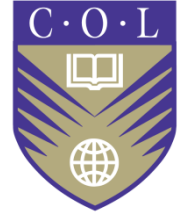


# Teacher Education: New Approaches Are Necessary And Possible

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*Sir John Daniel*  
*Commonwealth of Learning*

## Introduction

Director-General; Goodwill Ambassador Hakim; Your Excellencies; Teachers and Colleagues; Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour and a pleasure to speak after the Director-General and the Goodwill Ambassador for Teacher Education at this important gathering. My pleasure is the greater because I have good memories of helping to organise this annual event during my years as ADG for Education from 2001 to 2004. It is most important that we pause each year to celebrate the work of the 100 million teachers around the world.

However, our celebrations are muted because each year the challenge of improving the status of teachers and expanding their numbers seems to be as great as ever. We are expanding the numbers of teachers – but then we are also expanding the numbers of pupils and students that they teach. It seems that the goalposts keep moving away from us or that we are running hard to stay in the same place.

We will not complete the drive to UPE, still less make progress towards universal secondary education, without new approaches to teacher education.

The numbers of teachers required are simply too big for business as usual. UNESCO estimates that countries across the world will need to recruit and train ten million new teachers over the coming decade.

My brief remarks will focus on expanding and improving the teaching force. My title is: *Teacher Education: new approaches are necessary and possible*. The Commonwealth of Learning is proud to work with UNESCO on teacher education. Each year we convene a meeting of UNESCO and other partners in Vancouver to review key issues in Teacher Education. This year's meeting was convened by COL's Education Specialist for Teacher Education, Dr Abdurrahman Umar, in July.

I am pleased that Dr. Umar is with me here today.

A major concern at this year's meeting was that governments and institutions are not taking full advantage of technology to expand and improve teacher education. The principal reason for this missed opportunity seems to be that many policy makers are simply unaware of the long and successful history of using technology, particularly open and distance learning, to expand the reach and effectiveness of teacher education. To address this situation the partners agreed that COL would commission a critical review of the role of open and distance learning in teacher education as a tool for advocacy.

Director-General, Ambassador; it is my pleasure to launch this text here today and present it to you. [see sidebar] It was prepared by Dr. Hilary Perraton, a world authority in the field, and demonstrates the strong foundation on which contemporary new approaches to teacher education can build. New technologies create further exciting possibilities, but they build on a tradition that goes back 50 years.

It was in 1963 that UNESCO and UNWRA teamed up to offer training by correspondence lessons and seminars to some 4,000 untrained teachers who were teaching 200,000 Palestinian refugee children. Within five years the proportion of untrained teachers had dropped from 90% to 9% and today the UNESCO/UNWRA education system outperforms other systems in the region.

Although this form of distance learning for teacher education was adopted at the time by a number of African countries it remained on the margins until the 1970s when the success of the Open University in Britain put distance learning on a par for quality with conventional approaches. Today many of the 25 open universities around the world have a special mission to the education service and the numbers of teachers studying with them number in the millions.

It is traditional to make distinctions between the initial education of teachers and their later professional development – and also between pre-service and in-service activities. These are not the same distinctions because, for example, some teachers begin teaching without teaching qualifications and get their initial training in-service.

However, my key point is that today's technologies can break down these old paradigms and take teacher education right into the schools so that teachers alternate constantly between learning themselves and teaching the children. By focussing on the classroom and helping teachers reflect on their school activity and their classroom realities, training becomes highly motivating, giving a more direct impact on the learning of their children.

Two new technologies greatly facilitate this approach. The first is Open Educational Resources, an exciting means of knowledge sharing that is making steady advances. UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning are working together on this agenda too. Yesterday I was with UNESCO colleagues in Bamako, Mali where we held a workshop of Open Educational Resources for Francophone policy-makers.

A splendid example of Open Educational Resources at work is the TESSA programme. This is a consortium of a dozen African universities and other organisations that generate Open Educational Resources in Arabic, English, French and Kiswahili which are being used and adapted by hundreds of thousands of teachers across Africa. Open Educational Resources make relevant quality learning possible on the large scale that is required by the challenging worldwide shortage of teachers.

Open Educational Resources are just one element in a wider campaign. We wish to encourage governments and intergovernmental agencies to release all their educational materials into the world's knowledge systems with open licences. In these times of austerity this would be a wonderful way of maximizing the impact of public investment. We hope that UNESCO will make the leadership of this campaign a key feature of its programme for the future. It would have a tremendous worldwide impact.

The second technology is mobile phones. In the North people usually think of educational technology in terms of laptop computers but handheld devices using mobile phone technology are being used in teacher education in Bangladesh. They deliver personalised teacher training and 'just in time' learning as needed in classrooms and other learning environments. In the Bangladesh *English in Action* programme they call it 'the trainer in your pocket'. African teachers rely on their mobiles to network with their colleagues for professional development.

To summarise, we have a great opportunity to improve the quality and reach of teacher education by using contemporary technologies and approaches. We can build a new practice-based paradigm for teacher education on the firm foundations of distance learning that have been laid since UNESCO and UNWRA first adopted these methods nearly 50 years ago. What is more, such a technology-facilitated model of practice-based education can also be taken to scale with other professionals such as community health workers.

Director-General, Ambassador, these are exciting times. UNESCO once again has the opportunity to be a pioneer in the introduction of new approaches to scaling up teacher education.

It is my pleasure to conclude by presenting you with copies of two publications. The first is a recent book that I have written about these issues.

The second is the document that the Teacher Education partners group has commissioned. I hope that, through UNESCO, it will encourage Ministers of Education to be bolder in adopting new methods to address the teacher education challenge.