Keeping the doors of learning open
COVID-19

13 March 2020

Statement

With an increasing number of states, provinces and even whole countries closing institutions of learning as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 363 million learners worldwide are being impacted (UNESCO, 2020). How can we ensure that valuable time is not lost and our learners at all levels continue to learn wherever they are?

Many countries are planning to offer online learning as an alternative. COL's experience shows that open, distance and online learning, if done well, can have the same outcomes as campus education without requiring teachers and learners to be in the same place at the same time. However, we recognise that not all schools, colleges and universities are currently well-prepared to fully utilise these approaches, and COL stands ready to share its expertise and resources to enable stakeholders to keep the doors of learning open for all.

In this time of crisis, a suitable response requires a renewed commitment to sharing and re-using open educational resources (OER); exploring novel ways to enable interaction between learners and other learners, learners and teachers, learners and content using online platforms; and to use appropriate technologies so that no one is left behind.

Some guidelines to consider include:

1) Institutions should take emergency policy decisions to adopt alternative ways of teaching, including online learning.

2) Ensure that learning is delivered using ICT tools such as radio, TV, mobile devices so that no learner is disadvantaged.

3) Identify and use existing OER to provide quality learning.

4) Develop and implement strategies for synchronous/asynchronous approaches.

5) Encourage teachers to use free resources such as MoodleCloud to conduct online classes.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an inter-governmental organisation headquartered in Burnaby, Canada, is committed to promoting learning for sustainable development. It does this through the use of distance learning and online learning technologies. For more than 30 years, COL has used innovative approaches to open the doors of learning not just for formal education but non-formal and informal learning that is accessible, affordable and available to the last person in the queue.

COL will provide technical guidance and support to ministries and institutions seeking support in this effort. Please write to: info@col.org.

Resources and Tools

COL has compiled a selection of resources and tools as a first response to this crisis. These are available below.

Resources and Tools

School level

- CK-12 (Elementary and Secondary)
- COL Resources (Secondary)
- Khan Academy offers access to materials from Grade 9 upwards to the first year in a college.
- Lumen Courses (Tertiary)
- MIT Blossoms (Videos)
- PhET (Simulations for Science and Math)
- OpenStax is a good starting point to avail of quality textbooks. A printable version of textbooks can be accessed at OpenStax textbooks.
- Siyavula (Elementary and Secondary)
- The University of Colorado has simulations for science and math at the secondary level.

COL resources

- COL Virtual Event Environment has over 100 courses on a range of subjects in the areas of technology, vocational education and higher education.
- OER for Open Schooling has grade 10-12 textbooks in various subjects.
- Directory of Open Educational Resources has over 7000 resources on higher education, open schooling, teacher education, and technical and vocational skills development.
- Open Resources for English Language Teaching is intended to support classroom activities for teachers.
- COL's Institutional Repository provides access to a large number of resources on online learning and guides to help teachers plan, design, develop and offer quality online learning.

College/university level

- BC Open Textbooks
- MIT OpenCourseWare
- National Open University of Nigeria, OpenCourseWare
- NPTEL, India
- OERu Courses
- Saylor Academy
- SWAYAM, India
- Virtual University of Pakistan, OpenCourseWare

Tools

- MoodleCloud provides free hosting of courses for individual teachers to teach their students.
- Google Classroom creates online learning environments.
- Google Drive provides space to share resources and use other Google tools via a Google account.