

# *UNESCO-COL Workshop on Open Education Resources*

---



*Workshop for Asia and Pacific Universities  
Kochi, Kerala, India*

*UNESCO-COL Workshop on Open Education Resources  
23 November 2010*

*Welcome and Introductory Remarks*

*Sir John Daniel, Commonwealth of Learning  
&  
Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, UNESCO*

## **Welcome: Sir John Daniel**

On behalf of the organizers of this workshop, UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning, it is a pleasure to welcome you and to thank you for adding a day to your schedule at PCF6 to attend this event. We hope that by the end of the day you will be pleased with your decision to come early.

This workshop is part of a joint project between UNESCO and COL whose aim is to spread awareness and understanding of Open Educational Resources, or OERs, beyond the community of practice that has already grown up around them. It is coordinated by our colleagues Zeynep Varoglu at UNESCO and Trudi van Wyk at COL.

We are doing this because UNESCO and COL believe that OERs have considerable potential to widen access to education – both numerically and geographically – and to improve the quality of curricula and teaching. Very importantly, in these austere times, OERS can help to achieve these goals at lower cost.

I insist that OERs are entirely consistent with the best of our academic traditions rather than a fancy form of plagiarism.

Reflect for a moment on the contrast between the way that academics conduct research and how they prepare for teaching. When we engage in research we assume that we will build on the research of others. We cite previous work as background to our own, or to apply it to a new situation, or sometimes to challenge it. We publish our results so that others can scrutinise our work and build on it in their turn.

Contrast this to the way we prepare for teaching. We usually scan current scholarship to ensure that our teaching is up to date. However, apart from recommending textbooks, we rarely make much use of others' teaching materials, even if we could access them.

Furthermore, whereas we treat research as a public activity, until quite recently most academics considered teaching to be a private activity – except, of course, for the students present.

## Scholarship reconsidered

These attitudes began to change 20 years ago, thanks in part to the great American educationist, Ernie Boyer, and his book *Scholarship Reconsidered*. Starting from Aristotle's dictum that teaching is the highest form of understanding, Boyer insisted that knowing and learning are communal acts.

He distinguished four types of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery, which we usually call research; the scholarship of integration, that throws bridges between disciplines; the scholarship of application, that uses knowledge to solve real problems; and the scholarship of teaching – whose role, like research, is to transform and extend knowledge.

As a result of Boyer's work, the way that academics are evaluated for promotion and tenure has evolved from an almost exclusive focus on published research towards a more holistic conception of their work.

How do OERs fit into this evolutionary process?

Open Educational Resources place teaching in the public domain. OERs can be developed by individuals – what my Vancouver colleague Professor Tony Bates calls the 'Lone Ranger' approach – but more often they are developed by teachers working as a community.

Examples are the large pool of OERs made available by the UK Open University on its OpenLearn site and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, which is meeting here in Kochi now.

## Sharing materials

The possibility of sharing teaching and learning materials has long been hailed as an advantage of distance education. Until recently, however, such sharing has encountered three obstacles which OERs now surmount.

First, institutions and their academic staff are prone to the 'not invented here' and the 'not invented by me' syndromes. The rich resources of the Internet, Google and social software are steadily curing that syndrome.

Second, until academic world went digital sharing materials was tiresome. They always needed adaptation, and this meant re-keying large amounts of text and changing illustrations.

Third, intellectual property rights were a nightmare. Copyrighted material was often buried in learning materials that claimed to be free of restrictions, and a conscientious institution had to proceed very circumspectly.

OERs are now removing the last two of these obstacles. First, they are almost invariably developed in digital format even if they often reach students in the form of print. That makes them easy to change and adapt.

Second, the various licences under which OERs are shared, with which you will become familiar at this workshop, mean that you can proceed with confidence both to develop and use OERs.

I am delighted that Ms Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Chief of the Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality in UNESCO's Division of Higher Education is here with us for the workshop. Stamenka was also the Executive Secretary for the World Conference on Higher Education that UNESCO convened in Paris last July.

Stamenka will begin our proceedings by recalling some of the conclusions of the World Conference and suggesting how OERS might help us take some of its recommendations forward.

## Ms. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

On behalf of the co-organizer of this workshop, UNESCO, it is a pleasure for me to welcome you and to thank our partner organization COL for adding a pre-workshop to the busy schedule of the Pan-Commonwealth Forum 6 that opens tomorrow here in Kochi.

UNESCO is delighted to collaborate with the Commonwealth of Learning in organizing this workshop, the last one of four, within our joint project on *Taking OERs beyond the OER Community: Capacity Building for Developing Countries* and we thank the US for its financial contribution.

## The World Conference on Higher Education

UNESCO and COL have been collaborating for a number of years within a partnership agreement between the two organizations. However, the incentive for this particular project was given by UNESCO's Second World Conference on Higher Education, organized last year at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. I will first give you the context of the WCHE before I come to the more specific conclusions of the Conference related to OERs.

To achieve global coverage this World Conference was preceded by six regional conferences and many publications were commissioned to set the stage. COL provided significant input for a paper on *ICTs in Higher Education*. The Conference was a major event that attracted over 1,500 participants from governments, institutions, student associations, civil society, and the private sector.

From the political sphere it brought together leaders from small countries and large countries. It also attracted many university leaders, professors, quality assurance specialists and scholars. The broad HE community was well represented by students, who were vocal in all the political and professional debates, both as individuals and through their associations.

The recommendations of the World Conference will determine UNESCO's agenda in higher education for the next decade.

We shall carry out the work under the guidance of our new Director-General, Irina Bokova from Bulgaria; who is the first woman ever elected to head UNESCO.

The title of the World Conference was *The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development*.

Let me share the three most significant new dynamics in higher education that emerged from the Conference and which have particular relevance to today's topic.

The first is *growing demand for access* to higher education. Higher education's role as the foundation of the knowledge society is now acknowledged by all. University degrees and diplomas are seen as passports to a good future.

This dominant trend is now called the 'massification' of higher education. Worldwide, age participation rates have grown from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007. There were 150.6 million students enrolled in tertiary education globally in 2007, which represents a 53% increase over 2000. However, in low income countries age participation rates are still small and rose from 5% in 2000 to a modest 7% in 2007. We can expect to see continuing rapid growth in access to higher education in those countries. At the same time we are aware that traditional institutions are no longer sufficient to respond to this growing demand which gives rise to a diversification of new providers of higher education.

The second trend is the role of new technologies in providing opportunities to expand access to quality learning and to facilitate the tasks of teachers.

In particular, the emergence of a growing corpus of Open Educational Resources means that academics and students will be able to draw on a worldwide pool of excellent teaching and learning material that can be fully adapted to local needs.

The third trend is the internationalisation of quality assurance. It is vital to maintain quality as higher education diversifies through greater use of ICTs, more private provision, cross-border delivery and other new approaches.

## WCHE and OER

Allow me now to be more specific about what the WCHE had to say about OERs.

Drawing on a session on OERs and the outcomes of the conference debates, the 2009 WCHE Communiqué (article 13) states that:

*ODL approaches and ICTs present opportunities to widen access to quality education, particularly when Open Educational Resources are readily shared by many countries and higher education institutions.*

To ensure that the OER movement gives rise to a true 'global knowledge commons' and to mitigate the risk that OERs be perceived as a 'neo-colonial' threat, it is imperative that all academics and their institutions, whether in developed or developing countries, be enabled to contribute resources.

This will require continuing improvement of infrastructure and bandwidth in developing countries, as well as broadening modes of delivery, particularly through the use of handheld devices and other appropriate – often low-tech – technologies.

However, if OERs are to promote access to quality higher education, including them in quality assurance processes is vital. Another new dynamic identified by WCHE is the internationalization of quality assurance.

The Indian Minister of Human Resource Development, to quote his speech at the WCHE, expressed his approach to internationalising quality assurance rather well:

*“The globalisation of higher education has added newer challenges in terms of quality assurance system, issues of mutual recognition and equivalence of degrees and transparency in the regulatory structures of national systems of higher education. (...) Quality Assurance Systems should encourage effective learning processes which are adapted to the needs of various categories of learners. The systems should encompass not merely conventional programmes in higher education but also the borderless, private and continuing education.”*

Let me now return to our project which is the reason we are here today.

## The UNESCO-COL OER project

The aim of the project is to spread awareness and understanding of Open Educational Resources, or OERs, beyond the community of practice that has already grown up around them. It is coordinated by our colleagues Zeynep Varoglu at UNESCO and Trudi van Wyk at COL.

The objectives of the initiative are to ensure greater support for the use of OER creation and use both in developing and developed countries by educational decision makers (governmental and institutional) and to enhance the capacity of educational practitioners in developing countries to create and use OER.

The basic premise of the project is that OER will not be able to help countries reach their educational goals unless awareness of their potential can rapidly be expanded beyond the communities of interest.

The project consisted of a number of activities carried out over the past year. An OER Dossier presented evidence that the use and adaptation of existing OER raises the quality of teaching and/or reduces costs. Three on-line forums from September to November addressed issues such as: Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity; [September 2010]; What works, what does not and under what conditions? [October 2010] and Copyright and the development and re-use of OER [15-19 November 2010].

Four capacity building workshops were organized.

The first workshop was held in Cape-Town, South Africa in April and targeted Heads of Commonwealth Universities. It followed the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Conference of Executive Heads. The workshop brought together some 40 leaders of both traditional and open universities.

The second workshop was held in Windhoek, Namibia in May and coincided with the 2010 Biennial Members’ Forum of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) that took place in May. The workshop brought together 44 experts in quality assurance and representatives from quality assurance agencies from both developing and developed countries.

The third workshop was held in October and coincided with the Fourth International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa (ICQAHEA – 2010) and the Capacity Building (Training) Workshops on Institutional Accreditation (ICQAHEA – 2010) organized by UNESCO Bamako. The workshop brought together some 40 higher education stakeholders from mainly francophone countries in Africa.

Finally, this fourth and final OER workshop here in Koch, India on 23 November is the first one in Asia and the Pacific. It aims to bring together University leaders and managers.

We were most encouraged by outcomes of the 3 preceding workshops.

The objectives of the Kochi workshop are to explore how OER have the potential for Higher Education institutions to improve teaching and learning and to present the opportunities and challenges of OERS from the quality perspective.

We hope to convince you that OERs can be an important element of quality in developing learning and teaching materials in higher education especially in Open Universities that the majority of you represent at this workshop.

The conclusions of the workshops will be brought to a Policy Forum to be held at UNESCO HQs in Paris on 1 December, just following the PCF6 event. With our partners we will then determine the next steps to follow in bringing OERs to a higher policy level in convincing decision-makers that it is a worthy element of public investment.

We wish you a successful workshop and look forward to its deliberations.

Thank you.