

# Opening Presentation - Open Schooling Workshop

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*Opening Presentation, at the Open Schooling Workshop*

*Held in The Seychelles, 2 March 2009*

*By Paul West*

## Transcript

Twenty five teams in six countries are collaborating to create course materials for grades 10,11 and 12. These course materials will be usable by conventional schools, open schools and for lifelong learners. I have been told that there are over 200 million children in Africa and Asia who will never receive an education, and will never even see the inside of a classroom. It is projects like this one that strive to make a difference in the world.

The Open Schools project has begun in earnest in 5 countries, and now it is your turn to take-up the challenge. Participants will engage in an active two-week programme, during which they will learn from each other and begin to write the course materials that they have committed to creating. After this workshop, participants will return to their regular work for the rest of the year, but with one exception; they have committed to set time aside from their regular work duties to create the self-instructional learning materials that will be used internationally. The managers of the participants have also committed to release them to enable them to carry out the task ahead that will culminate at the end of the year in a second workshop. At this time, materials will be finalised by peer review and published on the Internet.

With the promise of increasing Internet connectivity in the Seychelles, you will even more easily be able to access the materials created by the other participating countries, adapt them and apply them in ways that suit you. We will ask that when you customised versions of the course materials created in other countries, that you give us copies so that we can add them to the Open Schools website, so that others may benefit from them. As I have already mentioned, there are millions of children who could benefit from them if only they could get copies.

The Seychelles is participating in projects such as this Open Schools Initiative and the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and we are thankful to have the support of the Ministry of Education yet again on what we believe is an important Initiative.

By working together, Commonwealth countries can nurture capacity for learning and harness the new ICT developments for the benefit of their people. By working together, small states can create more than the sum of their individual efforts, as you are doing in this Open Schools Initiative.

Internet connectivity has become a key enabler today. With it, businesses are able to function better, learners are able to reach their full potential, and research and the development of open and distance course materials become possible. It is essential that Internet connectivity now be treated in much the same way as the provision of safe drinking water and electricity. With good connectivity comes much of the future of economic activity, which is increasingly online.

During the next two weeks, participants will become familiar with some of the web2 technologies and gain additional skills in word processing; searching for open educational resources and the writing of self-instructional materials. All this requires an improved understanding of copyright, instructional design and a good grounding in the technical skills needed to operate a computer in a way that makes sense when teaching. Some of the participants' colleagues have already participated in workshops of the Virtual University and so may now be able to be of support. It is important that all educators rapidly gain the skills needed to operate with confidence in the eWorld. You also have a cadre of IT professionals who can technically support your work since a 2-week workshop for IT Managers was held in the Seychelles just last year.

In order to facilitate the international use of programmes offered by institutions in the small states, COL has worked with the qualifications authorities of small states to develop a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). The TQF aims to promote the "translation" of programmes between countries and regions, and give greater credibility to the courses developed and offered by small states.

An Internet portal or hub is being created that will provide access to courses offered by accredited institutions in the small states. These institutions, having already received accreditation from their national systems, will be able to promote selected programmes in the international market, through this portal. Once eLearning programmes have been provided by these countries and approved by the national and regional structures, they will be posted on the portal. Posting of programmes on the website will signify that the programme is credible, and that it accords with national and regional qualifications structures.

Learners will be able to register for these programmes with the knowledge that programmes offered through the portal carry the national accreditation of the country in which the providing institution is based. In addition to this, learners will be able to review the accreditation of the selected qualification in the country of origin and their own country by reviewing the qualification's registration in the TQF. This question of credibility is particularly important for small states some of which, advertently or inadvertently, have acquired reputations as safe havens for degree mills.

The participants of this Open Schools Workshop will now embark what we expect will be a productive and memorable two weeks of teaching colleagues and learning from colleagues. We expect the skills and professional networks built up here; and between your teams and the teams in other countries, will make a significant difference in the lives of participants and learners who will benefit from the materials.

I wish you an enjoyable and productive workshop.  
Paul West