The education imperative

What is being done to place knowledge and learning, the keys to economic and social development, in the hands of those who need it most?

In a concerted drive to educate our planet, international development targets such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [www.developmentgoals.org] and Education for All (EFA) [www.unesco.org/education/efa] include this clear imperative:

educate more people, more efficiently.

Conventional education methods, particularly in the developing world, are hard-pressed to meet the learning and training needs of millions of children, women and men. Open and distance learning (ODL) – inherently learner-centred and cost-effective, with considerable collaborative potential – is a viable and attractive education option.

One of four brochures that outline COL's programmes

SYSTEMS   POLICY   APPLICATIONS   KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Some ODL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT initiatives: 2003-2006

KNOWLEDGE DATABASES

Developing the COL Knowledge Finder's database of about one million documents and integrating it with the websites of other education and development partners, such as the British Council, the African Virtual University (AVU), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Continuing to provide administrative and content support to global information databases such as the Global Distance Education Network (GDENet) [www.col.org/disted] and the Development Gateway E-Learning section (topics.developmentgateway.org/elearning); collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on streamlining its ODL knowledge base with GDENet.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND ICT ADVOCACY

Encouraging use of open source applications for ODL. Providing orientation on open source applications to expand ODL and e-learning or mobile learning in Kenya, the Seychelles and India. Advocating international Commonwealth-wide ICT standards and interoperability .

KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

Publishing new knowledge on ODL, developing start-up and training guides and promoting COL's resources and services via regular newsletters, such as *Connections/EdTechNews* (www.col.org/connections). Resources are available online, on CD-ROM or in print. *Perspectives in Distance Education* series and the *Knowledge Series*. www.col.org/resources

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Creating and maintaining internal COL knowledge resources, such as contacts/consultants databases, mailing lists, the COL website and the COL Intranet, to increase efficiency. Maintaining COL's public affairs and media relations and establishing co-operative relationships with media consultants. Expanding COL's Vancouver-based resource and reference collection, available to COL staff and partners. Providing communications support to COL management and specialists.

REGIONAL AND VIRTUAL CONFERENCES/ FORUMS/EVENTS

Co-hosting COL's biennial Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF) and its associated virtual conferences in ODL topics with a local or regional host. Influencing the ICT development agenda for ODL compatibility via education or development forums such as the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network. Promoting Commonwealth awareness events, including Commonwealth Day.
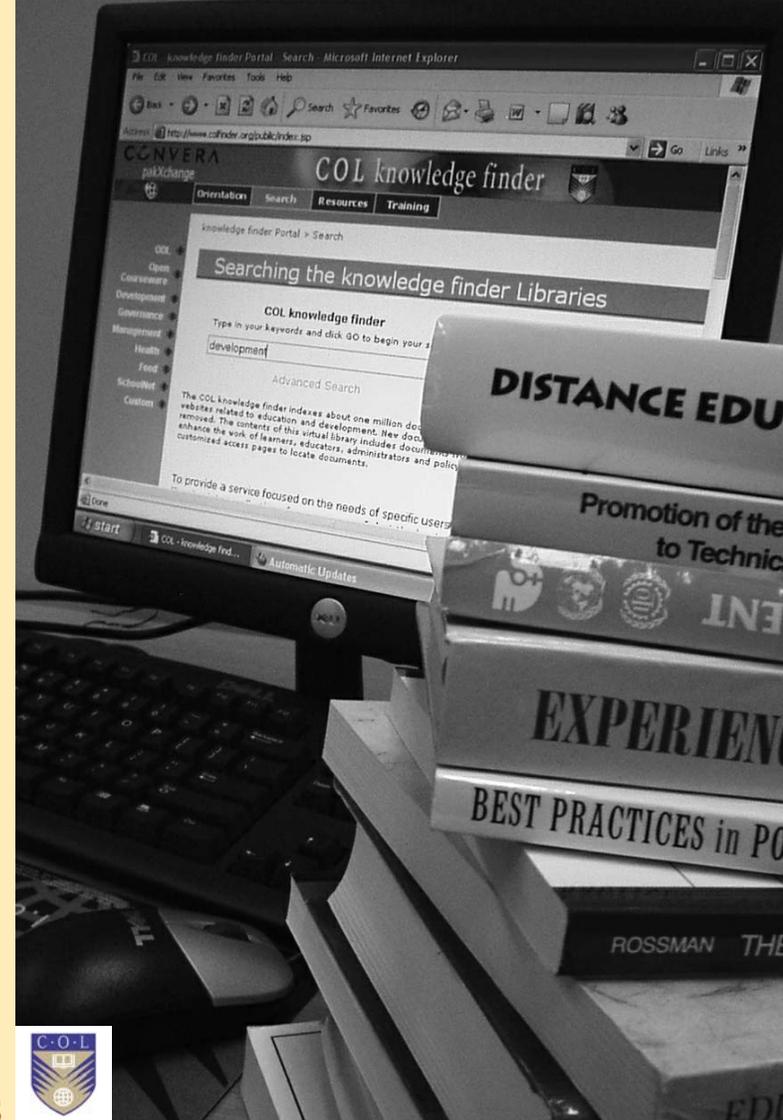
contacts

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OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

Knowledge Management

COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Open and distance learning and the Commonwealth of Learning

What is ODL, how can it be used, and what specific options exist?

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) helps countries and organisations deal with these fundamental issues, and to realise ODL's long term, sustainable potential.

COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation dedicated solely to ODL advancement. It was formed by the Commonwealth – a voluntary association of countries committed to international consultation, co-operation and development – to help its members achieve their education goals.

A provider of ODL development expertise and knowledge, COL fosters the ongoing, shared growth of quality ODL resources and technologies in the Commonwealth and elsewhere, particularly among developing countries. Based in Vancouver, Canada and effectively operational since 1989, COL's core multinational team of education specialists and consultants collaborate on international, regional and local development initiatives with governments, development and professional organisations, education providers, and industry. COL also provides fee-for-service consulting, knowledge management services and resourcing solutions.

In 2002, a COL-commissioned independent evaluation panel noted that "COL has touched nearly all of the nations of the Commonwealth and has had a positive impact on the lives of many thousands of people."

Financially supported by Commonwealth Governments on a voluntary, renewable basis, COL's major contributors have included Australia, Britain, British Columbia, Brunei, Canada, India, New Zealand and Nigeria.

COL directs resources into three key ODL areas – policy, systems and applications – as well as the rapidly developing knowledge management and information and communications technology (ICT) fields.
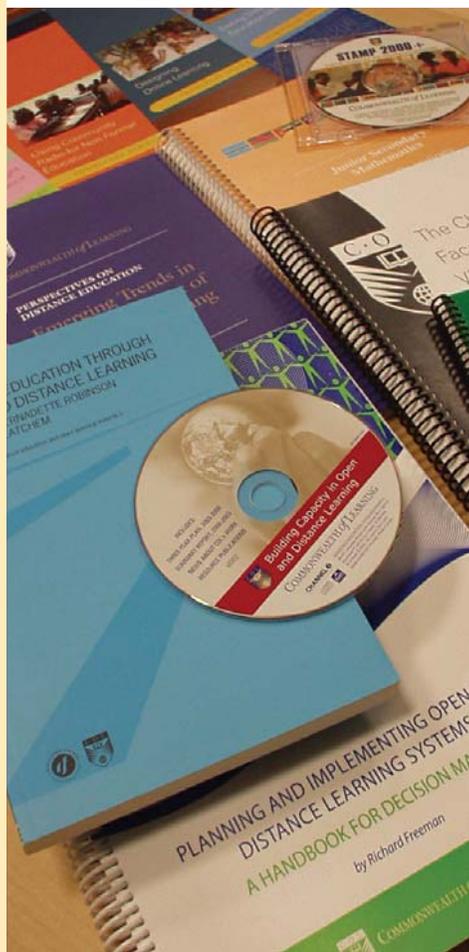
www.col.org/about
www.col.org/programmes/reporting/eval02.htm
www.thecommonwealth.org

Managing LEARNING INFORMATION

How does knowledge management work?

Educational knowledge resources such as learning, teaching and research materials must be designed, organised and delivered in a way that is equally and easily accessible to learners, teachers and administrators. In ODL's global learning environment, the considerable ability of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to provide virtual classrooms, libraries or administrative tools – to communicate, store and retrieve information, or provide services – is very useful to the education process.

COL's pan-Commonwealth ODL Knowledge Management programme uses systems and techniques that enable developing countries to use ICTs and systems often accessible only to multinational organisations. COL's goal is to provide the Commonwealth's ODL and development practitioners with an integrated, seamless gateway to information, collaboration and people-networking, using ICTs and multi-media.

Building capacity responsively

COL is committed to building the reach and influence of its programming and focuses its work through an action-oriented Three-year Plan, revised triennially in consultation with Commonwealth governments, funding and development organisations and education institutions.

The *Three-year Plan 2003-2006: Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning* goes further than any previous framework to define how COL focuses and manages its human, knowledge and technology resources. The Plan's pro-active Results Based Management (RBM) approach identifies three main programmes – ODL systems development, policy and applications – categorised into sub-programmes of more specific development goals, methods and outcomes.

www.col.org/programmes/reporting/3year_plan.htm

Developing ODL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

COL's knowledge management initiatives create, organise and consolidate access to the latest, most complete information on ODL and its applications. These include providing guidance in knowledge management to ODL regional centres and institutions; providing knowledge resources, such as the COL knowledge finder online database (www.colfinder.org); collaborating with partner institutions to develop knowledge management initiatives, such as the Development Gateway Internet portal site (www.developmentgateway.org); promoting international, interoperable ICT systems standards; and offering training and expertise in open source software applications.

COL creates local and regional knowledge and resource networks of people and systems; develops knowledge resources or assets; and promotes these initiatives – and COL as a knowledge expertise provider and networker – to learners and education providers in developing countries.

COL also works to consolidate its own knowledge management and resource needs, to improve staff, stakeholder, public and media access to COL's resources and to heighten the profile of COL's activities internationally.

See overleaf for more about COL's ODL knowledge management initiatives.

Better business, as usual

With the Results Based Management approach, COL responds to development needs and issues more cohesively. It can more efficiently evaluate proposed and ongoing programmes, and can more effectively harmonise its work with international development goals. COL's knowledge management systems, including databases, information-sharing and communications efforts, are increasingly co-ordinated with specific initiatives — enabling a more targeted response to building programme and project awareness, providing information and promoting activities.