a strong commitment to increasing student access through online delivery as well as to increasing our participation in international educational initiatives,” said Dr. Nicholas Rubidge, College of the Rockies President and CEO. “While College of the Rockies participates in a provincial educational repository, this is the first time the College has been involved in an international learning content collection.”

Gina Bennett, the College’s eLearning Specialist and author of the learning materials, agrees the donation provides a win-win opportunity for WikiEducator and the College of the Rockies. “Our College benefits from open content provided by other institutions so we are pleased to be able to give something back,” said Ms. Bennett.

COL supported a workshop in Ghana in January 2007 where educators from The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone transformed the Canadian Math and English materials into Wiki format, making it easy for users to store, revise and use the content. This partnership enables African educators to add value as equal partners to realising the educational aims of the region.

Institutions that are interested in donating learning materials to WikiEducator to be offered as free content globally are asked to contact Mr. Mackintosh at wmackintosh@col.org. www.WikiEducator.org www.coetr.bc.ca

TVET IN GHANA

SIR JOHN DANIEL, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF COL; REX RECENTLY WITH MR. PAPA OWUSU-AKNOMAH, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND SPORTS, IN GHANA

A group of 38 teachers have enrolled in a two-year Bachelor degree programme in Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) in Ghana. The pilot programme, supported by COL, is being offered by distance learning for the first time. In addition to studying on their own, the learners will participate in 11 face-to-face sessions and two residential sessions during the four semesters.

UEW has offered the TVET degree programme using the traditional classroom-based approach since 1998. The university decided to expand the programme to distance mode in 2003. COL supported UEW in developing the new learning materials. Course writers used local materials and also used courseware from the University of Technology (UTech), Jamaica adapted for use in Ghana. The current group of learners is piloting these learning materials. When this group graduates in two years, UEW plans to add three or four more study centres and double the intake of students.

With so many ways of communicating in our digital age – from telephone and email to videocferencing and Skyping – the question arises: are large-scale meetings still useful or relevant? The question was in our minds as we organised the fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF4), held last year in Jamaica. We now have ample evidence that PCF4 was successful on many levels.

As a Forum, PCF4 offered more opportunities for active participation by delegates than many conferences do. The parallel sessions – including numerous group presentations and panel discussions – sparked many lively discussions about relevant issues such as copyright, gender and introducing new technologies.

There was tremendous sharing of experiences throughout the conference. Connections were made, relationships were strengthened and collaboration was planned. This sharing of knowledge will in turn lead to more sharing of knowledge as the practice of open and distance learning (ODL) is enhanced and expanded.

Keynote addresses by global leaders in education and development were a hallmark of PCF4. The keynote addresses were highly rated by delegates in their post-event evaluations. Delegates also expressed appreciation for the international nature of the conference, networking opportunities and interaction in the parallel sessions. “It proved to be a remarkable transformational experience and in particular affirmed our support for the value of globalisation in education,” reported one delegate.

This was just one of several dozen notes of thanks sent to conference organisers. A sampling of those comments is on page 3 of this issue of Connections. Most importantly, many delegates wrote about their plans to incorporate information they gained at PCF4 into their ODL programmes.

PCF4 also provided input for COL’s work, helping us to refine the focus of our efforts in our new Three-year Plan, 2006-2009.

In the end, the success of PCF4 is due to the people who participated – the delegates, the presenters, the partners and the sponsors. By coming together in Jamaica, we shared an experience that is unique to conferences; the learning, relationships and positive energy that come from spending time together focused on a common goal. We thank you for your contribution to achieving development goals through ODL and look forward to seeing you at PCF5 at the University of London next year.
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The winners of COL’s 2006 Excellence in Distance Education Awards were announced at a gala banquet on the final evening of the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning. The awards recognise outstanding achievements by individuals and institutions from many Commonwealth countries.

Full citations and further details are available at www.col.org/dea.

DISTANCE EDUCATION MATERIALS

This award recognises excellence in distance education materials produced by publicly funded or not-for-profit organisations of Commonwealth countries.

CATEGORY A: PRINT OR OTHER “LOW-END” MEDIA MATERIALS AS PART OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE/PROGRAMME

Advanced Certificate in Education in the Field of Learners with Special Educational Needs – Submitted by the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Accepted by Ms. Judith Inglis

This six-module programme helps teachers meet the needs of all learners in their classroom. Developed over an eight-year period, this programme introduces teachers to the concept of inclusive education. It is recognised for its imaginative integration of conversational tone, pictures, dialogue and the forms of scaffolding. The programme was also cited for promoting wider societal goals.

Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learning – Submitted by the Open University Malaysia. Accepted by Mr. Abtar Kaur

These materials play an important role by orienting learners to ODL. The EDEA judges called these materials “well designed, interactive and learner-centred”. Learners have found the materials relevant and useful, and the programme is linked to wider development goals.


This handbook is an integral part of an innovative programme to educate and empower women in the fishing industry in the Lake Victoria region of Kenya. It is described as learner-centred, interactive and an excellent example of teaching practice. The methods used are appropriate to the programme’s objectives, which are to empower socially and educationally disadvantaged women working in the fishing industry.

CATEGORY B: INTERACTIVE, ELECTRONICALLY DELIVERED MATERIALS, WHICH MAY BE SUPPLEMENTED BY MATERIALS DEVELOPED IN OTHER MEDIA

PHARMALearn, Anticoagulation – Submitted by the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Alberta, Canada. Accepted by Ms. Theresa Schindel

This is the first phase of a comprehensive continuing education programme for pharmacists in the area of anticoagulation therapy. This professional development programme was recognised for incorporating movement and animation to enhance the attractiveness of the materials. The programme is easy to use, and learners can access materials at whatever point is appropriate for them.

NAMCOL Online, Welcome to the World of Physical Science Grade 12 – Submitted by the Namibian College of Open Learning. Accepted by Mrs. Frances J. Ferreira

This multi-media programme is successfully addressing high failure rates in Physical Science at junior and secondary school levels in Namibia.

The electronic materials are lauded for being interactive, learner-centred and attractive to learners. The programme is described as “a good example of how technology can make a real contribution to the development and delivery of electronic materials and enhance education at the secondary and post-secondary levels.”

INDUSTRIAL ACHIEVEMENT

This award honours significant achievements by institutions in the innovative and effective application of learning technologies and ODL methodologies to reach students who might otherwise not have participated in the learning or training experience.

Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) – Accepted by Dr. Daniel R. Tau, Director

Launched just eight years ago, BOCODOL is honoured for building a cost-effective system of ODL that provides school equivalence programmes as

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INSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

This award honours significant achievements by institutions in the innovative and effective application of learning technologies and ODL methodologies to reach students who might otherwise not have participated in the learning or training experience.

Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) – Accepted by Dr. Daniel R. Tau, Director

Launched just eight years ago, BOCODOL is honoured for building a cost-effective system of ODL that provides school equivalence programmes as
well as vocational, management and professional courses. BOCODOL facilitates equitable access to quality basic education, skill development and lifelong learning for young people and adults. The majority of its students are girls and women, thereby promoting two important Millennium Development Goals – universal basic education and the eradication of poverty and hunger.

Netaji Subhas Open University – Accepted by Professor Surabhi Banerjee, Vice Chancellor

Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) is recognised for significant achievements, including remarkable growth over the past five years. A small university offering just three courses to about 20,000 students, in 2001, NSOU now offers 65 courses ranging from vocational, technical and skill-oriented courses to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The university’s more than 75,000 students learn through a cost-effective and accessible system of distance education supplemented by appropriate technology. Most importantly, NSOU supports adult learners to make positive changes in their lives and contribute towards building learning communities.

The University of the South Pacific – Accepted by Dr. Jennifer Evans, Head, Distance and Flexible Learning

Founded as a dual-mode university in 1969 with its main campus in Fiji, the University of the South Pacific (USP) caters to about 20,000 students, half of them through the distance/flexible learning mode. One of the university’s main challenges is meeting the needs of students from 12 island nations spread throughout a large geographic area. USP offers education on campus and by distance and flexible learning through its 13 regional learning centres, thereby making a variety of higher education courses accessible to the learner population.

DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Ms. Neelam Narayan, Suva, Fiji

Ms. Narayan was honoured for showing remarkable perseverance in pursuing her learning objectives. After obtaining a Bachelor’s Degree in Education from the University of the South Pacific, she went on to obtain a postgraduate Certificate and then a Master’s Degree in Online Education from the University of Southern Queensland.

Distance learning helped Ms. Narayan’s professional development, but the more important outcome of her learning experience was her keenness to help and empower other distance learners across the Pacific in her job in the USP’s Distance and Flexible Learning Support Centre. She put her instructional design skills to work and developed her own strategies for a more learner-friendly approach, thus improving the quality of distance education provided by her Centre.

The award recognises the indomitable spirit of this young learner who has dedicated her achievements to the cause of empowering other distance learners.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
**DIARY OF A NEW RECRUIT**  
**BY WILLIE CLARKE-OKAH**

Dr. Willie Clarke-Okah joined COL in September 2006 as Education Specialist, Higher Education and Policy Development. This is the first installment of a regular feature where he shares his impressions of his first year with COL.

Countless moons ago when I worked with the Special Programs Branch of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), I made regular trips to some of the key institutions in British Columbia, including the Commonwealth of Learning. At that time, COL was in its infancy. Later, *Connections* was mailed to me on a regular basis even when I was overseas on assignments. Little did I know that I’d end up in COL pushing higher education and policy development across the Commonwealth!

How did it all happen? A friend had spotted an ad on COL’s website and thought: hey, this job is tailor-made for Willie! He encouraged me to visit the website. I never did. Busy, as CIDA’s Head of Aid in Jamaica, a new job was the last thing on my mind. My friend persisted, finally e-mailing me the ad. The *Connections* people; how interesting, I thought. That night, I read four back issues of *Connections*. Then I discussed my temptations with my wife. End decision: why not! So, I applied. The rest, as they say, is history.

The earliest I could join COL was in September 2006, but I attended a conference that the World Bank, UNESCO and COL were co-sponsoring in Paris on quality assurance in higher education. And I took time off to join my new colleagues in Vancouver to review COL’s draft Three-year Plan. These two events gave me a quick refresher on the debate about quality assurance and the workings of COL. Meanwhile, back in Jamaica, I was now getting more e-mail messages from COL than I was receiving from CIDA headquarters. When I arrived in September, I would hit the ground running.

Then something not so funny happened! Returning to Jamaica in July, I found my residence in almost complete darkness. In a highly security conscious environment, that was a shocker. Heightening my concern was the news from one of the security guards that the place has been in darkness for two weeks and the property manager at the High Commission of Canada wasn’t informed. I was royally put off by this rather reckless abandonment of duty, and as soon as I opened the doors to the house, I proceeded to change the light bulbs. To fix one of the patio lights at the back of the house, I had to pull the heavy outdoor dining table out of the way. This wasn’t a job for one person, let alone for one who’s just stepped off a long flight. But I was too mad to ask for help. So I foolishly did myself in. In trying fruitlessly to yank the table aside, I yanked out *something* in my back; not something you want happening to you when you are alone, very busy and have only a few weeks to go before taking up a new job. I was just coming out of it when I assumed my COL position in September. It was a great relief to know that I could show up on my first day of work without limping around like the Hunchback of Notre Dame!

COL is a unique learning organisation. Wired, connected, quick, nimble and agile, it is your quintessential smart organisation that is results oriented with a sharp eye on the Millennium Development Goals. Customer service, as it were, is front and centre of COL’s everyday life and those charged with the design and delivery of its services are very much empowered to do so – in decision-making, development of project ideas and funding of activities. The collegial working atmosphere is infectious. Colleagues are highly committed to learning for development, very knowledgeable and skilled in their respective areas of expertise, and luckily for me have been very helpful and supportive as I find my way around the organisation and its impressive network of contacts. I’m enjoying the job immensely and look forward to making a worthwhile contribution to COL’s work.

I was able to find a home within days of my arrival in Vancouver. I have settled in quite nicely in the suburb of New Westminster in a condo that looks like an IKEA franchise. I have run into several old friends and I’m beginning to feel very much at home. There’s a Jamaican grocery store behind my condo and a Nigerian restaurant down the road. Just about everything is within a short walking distance. The Skytrain station is close by; 25 minutes on the tracks and I’m at the train station downtown that’s a couple of blocks away from the office.

I see exciting and productive times ahead as I work with our partners to advance their goals and objectives.

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**COL’S FOCAL POINTS**

To make our relationship with each Commonwealth Member State more systematic and interactive, COL has introduced a network of COL Focal Points. Each Minister of Education was requested to nominate a person who would act as a Focal Point and be COL’s primary contact in that country.

Through dialogue with the Focal Points, COL will ensure that our initiatives match national priorities. These discussions will help COL to develop Country Action Plans that will be the operational expression of COL’s Three-year Plan for 2006-2009.

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

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**COL COUNTRY REPORTS 2003-06**

“COL in the Commonwealth 2003-2006: Country reports” is now available. Intended as a companion text to “Learning for Development”, the Commonwealth of Learning’s Three-year Plan for 2006-2009, this compendium reviews COL’s work over the last triennium country by country. These country reviews, which cover all Commonwealth countries except Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, are grouped under four regions: Africa (and the Mediterranean), Asia, Caribbean and Pacific. [www.col.org/reporting](http://www.col.org/reporting)

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**COPYRIGHT LAW CHECKLIST**

Copyright law plays an important role in education, because it governs how knowledge is disseminated and used. Recognising the importance of keeping the gates of learning wide open in our information society, COL has been working with a group of experts to address copyright issues. This group recently developed a copyright law checklist, which will help individuals and institutions gain a better understanding of how intellectual property affects education and what countries can do to increase access to education of quality at all levels.

[www.col.org/copyright](http://www.col.org/copyright)
**STAFF NEWS**

**Dr. R. Sreedher** joined COL as Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in February 2007. Most recently Project Director with Local Voices Project of Internews in Chennai, India, Dr. Sreedher previously led the Educational Multimedia Research Centres at IIT campus Roorkee and at Anna University Chennai. He was also Director of the Electronic Media Production Centre at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and has worked in various capacities with India’s national broadcasters, All India Radio and Doordarshan.

Dr. Sreedher’s extensive experience in distance education includes producing the AIR School of Continuing Science Education while at All India Radio and executing mega radio science serials for children simultaneously in all of India’s 18 recognised languages. He introduced Interactive Radio Counselling for IGNOU in 1998 and was the architect of India’s 24-hour educational TV and radio channels, Gyan Darshan and Gyan Vani. The recipient of many national and international awards, Dr. Sreedher will lead CEMCA’s efforts to promote the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for education in Commonwealth nations in Asia.

**Mrs. Frances J. Ferreira** (formerly Men-salh) has joined COL as Education Specialist, Basic Education and Open Schooling. A teacher by profession, Mrs. Ferreira was Director of the state-owned Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) for the past ten years. As NAMCOL’s first chief executive, she facilitated the strategic positioning of the institution both nationally and internationally.

Previously, Mrs. Ferreira served as a teacher, school principal, the first female Mayor of Grootfontein and Vice-President of the Association of Local Authorities in Namibia. She has also served as Chair of the Namibian Open Learning Network Trust and Chair of the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA). In recognition of her contribution to open and distance learning, Mrs. Ferreira received an Excellence in Distance Education Award at COL’s second Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in 2002.

Mrs. Ferreira succeeds **Ms. Helen Lentell**, who has retired. Ms. Phillips joined COL in 1989, its first year of operation. She has held roles in a variety of areas including materials design and development, gender issues, open schooling and basic education. Most recently, she was Education Specialist, Basic Education. As a result of Ms. Phillip’s effective and diligent work, COL’s expertise on Open Schooling is now much in demand and there is significant south-south collaboration in developing alternative schooling.

COL also sends best wishes with **Mrs. Susan Phillips**, who has retired. Ms. Phillips joined COL in 1989, its first year of operation. She has held roles in a variety of areas including materials design and development, gender issues, open schooling and basic education. Most recently, she was Education Specialist, Basic Education. As a result of Ms. Phillip’s effective and diligent work, COL’s expertise on Open Schooling is now much in demand and there is significant south-south collaboration in developing alternative schooling.

**INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR COL**

Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL, was recently awarded an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Education Winneba in Ghana.

Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada awarded Sir John an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the October 2006 convocation ceremonies. Sir John served as the university’s President from 1984 to 1990 and is credited with playing a major role in the establishment of distance education and the expansion of francophone programmes at the university.

Sir John also received an honorary Doctor of Letters from Vardhman Mahaveer Kota Open University in India in January 2007.

Sir John has accepted an appointment to the High-Level Panel of Advisers of the Global Alliance for Information and Communications Technology and Development (GAID). The United Nations launched GAID in March 2006 to meet the need for an inclusive, multi-stakeholder global forum and platform for cross-sectoral policy dialogue promoting the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to achieve development goals and to enable partnerships for action.

**BOARD NEWS**

His Excellency the **Honourable Burchell Whiteman**, O.J. has been appointed Jamaican High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. Jamaica’s Minister of Education and Culture from 1992-2002, Mr. Whiteman has been a member of COL’s Board of Governors since 2002 and was named an Honorary Fellow of COL at the fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in 2006.

The Chair of COL’s Board of Governors, **Mr. Lewis Perinbam**, O.C., recently received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
eLEARNING EXPERIENCE IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES: ACKNOWLEDGING THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNERS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS WHO HAVE COMPLETED THE COL-DEVELOPED AND DELIVERED WORKPLACE eLEARNING COURSES.

Ms. Najwa Qaisy, Disaster Management Manager, Iraq Delegation, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; Baghdad, Iraq

This award celebrates learners from international organisations who have overcome significant challenges to successfully complete COL’s workplace eLearning courses.

Ms. Najwa Qaisy is the Manager of the Disaster Management Department with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Baghdad, Iraq. Recognising that opportunities for learning are limited in war-torn Iraq, Ms. Qaisy enrolled in COL’s “Writing Effectively” programme. Initially daunted by the rigorous course, she was encouraged to continue through e-mail communication with her Canadian tutor, Mr. Glenn Millar.

Ms. Qaisy completed the course during some of the worst days of the social unrest in June 2005. She often had to study without electricity. She hid her English work in a toilet and would walk hours through cross-fire and literally walk through bullets to get to a computer so she could submit an assignment. Ms. Qaisy says it comes down to the great value she places on learning.

When asked why she persisted with the course, I marvelled at how this young woman could maintain her focus with the social turmoil of Iraq swirling around her.”

In recommending Ms. Qaisy for this award, Mr. Millar commented: “Throughout the course, I marvelled at how this young woman could maintain her focus with the social turmoil of Iraq swirling around her.”

“Ms. Qaisy’s appreciation of the value of her own experience led her to set up English classes for orphans and displaced children in her community. As the word spread, her class rapidly grew to 55 learners. “This experience made me realise that one day when I look back at my lifetime achievements, I can proudly point out that I did something good for someone!” she says.

The award recognises Ms. Qaisy’s unquenchable spirit, her love of learning and her inspiring application of the skills she learned to bring hope to dispossessed young people in her community through education.
NEW PRIZE FOR ICT PARTNERSHIPS

The Stockholm Challenge GKP Awards 2007 is a new prize launched by Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and the Stockholm Challenge. Designed as part of the Stockholm Challenge 2008, the new award will open in four categories related to information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D): Culture, Economic Development, Education and Public Administration.

The new award will focus on the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in ICT for development. All Stockholm Challenge 2008 applicants in the respective categories will be eligible for the Stockholm Challenge GKP Awards 2007. The Awards will close for entries on 31 August 2007; the Stockholm Challenge entry deadline is 31 December 2007.

The twelve selected finalists, three in each category, will be sponsored to attend the 3rd Global Knowledge Conference in Kuala Lumpur from 11-13 December 2007. They will exhibit their projects, network and be celebrated as finalists and possibly winners of the Stockholm Challenge GKP Awards 2007.

www.stockholmchallenge.se
www.globalknowledge.org

BOCODOL OFFERS TERTIARY COURSES

The Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) is working in partnership with Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) to offer tertiary level courses. BOCODOL students can now take diploma programmes in Business Management and Human Resources management.

As BOCODOL’s strategic partner, ZOU is overseeing quality assurance of all aspects of the programmes’ development, delivery and assessment systems. BOCODOL diploma holders will be welcome at ZOU for degree programmes.

BOCODOL provides school equivalency programmes as well as vocational, management and professional courses through open and distance learning (ODL). Its mandate is to make quality learning accessible to people who cannot access learning through the conventional education system.

www.moe.gov.bw/bocodol

ICTs AWARD TO MINDSET NETWORK

Mindset Network, a South African non-governmental organisation (NGO), has won the 2006 Development Gateway Award. The award issues a $100,000 cash prize as acknowledgement of excellence in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for development, and recognises projects, organisations and individuals who improve the lives of young people.

“We are proud to receive such recognition by the international community,” said Vis Naidoo, Mindset’s CEO. “It gives us confidence that in providing educational support to our youth and communities, we are on the right track. However, there is much more work that we need to do to ensure that the benefits of this kind of support to both the education and health sectors for South Africa and Africa is more widespread.”

The Development Gateway Foundation is an international NGO that provides web-based tools to make aid and development efforts more effective. Mindset Network is a not-for-profit organisation set up in 2002 to provide educational solutions for the formal education, health and livelihoods sectors. Mindset Network was selected from 160 nominees for the award.

www.mindset.co.za

INDIA’S NEW ONE-STOP EDUCATION PORTAL

The Ministry of Human Resource Development in India recently introduced Sakshat, an education portal that provides answers to education queries and allows users to participate in real time virtual classrooms. Working with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), the Ministry has created the interactive site, which was launched on Republic Day, 26 January 2007.

In addition to providing educational content for learners, Sakshat has information on getting financial aid for education and reliable data on education centres and schools in India.

www.sakshat.ac.in
OPEN CONTENT FOR AFRICA

COL recently hosted the first meeting of FLOSS4Edu in Nairobi, Kenya. The initiative is promoting Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS) for education in Africa. The meeting in Nairobi, which included 33 people representing education institutions, government, students and non-governmental organisations, was focussed on mobilising a sustainable Open Educational Resources (OERs) development community in Africa.

Discussions at the FLOSS4Edu workshop explored the status of digital educational content in the various institutions represented at the meeting. Currently most of the content production is closed and based at the institutional level, with little collaboration towards the creation of open digital content. The main reason attributed to this is the lack of awareness about the benefits of collaboration and the potential impact of OERs. Workshop participants agreed to form a content developers group and begin developing open content immediately in the areas of Chemistry and Physical Sciences. This content will be freely available through WikiEducator. They also agreed to work to create awareness of open content, to promote collaboration among educators and students at all levels, and to seek financial support for FLOSS4Edu initiatives from various development partners.

www.WikiEducator.org/floss4edu

ODL FOR LIVELIHOODS

A group of African educators gathered in Pretoria, South Africa in December 2006 for a three-day meeting on “ODL Application for Non-formal Education and Livelihoods”. Sponsored by COL and the Institute of Adult and Basic Education and Training, UNISA, the roundtable brought together resource people and experts from Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania. Their focus: how to effectively use ODL to improve the livelihoods of disadvantaged young people in Southern Africa. They shared country experiences in using open and distance learning (ODL) for non-formal education and livelihoods, identified action areas, discussed how to adapt and use ODL materials, and explored how to share country resources.

OPENING NEW FRONTIERS IN UGANDA

Along with Makerere University and the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, COL sponsored a National Consultative Forum on open and distance learning (ODL) in Kampala, Uganda in December 2006. Close to 100 people representing governments, universities and civil society organisations attended the three-day meeting. Speakers from Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda shared ODL experiences. Issues discussed included open schooling, teacher training, policies and practices, quality assurance, funding and the role of information and communications technologies (ICTs).

In her concluding remarks at the forum, COL Vice President Professor Asha Kanwar outlined the basic elements that should inform a national policy on ODL – an understanding of ODL’s potential, the need for the appropriate political will, the need for technology infrastructure and a commitment to providing the required resources. A Task Force formed at the forum will draft an ODL policy, which will be finalised at a follow-up workshop in May 2007.

“By 2009 to make available appropriate educational content and a set of easy to use FLOSS tools to 100 educational institutions while building the largest community of educational practitioners collaborating on the development of Free and Open Educational Resources.”

THE STRATEGIC VISION OF FLOSS4EDU

EVENTS

AFRICA

UPCOMING EVENTS

CADE-AMTEC 2007 JOINT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
13 - 16 May 2007, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Organised jointly by the Canadian Association for Distance Learning (CADE) and the Association for Media in Technology in Education in Canada (AMTEC)
Theme: “Connecting in the Global Village/Connexions dans le village planétaire”
www.cade-oced.ca/conferences/2007

eLEARNING AFRICA 2007, THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING
28 – 30 May 2007, Nairobi, Kenya
Theme: Building Infrastructures and Capacities to Reach out to the Whole of Africa
www.eLearning-Africa.com

12TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION
21 - 24 May 2007, Brunei Darussalam
Hosted by the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education, Universiti Brunei Darussalam
Theme: Changing Contours of Education: Future Trends
www.ubd.edu.bn/news/conferences/12ice07

CAUCE 2007, CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR UNIVERSITY CONTINUING EDUCATORS
20 May – 2 June 2007, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Theme: Portraits of Tomorrow: Landscapes, Learners, Leaders
www.cauce2007.ca

3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OPEN AND ONLINE LEARNING (ICOOL2007)
11-14 June 2007, Penang, Malaysia
Organised by the VCILT, University of Mauritius in partnership with the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia
Theme: Pedagogical Scripting for Open and Online Learning
http://icool uom.ac.m

FIFTH PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING
13-17 July 2008, University of London
Theme: Access to Learning for Development
www.col.org/pcf5
COL’S RESOURCE CD-ROM

COL has updated its CD-ROM of most popular resource publications, news and software. It contains over 60 publications including training manuals, start-up guides and research and all 21 titles in COL’S popular Knowledge Series, as well as free and open source software. While most of the contents are also available in print or on our website, the CD-ROM provides a convenient, fast-loading compilation of the open and distance learning resources that COL has produced for public distribution and use. It works with both PCs and MacIntosh computers. It is updated regularly and available upon request from COL: info@col.org.

www.col.org/cdrom

WOMEN’S LITERACY AND ICTs

“Women’s Literacy and Information and Communication Technologies: Lessons that experience has taught us”, by Dr. Anita Dighe and Dr. Usha Reddi, is newly published by COL’s Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in New Delhi. A primary focus of this paper is to highlight why the problem of women’s illiteracy needs to be addressed and what experiences exist in using ICTs to for this purpose. The paper concludes by identifying strategies and planning elements that need to be taken into consideration when ICTs are used for women’s literacy programmes.

www.cemca.org/CEMCA_Womens_Literacy.pdf

EDTECH CONFERENCES

Mr. Clayton R. Wright, who has completed a number of overseas assignments for COL, has prepared a comprehensive list of educational technology and related conferences to assist those seeking professional development opportunities.

http://cider.athabascau.ca/events/conferences

QA RESOURCES ONLINE

COL has added a new Quality Assurance Micro-site to its website. This micro-site provides a single, convenient access point to existing resources in quality assurance in open and distance learning (ODL). It is designed to be of use to institutions, researchers and governments seeking to establish benchmarks for quality provision and to all those who are interested in devising effective systems for the review and evaluation of ODL programmes.

www.col.org/quality

BOYS’ UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Boys’ Underachievement in Education: An Exploration in Selected Commonwealth Countries (by Jyotsna Jha and Fatinah Kelleher), is a COL/ Commonwealth Secretariat joint study and publication on boys’ underachievement. Dr. Tony Sewell, a well-known researcher in the field, was the lead consultant and coordinated research on the case studies, which were undertaken in select Commonwealth countries: Australia, Jamaica, Lesotho, Malaysia and Samoa. This research identifies examples of successful practice and provides initial recommendations for policy direction. Surprisingly, there were few examples of how open and distance learning methodologies can alleviate the problem of boys’ education in circumstances where under-achievement and under-performance is evident. This is an area which COL will now pursue. The publication is now available for viewing and free downloading on COL’s website.

www.col.org/BoysUnder

ICTs FOR EDUCATION IN AFRICA

A Bibliography of ICT Education Applications in Africa, is now available on COL’s website. This is a first step in an Information for Development Program (infoDev) initiative in partnership with COL to assess the state of ICT applications in education by undertaking a survey that will address several questions. The Bibliography is extensive, but now is posted to invite further additions and edits through WikiEducator.

www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/4062
EXPANDING USES FOR MOBILE PHONES

The proliferation of mobile phones in the developing world is resulting in a growing number of uses for this technology.

- **mLearning**
  Many distance learners are using their mobile phones as a learning technology. Mobile learning – or mLearning – is a useful support that complements eLearning or classroom learning. Students and teachers often use text messaging to transmit information to each other, which speeds up communication. And learners are also creating learning communities through text messaging. The power of mLearning is the affordability of mobile devices compared to computers, especially in developing countries, and the immediacy of the interaction, especially among young mobile people who use their mobile phone as their primary communication device.

- **Mobile phone as modem**
  The rapid spread of 3G (third-generation mobile phone technologies) is giving users faster and cheaper access to the Internet. Rather than connecting to the Internet through a lanline or a costly local wireless network, users simply connect their mobile to the computer to go online.

- **Literacy not required**
  People who cannot communicate by e-mail because of an inability to read or write may be comfortable communicating with their mobile phones. Some services can be accessed by pressing a series of keys on the mobile. For instance, users can renew their contracts with some phone companies by pushing specified keys followed by a voucher number.

  It seems that the rapid growth in mobile phone use is being met with equally rapid growth in creative uses for this ubiquitous technology.

SHARING VIDEOS ONLINE

One of the most startling developments of 2006 was the dramatic growth of online video sharing. Anyone who didn’t realise the popularity of sharing videos on the Internet quickly understood it when Google purchased YouTube for $1.65 billion in November 2006. Founded just 20 months earlier, YouTube boasts 70 million video downloads every day. Time magazine named YouTube its “Invention of the Year” for 2006. A search of “share videos online” will generate more than nine million hits.

Services such as YouTube, MySpace and the open source Democracy Player enable people to share, comment on and view videos. Users can choose to broadcast their videos publicly or share them privately with friends and family. The service is free for everyone (for now!).

The educational potential of sharing videos online is significant. Digital video has made video production easy and affordable – anyone with a video camera or even a camera cell phone can shoot a video and upload it to the Internet. While largely populated by joke or prank videos now, YouTube and its many imitators have categories such as Science and Technology, which share useful and even educational information. As with any online technology, users should be aware of privacy issues, especially if children are involved.

An innovative programme is already demonstrating the educational potential of online videos. “CyberOne: Law in the Court of Public Opinion” is a course jointly offered by the Harvard Law School and the Harvard Extension School. In addition to being offered to Harvard students, the course’s videos and lectures are freely available to anyone with an Internet connection. Students interact with each other through “Second Life”, a 3D virtual world that enables them to attend classes, do group work and ask questions in real time.

www.youtube.com
www.myspace.com
www.getdemocracy.com
http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/cyberone

SELF-PUBLISHING ONLINE

The Internet has opened up new possibilities for people who want to produce their own book. Websites such as Blurb, Xlibris and Author House enable authors to publish their own book. Usually it’s as simple as downloading their software, adding in your words and visuals, choosing the type of book you want and sending it to the online publisher for production. On Blurb, the cost for a single book ranges from $18.95 for a 20-40 page softcover book to $79.95 for a full-color book of up to 440 pages with a custom book jacket.

There are several advantages to self-publishing: you retain all rights and control decisions about the marketing of your book. On the other hand, you have to cover all the costs, and you don’t have the benefit of expert input from a publisher.

A scan of self-publishing websites will find everything from self-help books and history to family chronicles and fiction. In addition to the possibilities of self-publishing, these websites also offer books for sale. Just be aware that these books wouldn’t be subject to the same scrutiny as books produced by mainstream publishers.

www.blurb.com
www.Xlibris.com
www.authorhouse.com