WORKSHOP: GLOBAL ADVOCACY FOR EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE

WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

PCF 10 SUBTHEME: BUILDING RESILIENCE

Global Advocacy for Educational Resilience – how to build a national or regional advocacy campaign for Open, Flexible and Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Two years of oscillating school closures globally has underscored the vulnerability of campus-based in-person learning and, in turn, exposed the vulnerability of equitable and open access points to education. To support millions of displaced learners, institutions and systems alike rapidly adopted alternative off-campus approaches, as an emergency response to teaching and learning. Advocates of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning (OFDL) environments have been building resilient education systems that enable equitable and inclusive access for decades. These efforts, however, have regularly faced significant stigma stemming from the false assumption that OFDL environments are inferior to in-person educational environments. Despite exponential growth over the last two years, scalable and resilient OFDL environments continue to face systemic barriers in public policy, academic and operational practice, and government support. These systemic barriers limit the ultimate potential for educators to truly transform lives and communities. Regrettably, many of the barriers standing in the way are beyond the control of any one institution or educational system, thereby necessitating strong advocacy efforts to influence change.

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) aims to change the narrative regarding OFDL policy and practice through advocacy as a global community. The ICDE is actively working to strengthen global advocacy efforts regarding OFDL and enable greater regional and national influence through members and partners. Originally developed during a series of Leadership Summits and President Forums involving OFDL experts from across the globe, the ICDE has created an advocacy toolkit that can be used as a framework to promote OFDL at the national and regional levels.

In this workshop will introduce the ICDE Advocacy Campaign and toolkit (https://www.icde.org/global-advocacy-campaign). This toolkit seeks to help attendees plan and prepare how to participate or lead a regional or national advocacy intervention suitable for their home country drawing on the open licenced materials developed by the ICDE, the advocacy messages for dissemination, and a campaign leaflet. By the conclusion of the workshop attendees will have identified key stakeholders, tailored relevant messages, and identified key resources and partners in support of their advocacy efforts.

Together, we can systematically dismantle the conscious or subconscious barriers that stand between learners and their future potential by advocating for change to public policy, practice, and resources that are necessary to improve open and equitable access to resilient education systems, nationally and globally.

INTRODUCTION

As one reflects on global events of the last half decade, it becomes apparent that society has faced an escalating trend of challenges and obstacles characterized by the now common moniker of "unprecedented." With an early backdrop of divisive and fear-based rhetoric fueled by populist political ideology, tensions between people and communities skyrocketed in 2020 as the world was thrust into a multi-year global health crisis. While reasonability suggests that individuals and communities would rally together to face the non-discriminating invisible foe of COVID-19, societal perspectives and relationships appeared to split even further. Now that society seems to be turning the corner to emerge from the pandemic, communities around the world face escalating economic pressures associated with hyperinflation, the collapse of currencies, and continued supply chain disruptions to name a few. Adding further pressure and complexity to our context, regions around the world are grappling with the geo-political and humanitarian challenges stemming from war-torn areas. The cumulative result appears to be growing social, economic, and cultural divides where inclusion and the building of proverbial bridges should exist.

As the globe grapples with these pressures, the vulnerabilities inherent in numerous infrastructures and systems have been exposed. Among the many systems whose hidden fragility was discovered in 2020 was the global higher education system. Seemingly overnight, global education systems were thrust into a world they simply had not considered before – what would happen if nobody could attend school in-person and on-campus?

The vulnerability of campus-based in-person learning – that we had become so used to - came to light primarily because of the system's reliance on a single assumption – that a physical location and a classroom would always exist. As millions of learners were displaced from in-person learning (Bozkurt, et al., 2020; Daniel & Kanwar, 2020, Stracke et al., 2022), the vulnerability of equitable and open access points to education became clear and apparent. So as not to lose an entire generation, institutions and systems alike rapidly adopted alternative off-campus approaches to teaching and learning. Needing to make the shift within days, institutions introduced makeshift on-line or off-line solutions to reconnect instructors and students.

In many cases, these responses were described as "emergency responses." They often relied on the adoption of approaches to teaching and learning that did not require students and teachers to be in the same physical location and time, but at the same time lacked the rigor of distance education methods, mostly due to a lack of time and resources that would be required for a more robust solution (Bozkurt, et al., 2020, Hodges et.al, 2020, Stracke et al., 2022).

Not long after adopting emergency off-campus solutions, large scale criticism was levied against these workarounds based primarily on rising concerns about lessened instructional and learning quality and instructor/student interaction (e.g., Petchame, Iriondo, Villegas, Riu, & Fonseca, 2021). While appropriate in the short-term, these workarounds were neither effective nor sustainable in the long-term (e.g., Alonso-Garcia, Garrido-Letran, & Sanchez-Alzola, 2021). Among other challenges, these emergency solutions tried to digitize or simulate in-person on-campus learning using an off-campus solution without considering the nuances unique to both on- and off-campus learning environments. Metaphorically speaking, this emergency response is akin to an orchestra performing over a videoconference technology with all musicians playing from their individual homes - including the conductor - and expecting an outcome like a concert hall.

The regrettable irony during this period is that robust, engaging, and high-quality off-campus learning solutions were readily available (Anderson & Simpson, 2012; Bates, 2022; Naidu, 2014). Often termed Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning (OFDL), these inclusive and resilient learning environments combine on- and off-line purpose-built learning experiences in which students can engage individually or in a group setting both synchronously and asynchronously from pretty much anywhere, but most often from their home.

Advocates of OFDL environments have been building resilient education systems that enable equitable and inclusive access for decades (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). With humble origins in rudimentary mail systems, the exponential growth in on- and off-line technologies combined with significant advances in off-campus learning design, production, delivery, and pedagogy are enabling distributed and remote learning environments that make the teaching and learning workarounds of the last two years appear rudimentary at best.

With a steadfast commitment to creating quality, inclusive, and equitable access to higher learning on a global scale, advocates of OFDL environments see the potential for the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal #4 in this generation (United Nations, 2015). In short, a truly democratized educational environment in which anyone, anywhere who is ready, willing, and able to learn can – on their own terms. A world in which the learning environment embraces the diversity of perspective, knowledge, and ways of knowing in a way that empowers individuals in a way that is meaningful to them and their community. Regrettably, beyond the Open, Distance, and Digitally enabled environments, access to and success in higher learning remains limited to a select few. For instance, those who did well in secondary school, who do not have employment responsibilities, who do not have caregiving responsibilities, who live nearby an in-person campus, who have the financial means to attend, and who's approach to learning is place-based and synchronous.

Despite the seemingly acceptable notion that off-campus learning is a permanent fixture in the global higher education landscape, these efforts of OFDL advocates continues to face significant stigma stemming from the false assumption that OFDL environments are inferior to in-person educational environments (e.g., Means, Toyama, & Murphy, 2013). Despite exponential growth over the last two years, scalable and resilient OFDL environments continue to face systemic barriers in public policy, academic and operational practice, and government support (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Stracke et al., 2022). These systemic barriers limit the ultimate potential for educators to truly transform lives and communities. Regrettably, many of the barriers standing in the way are beyond the control of any one institution or educational system, thereby necessitating strong advocacy efforts to influence change. To truly realize the potential created through distance and e-learning, we need to recalibrate the way we think about it and what the future may look like.

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION (ICDE)

The International Council for Open and Distance Education aims to change the narrative regarding OFDL policy and practice through advocacy as a global community. Founded in 1938, the ICDE is a global community of leaders and professionals in the field of OFDL at all levels. Since the 1960's, ICDE is an official consultative partner with UNESCO to further policy and international best practice in OFDL. The thread that ties all educators and educational institutions together in the ICDE is the vision of achieving the potential of OFDL created through our members and learning communities. Together, over 230 members and partners from 70 countries and speaking over 40 languages strive to promote and create

inclusive and affordable access to quality education, globally. Today, ICDE members impact over 15 million learners across six continents.

In November 2020, the ICDE launched its new strategic plan (ICDE, 2020). The first of the four strategic objectives in this plan is to increase the impact of ICDE's advocacy regarding OFDL globally and enable greater regional and national influence through members and partners. ICDE's Global Advocacy Campaign is a key marker of that objective. Involving OFDL experts from across the globe, ICDE's advocacy campaign was based on three years of discussions and development as part of ICDE's Leadership Summits and President Forums. Launched in October 2021, the campaign seeks to empower individual and regional teams of professionals and institutions to effectively advocate at local, national, and regional levels to promote quality OFDL environments.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Pan Commonwealth Forum participants are invited to participate in an ICDE Lab Workshop for Responsive Action for progressing the ICDE Global Advocacy Campaign for quality OFDL. In this workshop, participants will be introduced to the ICDE Advocacy Campaign and toolkit (https://www.icde.org/global-advocacy-campaign). Participants will plan and prepare how to participate or lead a regional or national advocacy intervention suitable for their home country or region drawing on the open licenced materials developed by the ICDE, the advocacy messages for dissemination, presentation template and social media cards, and a campaign leaflet. All materials from the toolkit may be supplemented, adapted, translated, and contextualized to various regional, cultural, and linguistic contexts participants see fit. The idea is to build the global campaign through local, national, and regional taskforces, led by ICDE members, with the support from interested individuals and stakeholders across the globe.

By the conclusion of the workshop attendees will have identified key stakeholders, tailored relevant messages, and identified key resources and partners in support of their advocacy efforts. Workshop participants will join a global community of other individuals and institutions putting forward Global Advocacy campaigns. As a member of this global community, participants may present their efforts at future ICDE Global conferences.

By taking part in this ICDE Lab Workshop, participants will be prepared to act locally by thinking globally. Through collective forecasting of potential challenges and opportunities in the prevailing climate we can influence emerging patterns and be pro-active in our approach to address the importance of quality Open, Flexible and Distance Learning for sustainable and resilient education.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

Tailored to fit a 60, 90, or 120 minute session, this interactive and action focused workshop will combine individual and group breakout work with moderated presentation and discussions. The proposed format includes:
- Introductions and welcome
- Context presentation by ICDE Board
- Presentation pitches from participants

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- Focused discussions among participants
- Summary and next steps
- Acknowledgement and close of Lab Workshop

WORKSHOP FACILITATORS

Dr Mark Nichols PFHEA is Executive Director of Learning Design and Development with Open Polytechnic of New Zealand Limited. He leads a team of over 100 project managers, learning designers, media developers and enabling staff who develop online learning journeys across a broad range of vocational subjects including teaching, engineering, social work and business.

Mark's career has included working for the Open University, UK as Director of Technology Enhanced Learning. He is a member of the International Council for Open and Distance Education Board, a European Distance Education Network Fellow, and former executive committee member of Ascilite and FLANZ. His scholarship focuses on institutional transformation, education process design, learning design, analytics, and digital distance education. He is also host of the Leaders & Legends of Online Learning podcast, which features interviews with leading international educators. Mark is on the editorial board of several prominent journals and is recognised internationally for his work.

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Dr. Naidu is former Pro Vice-Chancellor (Flexible Learning), and Director of the Centre for Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific, Principal Associate (Technology, Education and Design Associates), and Executive Editor of the journal Distance Education (https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cdie20/current).

Dr Naidu has spent most of his professional life in the higher education sector in a variety of roles to do with enhancing learning and teaching in open, flexible, distance, online learning and distributed learning environments, as well as education more generally in various jurisdictions and contexts.

In May 2014 the Open University of Sri Lanka awarded Dr. Naidu a *D.Litt. (Honoris Causa),* in recognition of his extensive contribution to the field of *open, flexible, distance and e-learning* both regionally and internationally. In addition, in July 2020, Advance Higher Education, UK, admitted Dr. Naidu as Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy for his commitment, contribution and strategic leadership in the scholarship of learning and teaching globally.

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Neil Fassina is the President of Okanagan College in British Columbia, Canada. Prior to his time at Okanagan College, Neil served as President of Athabasca University and Provost & Vice President, Academic at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. Neil holds a PhD in Management from the University of Toronto, is a Chartered Professional in Human Resources (CPHR), and a chartered director through the Institute of Corporate Directors (ICD.D).

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CLOSING

Together, we can systematically dismantle the conscious or unconscious barriers that stand between learners and their future potential by advocating for change to public policy, practice, and resources that are necessary to improve open and equitable access to resilient education systems, nationally and globally. This Lab Workshop hosted by ICDE during the Pan Commonwealth Forum 10 will serve as an interactive opportunity for participants to conceptualize, design, and initiate the development of an advocacy campaign designed specifically for OFDL environments applicable to their local community, region, or nation. The ICDE Toolkit presented in the workshop will help participants kickstart their efforts.

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