

Addressing the teacher gap through open and distance learning: the work of the Commonwealth of Learning



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Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić (UNESCO), Abdurrahman Umar & Sir John Daniel (COL)

Introduction

Colleagues:

I am very pleased to be here to make a short presentation on the work of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in addressing the teacher gap through open and distance learning.

We had hoped that Dr. Abdurrahman Umar, who leads COL's work in the area of teacher education, would be here to present their work, but the notice was insufficient and he could not be here.

Teacher Education is one of four initiatives in Education in COL's Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012 that was approved last week by the Commonwealth Education Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

My colleagues at COL have asked me to make this presentation on their behalf because I am the Focal Point at UNESCO for the joint work plan between COL and UNESCO that has been in effect for the last three years. We are in the process of updating that agreement to reflect COL's new Three-Year Plan and UNESCO's priorities in the 35C5.

I am therefore speaking on behalf of COL using notes that have been provided by Dr Abdurrahman Umar and Sir John Daniel, COL's president, whom some of you will remember as our ADG for Education here at UNESCO from 2001-2004.

Background on COL

By way of background let me remind you that COL's mission is to help Commonwealth governments, institutions and individuals take advantage of the revolution of educational technology.

Educational technology obviously includes ICTs, but my COL colleagues would want me to stress that COL considers the technological principles of economy of scale, specialisation and division of labour just as important as the media that are used, whether, print, radio, TV or ICTs.

COL expresses the focus of its work is *Learning for Development*, which is the title of its Three-Year Plan. In practical terms, this means a focus, similar to that at UNESCO on the MDGs and the EFA Goals; as well as Commonwealth values.

Teacher Education at a Distance: a Long and Successful Tradition

In its Teacher Education work COL starts from the challenge of the desperate shortage of teachers in both developing and developed countries. Many millions of teachers need training or retraining. This is a challenge of scale that, in COL's view, can only be addressed by using technology, particularly the technologies of open and distance learning, ODL.

My COL colleagues would also wish me to stress that using ODL for teacher training is not new. Back in the 1970s Sir John Daniel's first job in distance learning, at Quebec's Télé-université, focused on a programme called PERMAMA, Perfectionnement des Maîtres en Mathématiques, whose purpose was to retrain all Quebec's secondary school maths teachers in what was then called the new mathematics.

The Quebec Government believes that the impact and effectiveness of the PERMAMA programme, which reached thousands of teachers, is partly responsible for Quebec's excellent performance today in the OECD's PISA surveys.

Since then there have been many programmes in developing and developed countries. Nigeria's National Teachers Institute has trained or retrained two million teachers since its creation in 1976. Today it has an annual enrolment of 150,000 in upgrading programmes alone, and may be the world's largest teacher education programme at a distance. Dr Abdurrahman Umar was the Academic Director of the NTI before he joined COL.

Closer to here France's Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance has also trained tens of thousands of teachers since 1949 and has an annual enrolment of around 40,000.

Much more recent is CalStateTEACH, a joint programme of all the campuses of the California State University, which has trained 7,500 teachers in the last decade using a combination of online methods, printed materials and local meetings.

The final example is TESSA, the Teacher Education for Sub-Saharan Africa consortium, not to be confused with our own TTISSA programme, although COL collaborates with us on that too.

TESSA is a consortium of the UK Open University, the BBC and 13 African institutions. TESSA develops materials, as Open Educational Resources, that are easily accessed via the Internet or in print format by teacher training institutions. Colleges and universities across Africa are able to download materials to equip primary school teachers with teaching skills in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, science, life skills, social studies and the arts. COL is a member of the consortium

These examples, and there are many more, shows that ODL is already used extensively across the world for teacher training at scale. So how does COL contribute to this? I shall first describe COL's programme in general and finish by noting the elements of teacher education that figure in the joint UNESCO-COL work plan.

COL's Work in Teacher Education

I noted earlier that Teacher Education is one of four initiatives in COL's Education Sector. The initiative has six aims:

First it advocates the use of ODL in teacher education by supporting policies for professional development.

Second, it works with selected Teacher Education Institutions to ensure the design and delivery of quality teacher education programmes.

Third, it emphasises the development of pedagogic content knowledge and skills among ODL practitioners.

Fourth, COL supports conventional teacher education institutions to make the transition to dual mode.

Fifth, it facilitates the use of open educational resources, as in the TESSA consortium.

Sixth, it develops the capacity of teachers to implement UNICEF's concept of child-friendly schools.

To do this COL works in partnership with teacher training institutions, ministries and development partners, including UNESCO.

Like UNESCO, COL implements results-based management. Its Three-Year Plan includes a Logic Model. You can't read the detail here but it is on COL's website.

For Teacher Education the Performance Indicators are:

One: 4 major institutions in at least 3 Commonwealth regions begin to train or upgrade teachers, or significantly increase the number trained or upgraded through ODL.

Two: Teacher education institutions in four countries offer significantly improved curriculum content.

Three: Institutions in 6 countries adopt the Child Friendly Schools approach.

This work builds on COL's work in teacher education over the last three years. In that time, for example, it worked in 13 African countries; those in West Africa through the West Africa Consortium for Teacher Education.

In Asia it has worked extensively in India, most particularly with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, the NAAC, to develop a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education – both conventional teacher education and programmes done through ODL.

UNESCO-COL Joint Work Plan

Let me conclude by telling you about the UNESCO-COL Joint Work Plan in Teacher Education. My COL colleagues have particularly asked me to tell you how much they appreciate this collaboration.

First, we shall work together on the development and use of OERs. This has three components namely:

- a) The development and utilisation of OERs for English Language Teaching at Junior Secondary School level. The aim is to develop a bank of “open content” multi-media resources in on-line and traditional text formats that will support school-based training of teachers working in upper basic education sector.
- b) Adaptation and dissemination of the OERs developed by the consortium for Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) in selected countries. The target groups are: teacher trainers and primary school teachers in selected African countries.
- c) The adaptation and dissemination of COL's STAMP 2000+ (Science, Technology and Mathematics) modules in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia.

Second, we shall work together in capacity building of selected teacher education institutions in the use of ICTs in Teacher Professional Development.

- a) This activity will focus on the use of ICT-based delivery systems and advocacy for new forms of teaching and learning such as constructivist pedagogy and different types of learner-centred pedagogy.
- b) It will be undertaken in collaboration with UNESCO's TTISSA and some regional consortia such as the West African Consortium for Teacher Education (WACTED).

Third, we shall do capacity building on Quality Assurance in Teacher Education for selected commonwealth developing countries.

- a) This activity will involve the dissemination and utilisation of the QA Toolkit developed by COL and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India.
- b) The expected outcomes are the creation of awareness of the QA Toolkit among TE institutions in selected countries and the adaptation and utilisation of the QA Toolkit for internal assessment of their programmes.

UNESCO and COL will implement these projects in partnership with TE institutions, Ministries of Education, regional consortia and Development partners in the developing countries of the Commonwealth.

I'll stop there. If you want more information on COL's work I refer you to these URLs and e-mail addresses. Thank you for your attention. Let me remind you again that I have been presenting COL's work in my capacity as UNESCO Focal Point for our Joint Work Plan. I don't consider myself an expert in this area so please contact COL directly for any follow up.