Connections

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PAN *Commonwealth*

FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

1–5 March 1999
Bandar Seri Begawan

Empowerment through Knowledge and Technology

A Celebration of Ten Years of the Commonwealth of Learning

Virtual conferences set to begin

COL's first "virtual" conference will run from 1 – 22 October and will cover the topic, *Distance Education and Challenged Communities*. It will be moderated by Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President and Chief Executive Officer of The Commonwealth of Learning.

In conjunction with next year's Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, four on-line conferences have been organised to help participants and conference planners to prepare for the Forum and to provide means of participation for those who may not be able to attend in person. Please visit the Forum home page (*www.col.org/forum*) for information on how to join these conferences:

- *Distance Education and Challenged Communities*, 1 – 22 October 1998, moderated by Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan
- *Library/Information Systems and Student Support*, 10 – 30 November 1998, moderated by Dr. Neela Jagannathan of Indira Gandhi National Open University and Ms. Elizabeth F. Watson of the University of the West Indies (both are head librarians)
- *Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Credit Banking*, 11 – 29 January 1999, moderated by Dr. David Woodhouse, Director of the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit
- *Staff Development*, February 1999 (further details to be announced)

Each topic will be introduced by the moderator who will also present some thought-provoking questions. Participants will then be invited to join the discussion virtually. At the end of the third week, the moderator will wrap up the discussion.

A Round Table, scheduled for the first day of the Pan-Commonwealth Forum programme, will serve as an icebreaker and will include discussions on regional and sectoral developments. Suggestions and recommendations arising from the virtual conference will be reported at these plenary sessions.

Keynote speakers

Confirmed keynote speakers for the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning include:

His Excellency Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary-General

The Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture, Barbados

The Right Honourable Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, Britain (*via videoconference*)

The Honourable Maurice Strong, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General and Chairman, Earth Council

Mr. Noah A. Samara, Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, WorldSpace Corporation

Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President and CEO, The Commonwealth of Learning

Plenary presenters include:

Ms. Fay Chung, former Chief of Education Cluster, United Nations Children Fund and former Minister of Education, Zimbabwe (now with the Organization of African Unity)

Sir John Daniel, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University, UK

Mr. Armoogum Parsuramen, Director, Division for the Renovation of Secondary & Vocational Education, UNESCO and former Minister of Education and Science, Mauritius

Ms. Madeleine Woolley, Director, Adelaide Institute of TAFE, Australia

Round tables will be chaired by:

Dr. Abdul W. Khan, Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

Dr. Ros Morpeth, Director, National Extension College, UK

In celebration of ten years of The Commonwealth of Learning, the first Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning will be held next year in Brunei Darussalam. The event will be co-hosted by COL, the Brunei Darussalam Ministry of Education and Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and is being organised in collaboration with the Commonwealth's open and distance learning professional associations. It will be held at the International Convention Centre in Bandar Seri Begawan from 1 – 5 March 1999.

Further information is available on the forum web site (*www.col.org/forum*) or by contacting the Forum secretariat at COL's Vancouver headquarters (*forum@col.org*).

Deadline reminders

25 September 1998—deadline for submission of abstracts for presentation at the Forum (*www.col.org/forum/call_abstracts.htm*)

30 September 1998—deadline for submissions and nominations for COL's Excellence in Distance Education Programme awards (*www.col.org/edep*).

1 December 1998—registration deadline for Forum participants (*www.col.org/forum/reg_form.htm*).

Information on Brunei

The web site for further information on Brunei Darussalam (history, culture, ecology, tourist attractions and government) is at *www.brunet.bn*, rather than the site that was printed in the Forum brochure, which is no longer valid. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience.

COL in Action

Signing of the CEMCA agreement in Vancouver: COL President, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan (left) and Mr. Madan Mohan Jha, Joint Secretary, Indian Department of Education

CEMCA becomes international organisation

The Government of India and COL have signed an agreement that confers full international status to the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). Under the new agreement, CEMCA will operate in India as a fully recognised international agency and be accorded the associated rights and privileges.

CEMCA was established by COL in 1995 and is hosted by the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Its objective is to promote co-operation and collaboration in the use of electronic media resources for distance education in the Asian region. CEMCA undertakes research, training and co-productions. It also maintains a database of electronic media teaching material containing details on over 9,000 audio and video programmes.

CCDESP partners named

Agreements have now been reached with the institutions that will be COL's partners in its pilot Canada Caribbean Distance Education Scholarship Programme (CCDESP).

Recognised for their expertise in the relevant subject areas and for their success in delivering programmes "at a distance", three Canadian universities will be developing and providing undergraduate degree programmes, for three Caribbean countries, in collaboration with the University of the West Indies.

Alberta's Athabasca University will provide information technology programmes in Jamaica, Memorial University of Newfoundland will develop teacher education in Dominica and Mount Saint Vincent University will offer tourism management in St. Vincent & the Grenadines.

While the students will be taking courses and earning degrees from Canadian universities, they will be studying "at a distance" using specifically designed materials and taking advantage of modern communications and information technologies.

"We are delighted with the partnerships that we have been able to strike," said COL's President, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan. "Moreover, unlike other study-abroad schemes, this one also ensures that local institutions are involved in the arrangements. The University of the West Indies is a full partner in the CCDESP, providing it and the Canadian institutions with opportunities for collaboration and growth. The UWI will bring its long-standing experience and immense knowledge of the region to bear upon the direction of the delivery systems in the venture".

The CCDESP is funded by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade as an innovative expansion of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP). Until now, the CSFP has provided students with scholarships that required them to study elsewhere while they earn primarily graduate degrees.

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister, the Honourable Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, in his welcoming letter to the Association of Commonwealth Universities conference, held in Ottawa in August, encouraged delegates from both Canada and other Commonwealth countries to develop ideas for similar initiatives in support of new and lasting approaches to education and training. "If you accept this challenge," he wrote, "you can count on Canada once again to champion innovative education initiatives with our Commonwealth partners."

Capturing action outdoors

Intensive research, effort to capture the unusual and unexpected, use of modern technology to save time and to improve quality, and sharing of ideas with the team are a must for a good director while filming or videotaping outdoors. This was the advice given by Mr. Siddharatha Kak, a well-known Indian television personality, in delivering the keynote address at CEMCA's workshop on "Capturing Action Outdoors." The training programme was held in Pune in June, in collaboration with the Film and Television Institute of India.

On-line catalogue launched

COL is pleased to announce the launch of Internet access to its Information Resource Centre's on-line catalogue. With this year's complete up-grade of the library management software used by the IRC, the most noticeable improvement is a catalogue accessible to anyone with access to the web. This enhanced access will benefit those working or studying in the field of open and distance education world-wide. To search the catalogue, follow the links from COL's home page or go to: *www.col.org/irc* and select the *On-Line Catalogue* option under the list of services. Inter-library loan service is also available within North America.

TVET-Net starts up

COL is developing a section of its web site to assist people involved in the vocational training sector to keep abreast of developments around the world. The site will include links to other technical/vocational education and training (TVET) providers that deliver on-line or by other distance education methods.

Connections to other networks such as UNEVOC, will also be provided—UNEVOC is the UNESCO programme focusing on TVET

Those without access to the world wide web can participate in the COL TVET Network via fax. Please contact COL for further information or if you would like to participate in the development of the site.

TVET teacher training

COL has been developing a core curriculum to provide teacher training by distance education in countries where an expanding technical/vocational education and training system has resulted in acquiring technically competent staff that lack teaching skills.

The learning materials for most of the 11 units have been written. However, COL would be pleased to work with institutions in member countries that would like to modify the material to make it more specifically relevant for their situation. Modules could also be developed or modified for use by enterprises that wish to use existing staff as trainers. There may also be opportunities for institutions or individuals to assist in the preparation of the learning materials for the final modules.

Further information can be obtained through COL's web site (*www.col.org/tvet*)

DE professional associations

COL continues to provide support for the establishment and development of Commonwealth open and distance education professional associations.

Recently, financial assistance enabled the Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA) to publish the proceedings of its fifth annual conference. "Sustainable Development of Distance Education: Opening the window of technology for a better future," was the theme of the conference. IDEA President, Professor Bakhshish Singh, in his opening remarks, expressed his appreciation for COL's work in developing countries.

COL's financial support has also enabled the upcoming launch of the Open and Distance Learning Association for Eastern Africa.

COL also provided assistance that allowed leaders of the Papua New Guinea Association for Distance Education to attend the annual conference of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia.

Ugandan Honorary Consul to Vancouver, Mr. John Halani (left), presents cheque to COL President, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, providing Uganda's first direct financial contribution to COL's funding (June 1998). Staff members Professor Peter Kinyanjui (Kenya) and Ms. Kgomotso Motlotle (Botswana) were also in attendance.

At the meeting of the COL Board of Governors in Vancouver (September 1998), the British Columbia Ministry of Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology joined with COL to host a reception for members of the local education, business, government and diplomatic communities in honour of the Commonwealth Secretary-General. From left to right: The Hon. Paul Ramsey (BC Minister of Education), Mr. Lewis Perinbam (COL Senior Adviser), His Excellency Chief Emeka Anyaoku (Commonwealth Secretary-General), The Hon. Gretchen Mann Brewin (Speaker of the BC Legislature), Hon. Andrew Petter (BC Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and Minister of Intergovernmental Relations), Dr. H. Ian Macdonald (COL Chairman), Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan (COL President).

People

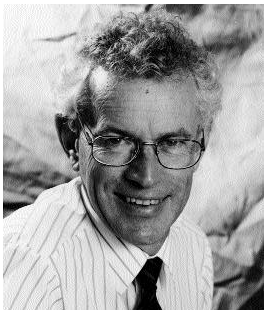
Staff news

Brian Long

Mr. Brian Long joined COL in September 1998 as Director with responsibilities for programme and staff management, resource allocation and representation to the wider community. With the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for close to twenty years, and Director of the Department's International Academic Relations Division for the past several years, Mr. Long has been at the centre of Canada's response to international education issues. He has also been a constant and knowledgeable spokesperson on, and on behalf of, The Commonwealth of Learning.

Patrick Julien

Mr. Patrick Julien joined COL in June 1998 as Chief Operating Officer for International Development. He is responsible for developing and implementing COL's new capability to design and deliver turnkey projects on a commercial basis for international clientele. Mr. Julien is seconded from the Canadian Department of Industry where he occupied such positions as Chief of International Development for Telecommunications and Information Technologies, Director of International Market Development and Chief Economist on media issues with the former Department of Communications.



John Bartram

Mr. John Bartram took up the post of Education Specialist, Technical/ Vocational Education and Training in June 1998. Mr. Bartram comes to COL from the Adelaide TAFE Institute in South Australia, were he was responsible for many international programmes, fellowships and consultancies conducted in and for the Asia-Pacific region. He also managed the Australian UNEVOC Centre located in Adelaide TAFE.

Dr. Usha Reddi became Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in July 1998, upon the retirement of Mr. Gopal Saksena. Dr. Reddi comes to CEMCA from Osmania University (Hyderabad) where she was a Professor and Director of the University's Audio-Visual Research Centre.

Dr. H.P. Padhy joined the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in June 1998 as Programme Officer, Broadcast Media. Dr. Padhy has worked as a producer of programmes and courses, researcher, trainer and teacher in the field of audio and visual communications for several years.

Peter Kinyanjui

Former staff members, **Ms. Mavis Bird** and **Professor Peter Kinyanjui,** will continue to be associated with COL on a consultative basis from their respective homes in Australia and Kenya. Ms. Bird was with COL from 1991 developing technical/vocational education and training initiatives. Professor Kinyanjui was one of COL's first employees, arriving during the organisation's first year of operation in 1989. He was responsible for developing several African region and teacher education programmes during the ensuing decade. Both were recently honoured with COL's *Distinguished Service Award* for exceptional contributions to the work of The Commonwealth of Learning in pursuit of excellence in distance education for the peoples of the Commonwealth.

COL also expresses its appreciation to former CEMCA staff members, **Mr. Gopal Saksena** and **Mr. Ravi Kanth.**

Board appointments

The Commonwealth of Learning is pleased to welcome four new members to its distinguished Board of Governors.

The Pacific Region will now be represented by **The Honourable Fiamé Naomi Mata'afa,** Minister of Education, Samoa. The other new appointments represent three of the six governments designated as COL's "major donors":

Ms. Shona Butterfield, Chief Executive of The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, for the Government of New Zealand.

Ms. Robin Ciceri, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post Secondary Education Division, British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, for the Government of the Province of British Columbia (Canada).

Dr. Glenn Crombie, former President, Cambrian College (Ontario), for the Government of Canada.

Sincere thanks are also extended to retiring Board members, **The Honourable Iona Campagnolo** (Canada), **Mr. Shell Harvey** (British Columbia) and **The Honourable Dr. S. Langi Kavaliku** (Pacific Region, Tonga), each for their several years of dedicated service to COL and the Commonwealth. A complete list of current Board members is always available on COL's web site.

Events

Reddy Memorial Lecture

Professor N.R. Arthenayake, Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka, delivered the 3rd annual *Professor G. Ram Reddy Memorial Lecture* on 2 July 1998. His topic was, "A Profile of a 21st Century Distance Teacher—A developing world paradigm."

The lecture was televised in 40 countries through Indian Television's International Channel, and made available to television and educational broadcasters throughout the world via satellite. Simultaneous audiences also gathered at IGNOU regional centres, state open universities, Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), the Bangladesh Open University, the Open University of Sri Lanka and at distance education institutes in Nepal and Maldives.

The event is jointly sponsored by the Indira Gandhi National Open University and COL in memory of the late Professor Ram Reddy, who was the first Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU and the first Vice-President of COL.

Guyana proposes national DE strategy

A National Conference on Distance Education, held in Guyana in June, resulted in the forming of a task force that will develop a national policy document to outline a co-ordinated distance education strategy for the country for presentation to the Minister of Education.

The conference was organised by the University of Guyana (UG) and the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the Cyril Potter College of Education and the National Centre for Education Resource Development.

COL's Caribbean Regional Adviser to the President (and former UG Vice-Chancellor), Dr. Dennis Irvine, and Senior Training Specialist, Ms. Patricia McWilliams, facilitated the conference discussions.

The British Department for International Development's continuing support in the development of foundation level distance education for teachers in Guyana will also be of assistance in the formulation of national policies.

Post-ACU "Think-Tank"

Following last month's Quinquennial General Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (Ottawa, Canada), a three-day "Vice-Chancellors' Think Tank" was convened by COL in partnership with the ACU and York University in Toronto.

Within the theme of *Technological Change: Impacts on distance learning and off-campus education*, three presentations were given on "Management and Leadership," "Learning and Teaching Systems" and "Learning Support Services"—by Dr. Ross Paul, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Windsor; Dr. Louise Moran, Flexible Learning Consultant; and Professor David Sewart, Director of Student Services, UK Open University, respectively.

Dr. Geraldine Kenney-Wallace, Managing Director and Vice-Chancellor of British Aerospace Virtual University, gave a keynote presentation on "Technology Change and the Learning Imperative: The Virtual University as a strategy for 21st century". She shared with participants the innovative implementation of an industry-based virtual institution.

The symposium was attended by 20 vice-chancellors and two registrars, representing 14 different countries and all Commonwealth regions. Participants expressed the usefulness of such a small group discussion focusing on a current theme of common concerns. COL will plan to hold similar workshops in the future in order to continue to provide a forum for academic leaders to share experiences of dealing with issues confronting higher education as universities move into the new millennium.

Caribbean delegates attend CADE

COL sponsored participation by six educators from the Caribbean at the Canadian Association for Distance Education annual conference, held in Banff in May 1998.

The theme of the conference was "Partnerships in Learning" and in support of this theme, COL convened a panel discussion entitled *The Challenges of Effectively Using Distance Education in Small Communities.* Three of the visitors from the Caribbean took part in the panel, along with Ms. Erin Keough from the Open Learning & Information Network in Newfoundland, and Mr. David Walker and Mr. Greg Zador, of COL's staff. COL's President, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, chaired the panel discussion.

The Caribbean participants were: Mr. George Callender (Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, Barbados), Ms. Cynthia Thompson (Belize Teachers' College), Mr. Wesley Barrett (Ministry of Education and Culture, Jamaica), Mr. Madison Stanislaus (Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, St. Lucia), Mr. Macaulay Peters (Ministry of Education, Culture and Women's Affairs, St. Vincent and the Grenadines) and Ms. Marcia Riley (Ministry of Education, Trinidad & Tobago).

COL President addresses key UNESCO conference

Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan was one of the keynote speakers at the UNESCO-UNEVOC Conference on Vocational Education in the Asia-Pacific Region in the 21st Century, held earlier this year in Australia. Hosted by the Adelaide TAFE UNEVOC Centre, the conference was attended by 100 delegates representing vocational education and training from throughout Australia, and international delegates from 42 different countries.

Professor Dhanarajan's topic was "Delivery of Training Programmes: Changing Design." He spoke about the huge needs for education and training, the resources that were available to start to address those needs and more crucially, the available technology. "What is needed," he said, "is the vision to make them a reality."

New Canadian policy institute

The Canadian Association for Distance Education (CADE) and British Columbia's Open Learning Agency have joined forces to create the new Institute for Distance and Distributed Education Advancement (IDEA). The Institute will provide input and respond to provincial, national, and international policy initiatives involving distance education and emerging distributed learning systems. IDEA promises to be a voice for the distance education sector and ensure that key issues of importance to distance educators, such as learner access to quality education, standards related to applications of new technology, and reliable student services, are represented in Canadian and provincial government policy research and development. Further information is available on the Institute's web site (*www.ola.bc.ca/idea_iped*).

Connections

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York University, Canada

President & CEO:
Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan

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EdTech News

A supplement to Connections • September 1998

This issue of *EdTech News* deals with some of the software applications that allow educators to produce on-line content and also some of the web-based computer conferencing tools that allow for new methods of collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning

Driven by the tremendous growth in the number, quality and availability of software applications that allow educators greater control and ease of creating content, the web-based "virtual" classroom is becoming a reality.

As was noted in the last edition of *EdTech News* (*www.col.org/et0598.pdf*), non-linear desktop video editing systems that combine powerful computing hardware and software applications, have given educators the ability to produce content from conception to final product, whether it is print, audio, video or web-based content.

Educators are now looking at the global movement of on-line distance education as an opportunity to enrich both their students' learning experience and their own professional strategies for teaching. In the post-secondary sector, institutions are moving quickly to reach students in remote locations and to increase their enrolments both locally and internationally.

Institutions serving all sectors, including technical/vocational education and training and open schools, in both developed and developing countries, are embracing forms of "virtual" delivery. A growing list of institutions engaged in virtual delivery is maintained by Athabasca University in Canada (*ccism.pc.athabascau.ca/html/ccism/deresrce/institut.htm#virtual*).

As a consortium of traditional and distance education institutions, and with assistance from the World Bank, the African Virtual University (*http://www.avu.org*) is now producing and delivering post-secondary education on-line to students throughout the continent.

An important measure of success with virtual delivery of education will be the quality of the learning content. While in many areas of the world, print-based delivery methods will continue to be the most cost-effective, accessible and flexible of systems for the next few years, they may well give way to newer technologies within the next decade.

When computerisation, information technology access, and associated costs of communications become cost-effective and accessible globally, the institutions and organisations that have developed the instructional design skills and experience using on-line delivery software applications and systems, will have a sound foundation for the production and adaptation of quality multimedia learning materials.

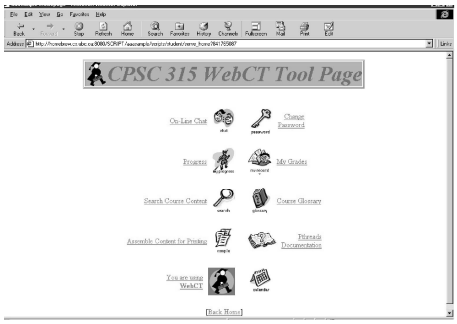
This will be especially important as high volumes of courseware become available across the Internet. Large institutions and private training organisations will compete for students everywhere in the world. Adaptation and multimedia courseware development and instructional design skills for on-line delivery will be key to maintaining the cultural character of learning resources and curriculum within Commonwealth nations.

On-line course development tools

Several on-line software applications have been developed that help to simplify the process of creating web-based content and delivering it over the Internet. Many of the applications contain an integrated set of tools or components that can be used to create entire courses on-line, or to introduce another environment to supplement learning already occurring within the classroom. Because the development tools are web-based, they can also be easily linked to existing learning resources anywhere on the web. Among the special functions offered by most programmes are forums for class announcements, assignments and tests, which can, in turn, be marked automatically on-line.

Web-based systems can also provide versions of documents, which are specially formatted, for printing, and a glossary or hypertext index to selected terms appearing in these documents.

Some of these course development applications employ templates that guide the developer through the process of creating web-based content. An example of one such product, WebCT, which is gaining popularity at the post secondary level, was developed at the University of British Columbia, Canada.



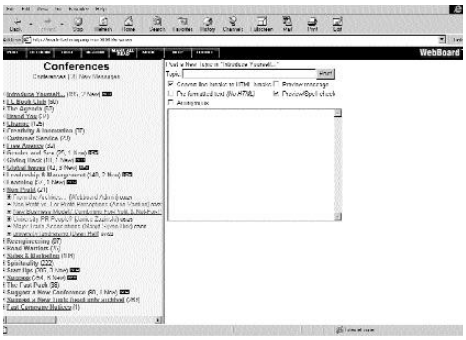
Some of the course development tools available in WebCT are discussion forums, audio and video materials, multimedia enhancements and hyperlinks to other resources.

Companies that have developed tools for development of on-line teaching materials include:

LearningSpace: *www.lotus.com*
TopClass: *www.wbtsystems.com*
WebCT: *www.webct.com*

There are also several organisations that have evaluated web course development packages:

www.atl.ualberta.ca/demos/conf/webbased.html
homebrew1.cs.ubc.ca/webct/papers/book
ccwf.cc.utexas.edu/~mcmanus/wbi.html
www.douglas.bc.ca/~landonb/dt
thinkofit.com/webconf



An example of a web-based computer conference in WebBoard. On the left side of the screen are the different discussion groups that are simultaneously taking place. Indented messages are postings within a given discussion group. By clicking on a particular message, the body of the message will appear on the right.

Web-based computer conferencing

Computer conferencing allows for moderated discussions to take place that permit the learner and instructor to post messages, comment on others and follow a flow of individual discussions. Computer conferencing, in the last number of years, has migrated from very basic messaging systems that grew from the early mainframe computer systems, to systems that now employ web-based interfaces.

How do these conferencing systems function? In a web-based conferencing system there can be many independent conferences on-going. The conferences could be public, private, read-only or moderated by a designated chairperson. Inside each conference there would be topic areas. Messages that are posted to these topic areas

within a conference would be "threaded", or organised, and kept within the specific topic area.

These conferencing systems eliminate the need for user software that can add to the expense and computer configuration difficulties at the learner end. The user would only require a web browser such as Netscape or Internet Explorer to view and participate in a conference. Web-based conferencing can enhance discussion already taking place in the classroom and facilitate interaction among students, and their instructors, in courses taught over a distance.

WebBoard and FirstClass are two of several systems that focus entirely on computer conferencing and have become valuable additions to tools employed by learners, educators and administrators in facilitating discussions at a distance.

WebBoard: *www.webboard.com*
FirstClass: *www.softarc.com*

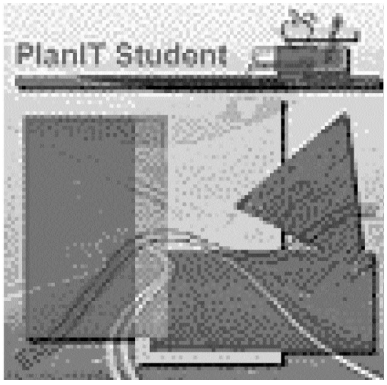
While these systems specialise in web conferencing, there are many web course development software packages (such as WebCT) that now include discussion group systems.

For teachers and students in open schools

There is also software that has been developed that provides teachers with tools for developing, planning and delivering lessons at the Kindergarten to Grade 12 level. These applications help to organise and easily reference Internet resources into an educational context.

By encouraging students to ask themselves questions and set goals, the systems help guide learners through a learning process. One example being used in open schools in India and Canada is the PlanIT series.

PlanIT: *www.morganmedia.com*



PlanIT software

Distance education—non-virtual delivery. Australia's "Travelling School" delivered education into remote areas of Australia at the turn of the century. Photo credit: Mr. John Eaton

The virtual book—a reality!

The virtual book

The concept of one book replacing thousands of books and even entire libraries, has been a sought after development by several publishers, as well as computer hardware and software producers. New "virtual books" are a step toward this goal.

One virtual book publisher is marketing SoftBook, which is a hardware device that is used to access, carry, and read "virtual" content. Just like a book, this device becomes ready to read by lifting the "book cover" (which is leather in a SoftBook). Readers can search for words and phrases, view text in a choice of font sizes, make annotations directly on the screen, erase them, highlight text, bookmark pages and link to related information.

Books are downloaded from the publisher's "bookstore". When you touch the title you want, SoftBook charges your credit card and downloads the book. It stays in your device until you are ready to delete it. Once deleted, if you want to see it at a later date, you can download it again without charge (from your own "bookshelf"), because your master account shows that you have already paid for it.

This concept has a long way to go before becoming mainstream, and is still impractical for many areas of the Commonwealth where phone lines are scarce and credit cards non-existent, but it does show good potential for being an important resource in education.

SoftBook Press: *www.softbook.com*
NuvoMedia, Inc.: *www.nuvomedia.com*

EdTech News

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